

By Cornelia Otis Skinner

# Technically Speaking

How does a woman who doesn't know a gasket from a tisket or a tasket communicate with the repairmen who know all the correct terminology but don't understand what she means by a gizmo?

Among the people who have my inordinate admiration are those who know the correct terminology for mechanical devices which are not necessarily up their alley. Take, for example, the car owner who though by no means an expert on automobiles is conversant with all the technical lingo. He can talk about a differential and not be referring to calculus, and should his engine misbehave, can drive into the nearest garage and give the mechanic an accurate diagnosis of what's wrong, bandying about words like "gasket" with the assurance of a Henry Ford.

I, who wouldn't know a gasket from a tisket or a tasket, when confronted with the dilemma of a misbehaving motor, am forced to employ my own powers of description, which at least are occasionally colorful if not technically accurate. For I must admit that my acquaintance with the workings of an internal-combustion engine is as limited as that of an 1887 peasant beholding the first Daimler. It is fortunate that I am seldom confronted by this dilemma, as my car, which is a nicely brought up little thing, seldom misbehaves.

However, not long ago it did, and I was obliged to seek help, not from our local garage, where they know me as a pleasant but somewhat simple-minded customer and never ask me to explain, but at a garage in a small town along the New England highway on which my motor had started doing peculiar things. I pulled up and drove slowly into the usual grease-oozing area festooned with wreaths of tires and embellished by the usual car high up in the air on the end of an oily shaft.

The usual mechanic approached with the kindly attitude of the doctor ready to hear the patient's complaints. I flashed on him the splendidly democratic smile which I find that I shed on all skilled workmen—just why I don't know, maybe a subconscious desire to show that, comes the revolution, I'm on their side—and said a bit overbrightly, "She's acting up."

I used the feminine pronoun to give an impression of automotive knowledge. It would never occur to me to call an automobile a "she," as though it were an ocean liner or a hurricane, but for some curious reason nearly all

"Well," I explained, "every now then, she sort of goes bloomp."  
"Bloom?"  
"Sort of."  
"I see," he said, although it was quite obvious that he didn't.  
"It's really more of a chunk."

"A chunk?"  
"Yes, a **CHUNK!**" I was trying to imitate the queer noise which periodically comes from the motor, but the result of my effort was so like a sneeze I half expected the young man to say, "God bless you!" Instead he asked, "Do you mean you've got a chunk of foreign matter in your manifold?"

"I have no idea," I replied. I also had no idea that I possessed a manifold. It sounded Biblical. I tried to assume the expression of someone who knew about manifolds.

"Is she missing?" he asked.  
"No, she's not missing. It's just that every once in a while there'll be a *fonk* and then she'll shudder."

The mechanic was silent. He must have been speculating on the mechanical reasons why any car of mine would shudder. He smiled with the pained forbearance of someone who is forced to listen to the babblings of a retarded child.

"Think it might be the carburetor?"  
Since, for all I could think, it might have been pixies, I merely shrugged in ignorance and assumed an attitude of feminine helplessness. As women drive—go—and I admit that some of them go pretty erratically—I am definitely a good one, if I say so, as I should. However, both my husband and my own say so too (somewhat grudgingly to be sure), so it must be a true statement. However, like almost every woman driver, I have no more idea of what takes place under the hood of a car than I have of what takes place at a Masonic initiation.

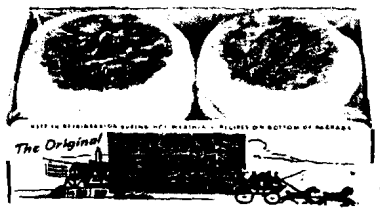
"Maybe if you'd let me take you for a little ride," I said. "Jump in here beside me and I think you'll get what I mean." It was a busy hour in the garage, and I knew the mechanic had no time to waste, so my tone was solicitously hesitant.

Unfortunately, to the mechanic, who was a bit of a... happily



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