



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

I have a terrible time with mechanical devices. Some people are born mechanics. Me? Every time I take something apart someone else has to put it back together.

For almost a year the ignition on my VW has been out of whack. Even though I've had the spare part in my glove compartment it was easier to take the back off the ignition switch and start it by crossing the wires with a penny. It caused a lot of sparks and sometimes some smoke, but it worked. The penny found a permanent resting place on my dashboard.

Last week, after an unusual amount of sparking and smoking, this method ceased to be effective. I went to work to replace the broken part. That's where all the trouble began.

The inside of the steering column of a VW is composed of many tiny screws, springs, washers and other things that fall out when you take the steering wheel off. After three hours of trying to get it back together I gave up and pushed it down to a garage. The garage man looked at the bag of springs and screws, then looked at me, and pathetically shook his head. I hate to see the bill.

That same afternoon I decided to drain the radiator in my Chevrolet station wagon so I could add some anti-freeze for our vacation trip up north. Any fool can drain a radiator. All you have to do is twist the drain cock and out comes the water. When I twisted the drain cock, however, out came the drain cock—leaving a gaping hole in the bottom of the radiator. When the garage man saw me coming again he tried to run but it was too late. He finally agreed to fix it. He took the radiator off and brazed the hole shut—forever. Now all I have to do to drain the radiator is turn the car upside down.

He agreed (with a wicked grin) to add this additional fee to my coming bill.

Even when I have directions I can't seem to get mechanical things together. I spent more than two hectic hours Christmas eve trying to put a Sears Roebuck bicycle together which unbeknown to me arrived disassembled. After tearing all the meat off my knuckles and thinking some very un-Christmas thoughts I asked my neighbor to help me. (I spurned my wife's sarcastic suggestion that I take it to the garage man). The front wheel still doesn't turn when you turn the handlebars, but it looks great when it's sitting propped up against the side of the house.

Then yesterday I finally got around to putting Jackie's shelves in her pantry. She wanted 14 narrow shelves 32 inches long. It wasn't until I sawed all 14 of them (out of what must have been iron wood) with a hand saw I'm sure belonged to Daniel Boone, that I discovered I had been reading my yardstick upside down and had cut them all 23 inches instead of 32.

This afternoon (Sunday) I walked into our 14-year-old Bruce's room and saw him putting his electric rocket launcher together. "Need some help, Bruce?" I volunteered cheerfully. I guess I should have expected his answer as he gave me a half-frightened look and said, "Uh, no, thanks, Dad. I guess I can tear it up by myself."