

“KEEPING PACE” - #56

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TRANSMISSION FLUID FIRES:



The arrow points to the transmission fluid dipstick tube. A fire originated around this tube after transmission fluid was ejected from it and landed on the hot manifold, because the transmission was being overworked. The transmission fluid also dislodged the dipstick.

This was a four-wheel-drive vehicle pulling a 19 foot boat up a long grade. After there were a number of such fires, manufacturers began putting a clamp, or mechanical lock, on the dipstick to lock it in place. That has greatly reduced the problem, but a few such fires still occur.

Usually, the fact that the vehicle was towing a load at the time of the fire is the first clue, along with the dipstick being dislodged. But we have also seen such fires in motor homes, where just the weight of the load was enough to overwork the transmission under certain driver actions.

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DEAD BATTERY CAUSES VEHICLE TO ROLL OFF CLIFF:



The motor home shown above has automatic levelers, powered by the vehicle's battery. After the motor home is parked, electronically controlled hydraulic levelers raise the motor home on four jacks, and afterward, continually readjust the motor home to keep it level. At the time of this accident, the motor home was parked in the owner's driveway, pointing toward a steep embankment.

The battery charger was not functioning, so over a few days' time the batteries became drained, and the electronic controls for the hydraulic leveling system became erratic. This lowered the jacks, which in turn lowered the motor home onto the driveway.

The owner admitted to leaving the transmission in "neutral." We believe he also left the parking brake "off" and so the vehicle rolled over the embankment. The scary thing is that the owner's children stayed overnight in the motor home the day before this accident, and they played in this motor home on the day of the accident.

Sincerely,

Frederick F. Franklin, P.E.
Forensic Engineer