

DIRTY WHEELS

Diary of a WHEELS Garage . . . by George Ambrose

I HAVE often wondered if people actually read these scribblings, usually at the end of a long hard day at the garage when I know that a column has to be in the mail by the morning. Bashing the brain to put words on paper does seem a waste of time, when you don't have a clue if the effort gets anywhere or ends up as fuel for the barbecue. Then someone writes to the Editor and comments on Dirty Wheels, which moves me to make another mark on the wall and smile at the apprentice, until he starts remembering all the latest mistakes and looks for somewhere to hide.

The gentlemen of Leyland Australia are now the owners of a wall-mark, for they wrote to me through WHEELS regarding a recent column, where I had written about a fuel starvation problem we had with a Rover 3500. They pointed out, and rightly so, that I should have said that it was a P6B and not the current model SD1, which is also a Rover 3500. Then to clarify the situation, they also explained that this fuel vaporisation problem was confined to the earlier models of the P6B, as later production units were fitted with Bendix electric fuel pumps as original equipment. A lot of the early P6Bs were also converted from mechanical to electric fuel pump operation, particularly when power steering and air conditioning were fitted, because they raised the temperature of the engine room and increased the incidence of vapour lock. This now rare condition occurs when the mechanical pump gets a bellyful of gas instead of fuel, refusing to function until cooled down with water or the owner deciding this is the time and place for a picnic. A rear-mounted electric pump doesn't have this problem, for it pushes the fuel through the lines instead of pulling and stays a darn sight cooler besides. Our customer's P6B had missed out on the conversion, which apparently didn't bother anyone until time and mileage combined to induce this automotive indigestion.

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WE HAD a problem with an SD1, just a few days before that letter arrived. One of our local hotel owners rushed in with his still-in-warranty Rover, with a short list of complaints that he wanted fixed before zotting off on an urgent business trip. He didn't have the time to take it across town to the dealer, so we were the next best thing. The windscreen washers wouldn't work as the jets were clogged with polish, one headlight had died and the brakes were funny. He couldn't explain why, but the car wasn't stopping as it normally did. We unplugged the washers and fitted another headlight, looked at the condition of the brake pads and checked for hydraulic leaks and booster operation. Nothing abnormal there, the brake pedal felt good and solid, yet out on the road it was a different ball game, for the Rover just didn't want to stop in its usual effortless style. A session of panic stops established that the rear brakes were doing all the work, for there was no way we could make the front wheels lock up, even on our choice test section of roller skate gravel, while the back of the car would be sliding and spraying stones at the pavement. Hard braking on smooth bitumen would pull the back down and leave black strips from the rear tyres with nary a dip from the front, and ripples in the road would twitch the back off line and send it skating. Putting the car on a hoist in the workshop established that the front brakes worked normally in a static position, proving that the calipers hadn't seized from being dunked in salt water or something equally unlikely, and we bled off some fluid to check for blockages and air bubbles. With the system thoroughly checked, the only possible explanation was that we had a faulty pressure regulating valve, a gadget that proportions braking effort between the front and rear wheels for safer and more stable stopping. I rang through to the service manager of our local dealer, who confirmed our diagnosis although he had never experienced the problem, suggesting that the only way to test it was by swapping the unit for another. Unfortunately that particular part wasn't in stock, while the owner was threatening to beat us about the ears with a bottle of stout for delaying his trip. So we let the Rover go after the man promised to get it fixed the instant he arrived at his destination, suggesting that if he didn't the Big Feller Upstairs might just tap him on the shoulder. Up to date we still don't know if we were right or wrong for the publican

still hasn't returned, all we can do is to sharpen our collective curiosity and wait.