



# HUILA



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## Raise Your Right Hand...

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**A**s I have written previously, I make my living (at least in part) by turning the wrench. As an automobile mechanic, you learn quickly that it is much easier to actually fix cars, than it is to diagnose what is wrong with them. Almost anyone can change the parts, but it takes a highly skilled technician to know which parts to change. In turn, problem diagnosis can be made much easier, by taking the time to gather all of the relevant facts. One of the most important resources I have is the car owner and driver. They are usually able to provide me with the whens, and hows of the problem. It is extremely important for the customer to take notice of the type of noise, when it happens, where it happens, and all other relevant information. Unfortunately, sometimes the customer leaves out some small detail that they think is irrelevant. The following story demonstrates that this can lead to a lengthy, and possibly costly repair. I present this tale for it's humor, procedural overview of the automotive diagnostic process, and with hope that you will remember it the next time you have your car in to your mechanic for repair of an intermittent problem.

Several weeks ago I made a new customer. This gentleman had a mid-80's BMW with an intermittent stalling problem. The car had already been to another service facility which changed most of the ignition components (and everything else within sight) in an unsuccessful attempt to solve this problem. In their defense this car had a lot wrong with it, and was definitely a case of neglect. When we first saw the car it was dead--a total no-start condition. This is good because it is much easier to diagnose a car with consistent, rather than intermittent symptoms; and not starting is a rather obvious symptom. This problem was not difficult to diagnose. The main relay for the DME control unit (ECU) was fried. This relay controls the power to the engine computer. No power, no computer, no start. Within fifteen minutes I had the problem diagnosed and repaired. But no problem is ever that simple. I knew there had to be more to it--or the other shop would have been able to fix it. Right?

So I test drove the car, waiting for this 'intermittent' problem to re-occur. I drove it and drove it. It ran and ran. In fact I drove the

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