

AutoSunday

Intermittent startup problem is frustrating

Q. I have a 2003 Ford Escape with 55,000 miles. I love the car and do not have any trouble with it except twice now it has not started after I went shopping and came out to go home. The first time, October 2008, it was "lobbing," according to my husband. We had it towed to our mechanic. When he went out the next morning it started right up. He did the computer diagnostic and pulled spark plugs, changed the gas filter and all checked out fine.

Last month it did the same thing. I ran to the store after work and came out and it wouldn't start. My husband said it had "a fast rev of the engine" but it would not start. We left it and came back about an hour later and it still did not start, so we left it overnight. Sure enough, the next morning it started right up and has been OK since.

I work from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., three miles from my home, so I go home each day at noon for lunch and it starts right up. My husband religiously changes the oil. I am now worried about going too far from home. Can you help? I hope to keep this car much longer.

A. The situation with your Escape does not fit a common failure pattern. This makes it a little difficult for me to suggest any repair process to you. If I am following your timeline correctly, it has been almost a year in between these two episodes, which is really intermittent and will be very hard to diagnose.

Generally speaking, the Escape is a good vehicle and has been very reliable. I would see if it happens again and ask your repair shop to come to the car (assuming it is close by) and try to catch it in the act of not starting. The other thing you can try if starts happening more often is to put a data recorder in the Data Connector of the car to see if it will capture the fault. I wish I had the magic answer for you.

Q. I have a 2003 Ford Taurus with 63,000 miles. I've been told I need an oil pan gasket that costs \$300. I have no oil stains on my garage floor or driveway. Are the service people just looking for a quick buck?

A. Without seeing it, I can't say for sure. I have seen other Taurus vehicles where the oil pan gasket starts to squish out from the front of the engine but doesn't leak until it lets go altogether. The shop may be alerting you to a potentially big problem. If you're not sure, get a second opinion.

• Douglas Automotive is at 312 S. Hager Ave., Barrington, and 7218B Virginia Road, Crystal Lake. Send questions to underthehood@dailyherald.com.

GM says sales hit new high in China

Associated Press
BEIJING — General Motors Co. said Friday it set a sales record in China in September and total sales for the first nine months of the year rose 55 percent to nearly 1.3 million vehicles. GM and other global automakers are looking to China's fast-growing market to drive sales amid slack demand elsewhere. China's monthly sales have surpassed those of United States for all but two months this year.

Playing music provided the means to embrace custom-car building ...

ZZ TOP STYLE

By **TODD D. BURLAGE**
For *Wheelbase Communications*

A trip to the grocery store in a 1962 Chevrolet nicknamed Slampala? How about a stop at the drive-through in the one-of-a-kind 1946 Cadillac called Cadzilla?

Or maybe a munchie-run in the souped-up, decked-out 1936 Ford known simply as Big Mambo?

No matter what or where Billy Gibbons is driving, there's no mistaking the guitar player from the band ZZ Top — a man with an unrivaled car collection and the Old-Man-Winter beard.

"(Big Mambo) is usually the day-to-day ride," Gibbons told Barry Meguiar, host of SPEED TV's weekly half-hour show "Car Crazy."

"That's what gets me from Point A to Point B. It's definitely not the anonymobile."

Gibbons' collection of classic cars was never intended to simply gather dust in some warehouse or museum. No, for Gibbons, the cars are to be enjoyed, driven, shared and stared at.

It's partially evident in the way Gibbons proudly talks about his collection. It's especially clear in the way his cars are prominently featured in the rock group's songs, album covers and music videos.

The now-famous 1933 Ford "Eliminator" three-window coupe immediately became an indelible part of the band's image when the famous sketch of the classic car appeared on the Eliminator album cover back in 1983. A few starring roles on MTV also helped solidify the '33 Ford's place in ZZ Top lore.

Music and motors is the mantra for ZZ Top and not necessarily in that order.

"There is a strange connection between rock-and-roll music and this passion for the automobile," Gibbons said.

"I don't know if anyone has been able to pinpoint that mysterious bridge. There is something to it."

Each of Gibbons' custom rides is born from his own vision, then built by some of the heavyweights of the car restoration and customization business.

Other notable cars in the multimillion-dollar stable include a 1950 Ford business coupe named Kopperhead and a 1965 Chevy Impala convertible called El Dorado Bar.



GREG PERRY/
Wheelbase
Communications

Pro-Files

Automotive legends and heroes

Gibbons, now 59, also collects vintage guitars, African art and custom-built Harley-Davidson motorcycles with endearing names such as Hogzilla and ZZ Funk 1.

Like his music, Gibbons prefers his transportation fast and loud, a common trait among rock 'n' rollers.

"You can paint guitars, hold them in your hands and modify them with pickups to make them sound unique," said James Austin, the man who compiled music for Hot Rods and Custom Classics, a set of rock songs about cars that included ZZ Top music. "A car is pretty much the same thing. They are rolling art."

Gibbons said it is difficult to pinpoint when and where his love of automobiles originated. He suspects the wheels began turning during an

old Elvis Presley movie with The King crooning inside a hot-rod convertible.

"It started way, way back," he said. "It was one of the first things I was interested in."

A Dodge Dart wasn't exactly what Gibbons had in mind for his first car, but the gift from his father was better than nothing to a teenager.

"Fortunately, it was a two-door, so we had that going," Gibbons joked. "That car was one of those exciting first things, a bit of embarrassment at the time, later to become a famous car."

The revving engine from that old Dodge Dart was later used on the 1979 ZZ Top album Deguello as an introduction to a song called Manic Mechanic.

It's just one of many salutes to the automobile Gibbons has used on the 19 ZZ Top albums that have sold tens of millions of copies since the group formed in 1969.

Gibbons might not look the part of a suburbanite with his waist-long

beard and southern-fried look, but he grew up in Tanglewood, an affluent area outside of Houston. It was there the Texan learned the finer points of rhythm and blues from, believe it or not, his family's maid.

From those roots rose a music empire that provided Gibbons with the means to fuel his other love: classic automobiles.

The band's passion for cars is so well-known, ZZ Top was the headline act at Chevrolet Corvette's 50th birthday party in 2003. They have also played at exclusive car auctions and shared the stage with Led Zeppelin, Madonna, Willie Nelson and Metallica in a Diamond Award performance that celebrated 10 million in ZZ Top album sales.

Not bad for That Little ol' Band from Texas with a love for just "motoring around," as Gibbons often says.

• Contact feature writer Todd Burlage at www.wheelbase.us/mailbag.html.

Kia replaces Spectra with more refined Forte

By **ANN M. JOB**
For *The Associated Press*

Kia's newest car, the 2010 Forte, is a convincing alternative for small sedan shoppers who feel the Toyota Corolla has gotten too pricey and the Honda Civic is too ordinary.

The four-door, five-passenger Forte is about the same size as the two best-selling small sedans. And the Forte's front end might even be mistaken for that of a Civic.

The Forte's starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, is just \$14,390 compared with \$16,100 for a 2010 Corolla and \$16,215 for a 2009 Civic.

Meantime, the Forte comes with more power than most Civics and an impressive 10-year/100,000-mile vehicle warranty that far surpasses the three years/36,000 miles of regular warranty coverage provided by Toyota and Honda.

Of course, the Forte is so new that there are no reliability ratings. Both the Corolla and Civic have reputations for reliable operation.

And there are no Forte crash test results yet posted by the federal government. Kia officials do point out, however, that all Forte models come fully equipped with standard safety features including head curtain air bags; front-seat, anti-



The 2010 Kia Forte sedan has more power than most Civics and comes with an impressive 100,000-mile vehicle warranty.

whiplash head restraints; traction control, Brake Assist and electronic stability control.

In comparison, Brake Assist and stability control are available only on upper level versions of Civic, and the lower-end models of Corolla still have rear brake drums, rather than discs like the Forte's.

Note that the base price is for a Forte with manual transmission and no air conditioning. With air conditioning, the Forte starts at \$15,890.

Kia applied its tried-and-true approach to the Forte, which replaces the Spectra small car in showrooms. Basically, the Forte is attractively styled, nicely equipped and put in the market with pricing that

undercuts the major Japanese competition. It also has a more refined ride than the Spectra.

Most people didn't give the Forte a second look during my test drive, even though the paint was a shiny, bright blue. The car's styling is similar to that of a Civic but with a bit more pizzazz. The only person who noticed the car was a young man in his early 20s who decided it was better looking than a Civic and was something he would check into.

But the Forte is more than looks. The car's two engines — a 156-horsepower, 2-liter four and the uplevel 173-horsepower, 2.4-liter four — generate more power than the Corolla's two engines and more power

than in most Civic sedans.

The test Forte was a top-of-the-line SX, so it had the larger engine with 168 foot-pounds of torque coming at 4,000 rpm. The powerplant moved the less than 2,900-pound Forte so easily in town and on highways, some of my passengers mistakenly thought the car had a V-6.

Mated to a five-speed automatic transmission, the Forte's most powerful four cylinder worked smoothly and only revealed its four-cylinder character during hard acceleration, when the engine buzzed noisily.

Otherwise, the Forte scooted around corners and merged into traffic without fuss and without a hint that it was under stress.

The smaller displacement base engine isn't as peppy and is typically mated to a four-speed automatic unless the buyer opts for the Fuel Economy Package that includes the five-speed automatic along with fuel-efficient tires and electric (not hydraulic) power steering.

Fuel mileage is good in all Fortes. The Forte uses regular unleaded gasoline, and thanks to a larger gas tank than what's in the Civic and Corolla, the tester traveled nearly 350 miles before needing a fill-up.

There was noticeable road noise inside the car on rough

At a glance

Price as tested: \$20,490

Engine: 2.4-liter, double overhead cam, inline four-cylinder with CVT

City/highway fuel economy: 23/31 milers per gallon

Length: 178.3 inches

Wheelbase: 104.3 inches

Curb weight: 2,868 pounds

Built: South Korea

Destination charge: \$695

pavement, and the front MacPherson strut suspension and rear torsion beam configuration managed most road bumps in a more sophisticated way than was done in the Spectra.

The ride isn't exactly sporty, however. Even in the SX, which has stiffer springs, larger tires and stronger brakes, the Forte has more of a mainstream feel, with predictable front-wheel drive manners in the curves.

The interior is a pleasant environment for people of nearly any size. Front-seat passengers get 40 inches of headroom, and in the back seat, legroom of 35 inches tops that of the Civic. Trunk space, too, is more generous than in the Civic: 14.7 cubic feet vs. 12 cubic feet in the Civic sedan.