IMPORTED INSTRUCTIONS,

or, "The Almighty Switch"

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by Bill Byrne

Have you ever been puzzled by the assembly, operating, or repair instructions which accompanied that foreign manufactured product you just purchased? I mean the unexpurgated kind, coming to you directly transatlantic or transpacific, without the sanitization that is done by a U. S. marketing and distribution arm. These puzzling documents are becoming rare, but enough of them are still around to prove a source of humor, albeit an unintentional one. Typos, of course, accompanied by occasional Freudian slips: "tighten ***not,*** but ***nut*** more than ***requited."*** (There is nothing quite as pathetic as an "unrequited nut!") Mistranslated metaphors, such as "watered-down male donkey" for "hydraulic jack" or "dog crotch" for "dog clutch." (Tank Corp veterans may have more than once referred to the latter pedal in this fashion!). Not to mention a smattering of Oriental philosophy to guide you as you tackle a motorcycle carburetor rebuild: "before working on machine establish quiet mind." Not bad advice on the whole, that last piece of wisdom.

Over the years, wise or not, I've collected some exasperating but humorous examples of this genre. For your reminiscence, I've culled a few of the more memorable ones from a host of original sources; most are courtesy of import automotive and motorcycle manufacturers.

The pretentiousness of what is written in some automobile owners manuals is sometimes ludicrous. With a trace of self-mockery, these writers call themselves "industrial poets." Witness the flights of fancy conjured up by these metaphors for renowned European sports car manufacturer Porsche:

Our cars belong to the high speed comfortable

The construction is surely safe *together with all water-proof parts*.

and:

The top of the shock absorber is mounted to the body through the cushion rubber, has resulted in elimination of any vibration and improved passenger comfort *co-operating with other rubber bushings*

From the infamous LAVERDA brochure we learn that:

the four-stroke transverse triple engine . . . assure an extraordinary power which is immediately available at each speed and *excellent driving elasticity.*

I wonder if "driving elasticity" is improved when a driver is "co-operating with other rubber bushings?" It probably can't hurt.

The September 23, 1991 issue of *Autoweek* , the "Outakes" column includes a curious bit of what the editors refer to as re-translation:

Take the old maxim, "There's no substitute for cubic inches." Translate it into German, then back into English. The result, found in Volkswagen's English-language press kit describing the new Golf's 2.8 liter VR6 Engine: **"Cubic capacity is irreplacable, except by more cubic capacity."**

Garbled grammar, mistranslation and textual malapropisms aside, the situation was never hopeless as long as a manufacturer could come up with this set of instructions

travelling carriages with an emphasized athletic accent. The stream-line shape of the self-bearing body . . . ren-

ders the most favorable compromise as well as passive security for passengers.

Later in the same text we read:

Our cars were able to come off victorious in numerous difficult combats.

The knights in armor have been replaced by a host of high speed, athletic, stream-lined, self-bearing armored turbochargers. But, then, all Porsche drivers, after they don their driving gloves and Carrera sunglasses, believe this in their heart-of-hearts.

In a prospectus accompanying the introduction of the 944 model, the Porsche poet supplies us with this classic example of alliteration—**"for full faultless fail-safe functioning of your vehicle. . . ."** Say that fast five times.

But lest you get the idea that only this manufacturer has an inflated auto ego, heed this statement from another continental producer, Renault:

Only spare parts stamped by the manufacturer of your car can guarantee you perfect identity of material, safety, dimensions and quality.

If your LeCar didn't weather the ocean crossing too well, perhaps it is suffering from an "identity crisis" and can only establish a "perfect identity" with manufacturer stamped spare parts. And just maybe, Renault's difficulties in the American market can be traced to a Gallic inability to "guarantee you perfect identity of material, safety, dimensions and quality." "Vive la difference!", anyway.

At times, repair instructions are so obvious that you wonder about their target audience. Oriental manufacturer Subaru, for example, cautions that "reinstallation is reverse of removal," while a Nordic text reminds the mechanic about to check the condition of a vehicle's tires that "they are the pri-

mary points of contact with the road surface." The text doesn't mention the secondary points.

If you want to examine your car for the dreaded "bees-in-the-bonnet" syndrome, then follow these recommendations from a British motor car manual:

To release the bonnet latch, pull the bonnet release knob whereby the bonnet latch will be released and the bonnet will rise slightly. Then open the bonnet fully. To close the bonnet, pull up the upper part of the bonnet stay slightly and shut the bonnet gently.

After reading so many "bonnet" references in one paragraph, one is tempted to wonder if Gertrude Stein had a hand in writing it. "A bonnet is a bonnet is a bonnet. . . ."

A classic example of tying up all loose ends in providing repair instructions is contained in this Japanese manufacturer's guide:

> **The rear view mirror is fallen down resulting from breakage of the screw made of plastic in case of collision. And it is removed by loosening the screw. When reinstalling it, be careful not damage the screw because it is made of plastic.**

Imagine the exasperation of the Tom Torque who insists on giving a screw "just one more turn for good measure" only to have the plastic screw break on him—again and again.

It is at this point that one might throw all caution to the wind, not heed this piece of advice from a South African version of a Volkswagen Owner's manual, and punish a totally innocent bystander by:

> **Letting the engine labor. This is just as bad as *thrashing* it at full throttle.**

But even after a sound " thrashing", and indeed as a result of it, you might find yourself forced to act as judge as well as executioner to follow to the letter of the law which this Audi shop repair commands:

Carry out a second compression test. The results now obtained are decisive with regard to *sentencing* the engine.

A sister Volkswagen shop bulletin adds a new wrinkle in pronouncing judgement on a recalcitrant turbo-variety engine. A word of caution—a "charging appliance" must be employed to mete out this high tech justice:

***In order to sentence* the turbocharger on charged engines** [evidently these VW engines have already been found guilty] **an appliance is required to carry out the charge.**

Teutonic justice is swift, merciless, and probably requires one of those strange continental electrical appliance adapters that no foreign traveller can do without. Speaking of appliances, I stumbled upon what I believe will be the automotive accessory sure to be a driver "must" by the year 2000—a food processor. What astonishes me is that no auto marketing genius has seized on the potential which is alluded to in this Porsche 911 shop bulletin:

This way the combustible unburnt exhaust gasses are supplied with oxygen. The resulting afterburning process considerably eliminates poisonous pollutants *(carbohydrates)* contained in the exhaust gasses.

Now, the way I figure it, all we have to do is put a collector of some sort before the point of afterburn and we can turn those **exhaust carbohydrates** into something akin to fake, precooked shrimp. It probably will taste just as good! You know, when you think about it, we have carburation and fuel injection. Why not "food injection?"

In this age of ecological awareness, recycling "poisonous pollutants" a.k.a. "carbohydrates" sounds like a natural. Under no circumstance do we ever want to have for instance:

an engine that *wastes oil uselessly* and exhausts much oil mist, which causes increase of carbon deposit.

Talk about a snowball effect! But lest we are left without recourse, we are informed in the next breath that:

> **To improve *these failures,* the KAWASAKI super lube and the injectolube have been developed.**

Thank god for "super lube," because I believe that if we are going to waste anything, we should *waste it usefully.* And, with my trusty injectolube, I certainly should be able to *"improve these failures"* of the past.

If you can't take it out on an uncooperative engine, maybe you should consider self-immolation. Simply follow this sage advice from a Kawasaki manual:

> **In case of clogging, blow away the clogged matter by compressed air, *after first washing with pure gasoline.***

The advice doesn't specify, but I believe it goes without saying that you wash with unleaded gasoline. I reckon that is what is meant by the term "pure gasoline." Octane rating is not an issue from what I can surmise. The best we can do is to invest the beast we drive with human characteristics—elbows, knuckles, a body—to mention a few. Yet repair manuals have added some dimensions to the auto which few realize exist.

One manual, in a not-so-obvious typo for "blunt tool," advises us to use a "blunt fool" to re-install a leaking oil seal. When you hear someone complaining that his or her car is "eating him out of house and home," remember that repair shops all over the world are reading this manual, taking it literally, and sacrificing some "blunt fool" to put someone's motor monster back on the road.

Another set of instructions conjures up visions of the Spanish Inquisition:

> **Remove the castle nut and separate a knuckle by using a puller. The nut should then be securely staked and fastened.**

Some service areas are reminiscent of dungeons, come to think of it.

The Inquisition may be history, but has slavery or at least indentured servitude disappeared? If you paid careful attention to a manufacturer's sticker affixed to your 1991 Audi 90 model sedan, you'd have to wonder. It reads:

> **WARNING Max. Speed Tire Related—118mph/190 km/h.**
> **See *Owner's Manuel.***

Or take for example this picture of a driver's vehicle or vehicle's driver (?) fortunate enough to have radial tires:

> **Even when running at a high speed on a good paved road or rough road, the car does not stagger or its tail does not waving.**

It is amazing what a little high-test gas will do to some vehicles.

And, speaking of tails, how about this bit of hype from Italian motorbike manufacturer LAVERDA:

> **The removable rear tail . . . help to get an exclusive comfort also in the rapid long distance tours.**

Again, on the subject of radial tires, another manufacturer offers this:

> **The radial tire is of a special carcass construction with such advantageous features that staggering in high speed cruising is eliminated.**

All this proves is that some "carcass constructions" can handle themselves and others "wave their tails" (if they don't remove them first) when they go "high speed cruising" on those "rapid long distance tours."

Some written instructions border on the profound as they make existential statements on the human condition. Try this one:

Disconnect the speedometer cable from the speedometer by pulling while pushing the hook.

Is this the modern myth of Sisyphus or a mechanical version of Dr. Doolittle's "Push me, Pull you"? Or how about this **Note** which follows the Setting Tables on the Al, A7, and Hi Kawasaki motorcycles:

After careful test, these specifications have been decided; thus, never change far from standard adjustment except for a special purpose *if there is no trouble*.

That inscrutable translator was not aware of the American axiom that "if something ain't broke, don't fix it."

In the same vein, I am tantalizingly puzzled by one textual remark. I have concluded that it is a Buddhist koan I have not been able to fully comprehend.

Question. "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Answer. "The hood closed firmly functioning hood lock mechanism."

That is an enigma, but it is at least a tantalizing one. I don't know what to make of the glossy sales brochure, ostensibly in English, from MOTO LAVERDA, the Italian manufacturer of the 1000 RGS motorcycle. I place it in a class by itself for sheer abstruseness while it abuses the language. It begins with the title: **1000 RGS—To Live the Speed Cleverly—**and it goes careening downhill at a record pace from there. Paragraph headings speak of ***The Exclusiveness of a Personalized Comfort*** and ***The Aesthetics of the Logic*** as well as ***The Art To Be Irresistible.*** Under a particular favorite of mine entitled ***Conscious Emotions,*** the text reads:

The LAVERDA 1000 RGS changes the form and the essence of the sporting bike. No emotions which come from the surprise and from the risk, but the excitant pleasure of the *absolute control* of *the motorcycle*.

It goes on to read:

> **. . . *a* careful research of the aerodynamics increase the wind slip favouring a saving of fuel consumption, an improvement of performances and *complete protection of the driver*.**

Even after reading that section in its original Italian, if I were able to, I doubt I would understand it sufficiently. It probably has something to do with an appreciation for opera, something I can't be accused of. Of one thing I'm sure. If the United States did import and sell the 1000 RGS, a thousand personal injury attorneys would be poised to pounce on the publication's claim of "absolute control" and "complete protection of the driver" when a LAVERDA case hit the trial docket. Maybe the LAVERDA people know this, and so, want this publication to remain as obscure as it obviously is. Machiavelli and the Borgias are alive and well in Breganze, Italy, headquarters of MOTO LAVERDA.

For clarity of perception, a prestigious Far Eastern sports car producer prefaces a list of troubleshooting procedures with this illuminating explanatory note:

> **ENGINE WILL CRANK NORMALLY BUT NOT START**
> **In this case, the following trouble causes may exist, but in many case ignition system or fuel system is *in trouble***

Thank you Nissan nee Datsun. I'm here in the middle of the San Francisco Bay Bridge at rush hour and I've been telling every disgruntled motorist who creeps by me that "my ignition system or fuel system is in trouble." They are being very understanding!

A further look at that self-evident statement reveals a curious choice of idiom. If to be "in trouble" means the same thing it used to mean, then an ignition system or fuel system in that delicate condition boggles the mind. On second thought, maybe that is how these machines achieve such impressive MPG figures.

Or how about this bit of Gallic advice:

> **In case of abnormal operation such as delayed shifting or rough engagement, we advise you to go to *your nearest dealer driving at moderate speed*.**

One wonders, given the service reputation of certain dealers, how much truth the sentence structure exposes. "The constantly moving dealers gather few complaints." The mental pictures created by reading some repair manuals out of context are worth a thousand fouled sparkplugs. Take for example this automaker's explanation of some features of its car:

> **Also, asphalt seats are placed on the upper surface of the floor to reduce interior noise and vibration.**

Bench bucket, and reclining seats, I am familiar with. Asphalt seats don't strike me as very comfortable even though they "reduce interior noise and vibration." The same manual continues with the following bit of information:

> **For washing inside, the floor is provided with water drain holes.**

Can't you just picture the suburban homeowner who has just watered his lawn and then decides, hose in hand, to wash the car, inside and outside? belt, he queries the puzzled driver:

A "spacer" is a perfectly good automotive term, but think of the uninitiated's reaction to a directive like this: "Make sure the spacer is not eccentric." I can hear the customer telling a service manager to make sure that no "eccentric spacer" works on his car. Or I visualize a dealership with a host of signs reading: NO ECCENTRIC SPACERS ALLOWED, or ECCENTRIC SPACERS *WILL* BE PROSECUTED

For sheer Imagery, though, one would be hard put to top this scenario created by a luxury import maker:

When driving under full load, in the mountains or highways with subsequent accumulations of vehicles or when driving in areas with high ambient temperatures, the coolant temperature readout may rise up to red mark WITHOUT ANY FAULT ON ENGINE.

Scene: A state trooper has stopped our Mercedes driver and, after adjusting his gun.

Police Officer: "Why did you accumulate all those vehicles?
Luxury Driver: "Well officer I was driving under full load"
Police Officer : "I'll say you were under full load!"
Luxury Driver: "In the mountains and bumper-to-bumper after fast driving on express highways, when I had a subsequent accumulation of vehicles."
Police Officer: "I see. Well, I'll let you go this time because it was probably WITHOUT ANY FAULT ON ENGINE."

Carelessly edited shop manuals are often guilty of idea overload, as well as punctuation perfidy, as in this example:

Caster and camber are not adjustable, in case they are beyond the specified values, those are caused by damages of the cross member, transverse link and body, or improper installation of each suspension parts, so replace with new ones or perform a proper installation.

The above is also known as the "revolving instruction" instruction. "If at first you don't succeed, then reread . . . reread . . . reread. . . ."

Try one more:

Either because manufacturers believe their vehicles are such complex beings that they have to cover all bases in explaining some function or they believe that we readers can follow their leaps of logic, they have a tendency to include "out-of-the-blue" add-ons. Our luxury European importer Mercedes-Benz provides us with the following:

When vehicles are held up for longer periods, the selector lever of vehicles with automatic transmissions should be preferably moved to position "N" ***(heating up of coolant by transmission oil cooler.)***

Huh? . . . Some things just get lost in translation.