

# FRANZ KAFKA'S GARAGE



» SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO "FRANZ KAFKA'S GARAGE," 2002 HOGBACK ROAD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48105, OR E-MAIL TO FKG@CARANDDRIVER.COM.

## FIX IT AGAIN, TONY

In the old days, one would perform an "Italian tuneup" to rid the combustion chambers of accumulated byproducts caused by slow running. Is this technique still effective in modern cars with fuel injection and electronic ignition?

Wayne Gallman

Spartanburg, South Carolina

The "Italian tuneup" developed because the Weber carburetors fitted to older Italian exotics are prone to running rich at idle, meaning that excess fuel is routinely dumped into the engine, causing carbon soot to accumulate in the cylinders. Webers also tend to gum up with fuel deposits during the long periods of storage that Italian exotics inevitably suffer due to breakdowns, neglect, or owner imprisonment. Mechanics have learned that a period of sustained high-speed running often

generates sufficient heat to blow out those deposits, thereby improving the car's performance with little actual labor, which is nonetheless charged at the normal rate. It is also true that with the replacement of carburetors by computer-controlled fuel injection, which supplies consistent air-fuel ratios for cleaner operation, the Italian tuneup is no longer needed. It has been replaced by the Tokyo tuneup, in which it is believed that a sluggish shitbox can be made faster with a giant wing, Day-Glo orange air filter, and gawping tailpipe.

## AVOIDING CLICHÉS

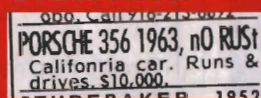
What exactly is a "Q-ship"? You reference them in your articles from time to time.

Art Wong

Torrance, California

A Q-ship is a truly fast car cloaked in the dull guise of

## READER SIGHTING



nO RUST, nO PHONE, either. From C. Swanson in El Dorado Hills, California.

a slow car. The cliché "a wolf in sheep's clothing" is apropos. (A Mazdaspeed 3 or 6 is a Q-ship; a wingless WRX is another.) The British term derives from World War I, when the Royal Navy, hoping to ensnare German U-boats wreaking havoc in the Atlantic, disguised fighting ships as merchant vessels, equipping them with guns hidden by collapsible deck structures. The resultant Q-ships were only mildly successful, but the idea was revived by the U.S. Navy in World War II, when five ships were commissioned to escort merchant shipping. An Infiniti Q45 is most definitely not a Q-ship or Q-car.

## WINDY ISSUE

Why is it that when you do road tests and talk about the front seats you never evaluate their ability to accommodate an occasional fart or two? I've noticed that well-bolstered bottom-seat cushions may help hold the driver in place during hard cornering but, conversely, make it darn near impossible to heist a cheek and pass gas. I have to use

my arms to raise my butt two inches off the seat of my wife's Z3 to gain sufficient clearance, but letting one rip in my 420SEL is simply a matter of a slight tilt to the side. Would it be possible to air this issue in future road tests?

D. James Rizzo

Orange County, California

At C/D, we don't pass gas. We pass dawdling motorists. We pass gas stations. We pass the occasional bottle of cabernet sauvignon. Last guy who worked here who passed gas was the tech director. Now he's at Motor Trend.

## TESTING QUESTION

In your road-test specs, I have a question about the numbers involving top-gear acceleration from 30 to 50 mph and from 50 to 70. In cars with automatic transmissions, do you let the transmission downshift? I know that if I floor it at 30 mph, I get first gear. At 50, it's second.

Tony Santucci

Somersworth, New Hampshire

Yes, as most of the world has learned by now, you floor a car with an automatic transmission, and it will shift into a lower gear, possibly the lowest gear. And that's why cars with autoboxes typically post much quicker times than ones with manual trannies. By keeping a manual in the highest possible gear and flooring the throttle, we can provide readers with a good indication of how torquey and flexible an engine is. ●

## READER SIGHTING



Needs work? Looks okay to us. From Don Swan in Laytonville, California.

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Well, what was out there? "Theme camps," where fellow burners dream up amusing entertainments that one doesn't find at the mall in Akron, Ohio. A program listed "Barbie Death Camp & Wine Bistro," the "friendliest concentration camp on the playa," where you get a glass of cabernet and can watch "as we destroy, mutilate, crucify, hang, and exterminate one of America's favorite childhood icons."

I kind of balked at dropping by the "Genital Portrait Studio," being Midwestern and all. Ditto "Camp Arachnid," offering daily "workshops in rope bondage." A "Vodka Snorting Bar" sounded good, where I might "learn the Russian Martial Art of Vodka Inhalation." Visitors are warned this could prove fatal. At the motorized "Freaky Tiki" bar, you get a drink if you can beat the driver at blackjack. "Losers are spanked by the nurse with a paddle with the raised letters 'naughty' on it."

Or drop by "Bad Idea Theater," a tent where the dreadful '50s movie *Robot Monster* plays until you wobble and keel over. At "The Sake Bar and Modern Stagecoach Stop," the "slight acidity of the sake pairs nicely with the alkaline properties of playa dust."

As mentioned earlier, a "Morning Coffee Enema" from 7 to 11 a.m. advised to "bring your favorite enema equipment." Gee, I forgot mine. I was looking more for a free

shower (forget it), but I wondered: Was it coffee *and* an enema being offered, or a coffee-fueled enema?

Yoga, meditation, and tai chi groups were everywhere, ditto massages, free sunscreen, foot rubs, morning workouts with jungle music loud enough to cross your eyes, a "Sex After 60 Demonstration," a "Low Tea," "Floggings at Sunset," and this: "Naked Gun. Bring your squirt gun to the Orgasmateria at high noon and exchange your clothes for a fill-up of ice water. Spend the scorching hour running around bare-assed chasing other naked gunslingers."

"Porn and Eggs" is just that; on Thursday they held a prom. There were lines at "Pigmalion," where pork products were cooked up. "The New Age: No Bullshit" sounded like a hot lecture series, the premise being "the two things most people know about the new age are jack and shit."

I will make no comment about "The Great Canadian Beaver Eating Contest #6 (ABSOLUTELY NO recording devices or single men)."

So, here's a tip. Don't do what we did: Drive bicycles for hours on end over the vast desert in the sun in search of owners of these "art cars." *Yo, there's no story there—they're golf carts with fur, okay?! A much better story's over at the Titty Totter, a teeter-totter the size of a telephone pole offering rides to topless women on one end and*

naked men on the other. (*I think that was the deal.*) Who could pass up "Fetish Attire From Inner Tubes" or a visit with "Very Bad Santa" or a "Fascist Fashion Show"? Funny how a sober "Alternative-Energy Walking Tour" was nearby the "Fallopian Tube Swim Team" event.

Not there this year was Chicken John's "Wizard of Ass" theme camp, featuring a papier-mâché butt, grossly hairy and pockmarked, 20 feet across and mounted on scaffolding. Visitors asked Dorothy-like questions and the butt spoke. When the Wizard finished with you, fire and smoke blew out the butt, and a thunderous recorded voice said, "THE ASS HAS SPOKEN!"

The vast playa was dotted with more than 200 art installations, none grander than the "Belgian Waffle." Ninety Belgians had shipped a huge load of pine wood (laid in a single row, it would run for 93 miles) from a reject pile in Canada and with cherrypickers nailed together a kind of see-through cathedral, 180 feet long and 45 feet high. At night it was a disco. It was set afire Sunday, its sensational burning likely seared into a lot of memories. (It was said the U.S. Customs office in New York had smelled a terrorist plot and held them up for days.)

The Esplanade is Burning Man's Main Street, its Coney Island boardwalk, where you go, day and night, to see and be seen. It is as gaudy as a carnival midway. Some-

## MUTANT VEHICLES

Below, "Splash, the Gift of Water." The ship at right is a double bus in disguise. "Serpent Mother" mesmerized crowds at night.



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