

Eternal tires and batteries

Bill Hall The Lewiston Tribune | [0 comments](#)

~~A few years ago, I had a flat tire on my car after decades without one.~~

But long, long ago, I had several flat tires every year.

Similarly, it had been many years since a car of mine refused to start. And then the other day, it happened. I immediately knew why, though I am far short of being widely recognized as a mechanical genius.

It had dawned on me one day that the battery in the car we bought new almost seven years ago had yet to need a replacement. So even I realized that was a stretch. I vowed I would, in a timely matter, replace the battery before it stranded us somewhere.

To dysfunctional mechanics like me, a timely manner means one of these days. Thus it was that the battery was rude enough to die on me. Fortunately, it did so in my own driveway with younger and more mechanical members of the family present with a functioning car of their own along with jumper cables.

I took that durable old battery on one last drive - to the battery store, gave the faithful unit my thanks and bid it a grateful goodbye. Best of all, the new battery is rated to function for eight years. These car organs get better and better.

Automobiles used to be something of a curse. They were like mules, always quitting on you when you needed them most. While you sometimes had to replace a mule, you never had to replace its battery. And its hooves rarely went flat.

Not so the cars of yesteryear. Flat tires were frequent. And there was no thrill in life much greater than to be down on your knees in a rain storm in your best go-to-meeting duds changing another blankety-blank flat tire.

I haven't been down on my knees for years, not since my wife finally asked me to marry her and I fell to my knees joyfully screaming "Yes! Yes! I thought you would never ask."

You may wonder whether I might have had fewer flat tires in life if I had spent more time on my knees.

Yes, you might say that. But these tacky politicians running all over the place these days, boasting how religious they are, are on the verge of giving religion a bad name. Today, with or without being as close to God as Obama and that Republican bunch all say they are, I hardly ever have a flat tire because the tire industry has almost invented that problem out of existence.

Similarly, in the bad old days of automotive imperfection, starting your car on a cold winter morning could be a challenge. On any frigid day 40 years ago, you had about one chance in 50 of being in the car that coughed and sputtered and went comatose for a few minutes after you had flooded the engine with too many lusty pumps on the accelerator. That's a rare event with today's blessed vehicles.

For good measure, most cars today can be driven at least twice as far without going to that Great Detroit in the Sky the way yesterday's versions of personal transportation did. We tend to notice what fails in our lives more than what quietly improves.

The quality of modern cars is not only a blessing but an essential blessing because most drivers today couldn't fix the radio knob on a car, let alone the engine.

Many years ago, the opposite was true. Men like my father (women like my mother didn't drive) learned to work on and swear at their own ROTTEN BLANKETY-BLANK BUCKET OF BOLTS! And it was a tossup whether the wrench or the swearing was more likely to do the trick.

Cars were simpler then so a large percentage of people could fix their own vehicles. Today, we are lucky when a car quits to figure out how to call a mechanic on a so-called "smart phone." Smart phones are even more complicated than automobiles. And if I quarrel with the designation "smart phone," it is on the high side. Those complicated devices go beyond smart to being smarter than we all are. It's humiliating.

But lest the mobile phones get the big head from what I say here today (I know they're watching and listening to us), let them explain why they have such incompetent little batteries that won't last half a day of passionate messages from a frisky teen lothario to his latest crush.

Hall is editor emeritus of the Tribune's Opinion page. His email address is wilberth@cableone.net.