DEAR CAR TALK:

Recently I drove up to Pike’s Peak in Colorado (14,000-foot elevation). On the way down, I had my car in D3, 2, or 1, depending on how steep the grade was. Part way down, an attendant was stopping people to check their brakes. He said I was doing fine.

The following day, I drove 75 miles to Denver, and the car ran perfectly. But the day after that, I noticed an unusual noise when idling. I drove maybe 10 miles that day. The following day, I drove one block, and the battery light came on.

I drove back home and put the battery charger on the battery, and later went to drive it. It went 50 feet and died. It was towed to my mechanic, and he determined that I needed a new alternator. Do you think my problem was caused by the trip down Pike’s Peak? -- Faye

In a word? No. My great uncle died that same week, and I don’t think we can blame that on your trip down Pike’s Peak either, Faye. The failure of the alternator can be blamed on the age of your car.

You don’t say how old the car is, but if it’s got 80,000-100,000 miles or more on it, your alternator is susceptible to failure. The alternator gets a ton of use. Every time you run the car, the alternator is spinning.

When it’s spinning, it’s pumping out electricity, which is used to power the car’s electrical systems and to recharge the battery. Once the alternator starts to fail, your battery will stop getting charged -- or will get charged much more slowly than it needs to be.

That explains the low battery warning light, Faye. The battery will then continue to drain until, eventually, it gets so weak that it can’t provide enough power to energize the spark plugs. No spark, no go. So, the car stalls. And once the battery is that weak, you can’t restart the car, either.

And that’s what happened to you, Faye. Yours is a fairly typical presentation, where you hear some increased noise, see the battery or charging light come on, and then -- kaput. But I do believe it kaputted of natural causes, Faye.

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Got a question about cars? Write to Ray in care of King Features, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803, or email by visiting the Car Talk website at www.cartalk.com. (c) 2023 by Ray Magliozzi and Doug Berman. Distributed by King Features Syndicate, Inc.

OLD CAR COLUMN

Great looks, room and power typified Montes

While Bruce enjoys time with his family this week, here’s what was happening 10 years ago with the Fin Man. Reprinted from November 18, 2013.

Fin Man fan Ronald Sanderson is a big Monte Carlo fan as well and he sent me photos of Big Blue and sister cars Beauty and Beauty Too. Ron has owned three generations of Montes including 1973, 1977, and 2004 models.

What can be said about the Chevrolet Monte Carlo? It has been produced in a number of styling and mechanical generations. It was a very successful line which had, and still does have, a loyal following (including my aunt Dorothy). And, at least in this hobbyist’s opinion, most of the designs are easy on the eye, having a very pleasing appearance. The 1973 Monte Carlo set a new sales record for Chevrolet, with nearly 250,000 sold for the model year.

Of course, I have my own personal favorites — in particular, the first and last generations. Oh sure, the Monte, as well as most American cars from all domestic manufacturers, went through that awkward period from the late ‘70s to the early ‘90s, when fit and finish problems were noticeable and designers choices for interior plastic and trim left much to be desired -- lots of black plastic, chrome-plated plastic and simulated wood-grain plastic surfaces. But, through it all, the Monte Carlo returned to its owners, more than just great styling.

The chassis was a mid-full size design, offering a comfortable interior for four adults, and plenty of space in the trunk for all of their stuff, including golf clubs all around.

Mechanically, GM was putting out some very reliable power plants through the many generations of Montes and most buyers were rewarded with a drive train that would survive well past the 100k mile marker. By far, most Monte Carlos were fitted with small block V-8s, but some years offered V-6 and big block V-8 power plants.

Great looks, plenty of room and more than adequate power. What more could you ask for? And all of this for a reasonable bottom line.

Tri-Power Trivia:

1. What was the first and last model year of production for Chevy Monte Carlos and how many generations were included? Hint: The nameplate went through a seven-year hiatus.
2. Not only is Monte Carlo a popular car, it is also a favorite European travel destination. In what country is Monte Carlo located?
3. What is the “Monte Carlo method?”
4. Often regarded as the first true heavy metal album, this LP was released on Friday the 13th, 1970, in the U.K. (June 30 in the U.S.) and it bore the same name as the British group that performed it. Can you name it? Hint: Band members included Geezer Butler, Tony Iommi, Bill Ward and Ozzy Osbourne.
5. On June 7, 1970, this rock band became the first act to perform rock music at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. What was the name of this group that performed the rock opera “Tommy?”

Tri Power Trivia Answers:

2. Monaco.
3. Monte Carlo methods (or Monte Carlo experiments) are a broad class of computational algorithms that rely on repeated random sampling to obtain numerical results.
5. The Who.

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