

Trip Log Summary

6/6/12 – 6/13/12

On June 6th, 2012 we left for our favorite vacation spot, Yellowstone National Park, towing our 28' Jayco 5th wheel. After crossing Lake Michigan on the S.S. Badger car ferry, our first fuel stop was near Mauston (Mauston Interstate BP, 1005 E. Hwy 82, Site ID# 8497893). We camped overnight in the Austin, MN Walmart.

On June 7th, we had no problems from Austin to the next fuel stop at the Super America station near Jackson, MN (2001 Hwy 71 North, Store #4701) late in the morning. Our last fill up before our trouble started was that afternoon (1545 hrs) at the I-90 Travel Plaza Shell station in Mitchell, SD (1821 S. Burr, ST# 101). That evening we camped in the Circle 10 Campground on the edge of Badlands National Park in South Dakota. As I always do when we stop at the end of a long day on the road, I checked all fluids, tire pressures and lug nut torque. Everything was normal.

The next morning June 8th, 2012 we left the Circle 10 Campground to have breakfast at Wall Drug 20 miles down the road where we got their breakfast buffet (great biscuits!) and a free veteran's donut for desert. As usual, the food was great and I ate too much. The truck was running fine and had no trouble accelerating to 65 mph with the 12,000 lb. trailer in tow. After breakfast, we noted the fuel prices in Wall (\$0.24 higher than we had been paying) and decided to push on to the Moorcroft, WY Cenex station before refueling.

The 50 mile run to Rapid City from Wall was uneventful and, again, the truck accelerated to 65 mph with no indication of a problem. We did some shopping in the Rapid City Walmart then took the nearest west bound I-90 on ramp. As I was accelerating to enter the traffic flow we felt a vibration that I thought might be a drive line "launch shudder" like we had experienced with our 1994 Chevy diesel. I slacked off on the accelerator and the vibration went away. Upon acceleration, the vibration returned. I didn't know what was causing it, but it felt like the driveline vibration we had experienced with our 94 Chevy diesel so we took the next exit and headed back to Rapid City. My suspicion that it was something loose in the drive line was reinforced by the fact that we had no check engine light or any other sort of warning light come on. The oil pressure was normal as were the engine and transmission temperatures and the voltage.

I pulled over and stopped along a side street on the west side of Rapid City and, knowing only generally where the GM dealer was located, used my Droid cell phone to find the exact address and directions. We hadn't made it more than a few miles when the engine developed a severe knock that wasn't a normal diesel knock. At that point, we were moving at side street speed of 25 mph or less and I kept scanning the instrument panel for any indication of a problem. There was no indication of anything abnormal on the display or gauges so I kept expecting a U-joint to let loose at any moment. When we were about a mile from the dealership, the instrument panel displayed a message "REDUCING ENGINE POWER". The reduction was immediate and almost total. We were barely able to move the truck and 5th wheel travel trailer up the slight grade and over to the curb before the engine wouldn't move us at all.

Fortunately, we were on a side street (across from the General Beadle Elementary School on N. Maple Ave between E. Van Buren St. and Custer Street) that had only a moderate amount of traffic. I shut the engine down then tried to start it again. It wouldn't start so I called Onstar and asked them to contact the GMC dealer (McKie Pontiac/Buick/GMC) to see if they could work on my truck. Since the truck only had 32,700 miles on it, they transferred me to GM Roadside Assistance where I got put on hold while they talked to the dealer. While waiting for GM to come back on the line, I called Good Sam Emergency Road Service and was connected with a very efficient and congenial guy named Ryan. His first question was "Are you safe?" Upon receiving my assurance that we were in no danger Ryan arranged to have Tow Pros of Rapid City send a flatbed to haul our pickup truck and a Ford F250 with 5th wheel hitch to haul the trailer. He assured me that if the dealer didn't have room for us to "camp" on the lot that Good Sam ERS would pay for taking the trailer to a campground.

During the 90 minute wait for the tow vehicles to arrive I received a return call from GM Roadside Assistance. They would pay for towing the pickup, but not the 5th wheel. I thanked the operator and told her that Good Sam Club was going to tow both for no charge. Fortunately, it was a sunny 85 degrees with zero humidity and a nice breeze. As we waited, a young man in a beat up Mercury Sable stopped to see if we needed help and I thanked him for checking on us. A guy wearing a Rapid City Fire Dept. shirt watched us from across the intersection in front of our truck, looking us over several times, but didn't make contact with us even though my truck has NSFD FIRE-RESCUE across the top of the windshield and sets of strobes on the grill and roof. I don't think that would have happened where we live, but I guess there are jerks in every profession. Also during our wait, four different Rapid City police patrol cars went by without taking any interest in our situation. Given the frequency of siren sounds there, I'm guessing that they don't have much slack time to check on motorists with mechanical difficulties.

The Tow Pros trucks arrived with Glenn driving the tilt-bed and Carter in the 5th wheel equipped F250. Within minutes we were on the way to McKie Pontiac/Buick/GMC. We had a good conversation with Carter, our driver, and he expressed his opinion that camping at the dealership overnight was not a good idea. Upon arriving at the dealership, we got the truck "enrolled", and had a discussion with various locals regarding the safeness of the neighborhood after dark. Carter called his boss, Jeremy and asked him to get on the phone with the Good Sam insurance provider to explain the situation. About 10 minutes later, after getting the truck & contents squared away for our absence, I called Good Sam ERS again. I got a different representative that time who insisted that we should be towed to a Walmart or Cracker Barrel. I insisted that those weren't safe options so she said she would have to check with her supervisor. When she called back, she reluctantly agreed to have the trailer towed to the local KOA. We found out from Carter that his boss, the Tow Pros manager (Jeremy?), was instrumental in convincing the carrier (GE) that Walmart and Cracker Barrel were not good choices for "safe places" in our particular situation and that they probably wouldn't appreciate people camping in a 28', 6-ton trailer in their parking lot for several days.

Before we left for the KOA with our trailer, L.J. (service manager) said his mechanic thought the symptoms sounded like fuel contamination. I asked the service manager why we had had no indication of trouble on the instrument panel gauges or display. He had no explanation for that and just stated that they would have to drain the tank, replace the filter, dispose of the

contaminated fuel and put new fuel in the tank. I said I understood that and gave him permission to do so. I asked him to save the filter and a fuel sample for me and he agreed to my request. I gave him my cell phone number and asked him to keep me posted on the progress. He said they might be able to get to it that afternoon and possibly even get it done the next day (Saturday) because they were working until 2 p.m. (on Saturday). He said he would call me with updates. Leaving our truck at the dealership, we rode in the crew cab F250 as Carter towed our trailer to the Rapid City KOA.

The Tow Pros owner/manager had taken care of the campground arrangements so the campground personnel were ready for us. The Tow Pros driver, Carter, who towed our 5th wheel pulled it into our site (#67) then jockeyed the trailer around until it was level and we had enough clearance from the electric/water service post on one side and the immovable picnic table & shade shell on the other side. This guy was the best! He wouldn't leave until I had checked to see that the trailer was exactly where I wanted it with enough room for the slide-out, level and in an appropriate position in relation to the picnic table and utilities hookups. I think he was an experience camper, himself.

Shortly after we finished setting up the trailer, the dealership service manager (L.J.) called to inform us that they had removed the fuel filter and that our fuel was, in fact, contaminated with what appeared to be lots of water and unidentified solids. He told me that the cost of removing, purging and replacing the fuel system would be around \$950, would not be covered under warranty and asked if I wanted them to proceed. Of course, I didn't have much choice so I told him to go ahead with that process.

With a full (and possibly extended) weekend in Rapid City now inserted into our agenda, we're thinking about renting a car. Di discovered that there is a quilt show going on at the Rushmore Civic Center so the rental is probably a sure thing.

The guy next to us, Josh Bakaturski, is a Duramax diesel mechanic from Illinois and runs his Duramax on an 80/20 mix of diesel fuel and recycled motor oil. He bought a processing system that uses a bicarbonate of some type to remove acids from the used oil which is then filtered through a 3-stage filtering system that removes particles down to 1 micron in size. He says commercial fuel is filtered to 3 microns if you're lucky. He recommended Wix, NAPA or Carquest filters. He's had trouble with getting the AC Delco filters to seal and said he thinks they are only good down to 4 microns on particulate matter filtering. He and his family (wife & 2 little Bakaturskis) are headed for Yellowstone. We gave them maps, other information & advice. They didn't know that only one campground in the Park has electricity for campers and it's booked solid a year in advance. Their only source of heat is an electric heater and their camp stove and it has been snowing every night in Yellowstone with highs in the 40s. Their second problem is they have too much food related stuff to fit it all in the cab of their truck so that's a 2nd reason for them to camp outside the Park and add 4-5 hours driving to their daily activities. We'll hook up with them in Norris or Canyon in a couple of days (if we're lucky) and see how they are doing.

We spent the evening talking with neighbors, doing computer related tasks and reading our books. @ 1900 hrs the Black Hills Speedway about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile southeast of the KOA got

their Friday night races underway so we were treated to the sounds of various large V8 engines with no exhaust system other than headers. One of the hosts apologized for the “racket” and I told her I was enjoying the “concert” and no apology was necessary. That left her speechless for a few moments. Nicely tuned V8 engines are music to my ears.

Bottom line for the day: This situation would have been a lot worse if the truck had quit 120 miles or so into Wyoming where cell phone signals are scarce. I would have had to put out a call with the CB or ham radio and have someone else make the call to Good Sam ERS for me. Negotiations were difficult enough without having to go through another intermediary.

Saturday, June 9th brought no news of any kind from the dealership, so around 2:30 p.m., I called to get an update. The service manager and everyone else in the department had gone home at 2 p.m. I requested that our vehicle be stored inside for the weekend due to the high value of the contents (tools, ham radio gear, etc.) and the person I was talking to assured me that my request would be granted.

Also on Saturday, I emailed Good Sam ERS to thank them for their help and efficiency. Kat Daly replied to my email and after a couple of exchanges, I asked her to provide me with contact information for Action Line.

Monday, June 10th, the service manager called me to inform me that the fuel system purging process had been completed, but the truck was still running rough and recommended replacing all of the injectors and the fuel pressure regulator at a cost of around \$7,000.00. He said he was hoping that replacing those items would be enough and it wouldn't be necessary to replace the injection pump. He asked if I wanted them to proceed with the additional \$7,000 worth of repairs. I asked if the repairs would be covered under the 100,000 mile engine/power train warranty. He said they would not be covered because the damage was caused by contaminated fuel. I asked him why the filter had not stopped the contaminants from reaching the injectors and he replied that no filter could stop all of the contaminants that were in my fuel. Again, I asked why the “WATER IN FUEL” message hadn't been displayed on the instrument display. Again, he had no explanation for that. I asked if there was an alternative solution to getting us back on the road and he refused to speculate. Not wanting to spend the rest of the summer in the Rapid City KOA, I gave him permission to proceed. I asked him to save everything that they removed from my truck including fuel samples and he agreed to do that.

Later that day, Monday, I sent an email to GMC Customer Satisfaction explaining our situation and my position that no crud should have gotten past the filter and since it's an AC Delco filter, I would like them to pay for everything in excess of the cost of replacing the filter, draining the tank and refueling. I also emailed Trailer Life Action Line to explore my options regarding help from them and I sent a letter via USPS to the Pilot/Flying J headquarters in Knoxville, TN (their online complaint form kept refusing my input).

Also on Monday did considerable online research regarding fuel system filters and discovered that there are several popular “pre-filter” systems available for installation in all types of vehicles. I called Chris, our son, to ask him about the filtering systems and he told me he had been running the AirDog system on his 7.3L PowerStroke Excursion for a couple of years due to

the possibility of acquiring bad fuel. I told him that I wish I had had this conversation prior to this trip. I made a mental note to talk to him more often regarding diesel engine performance.

On Tuesday, June 11th morning at 7 a.m. (day 5), I got a call from a heavily accented (east Indian?) GM rep named Lady who asked me to explain my situation verbally to confirm my email. I did so and she said she was waiting to hear from the dealership because she had left a couple of messages on their machine and no one had returned her call. I reminded her that we were on Mountain Daylight Savings Time here and she immediately apologized for possibly waking me up. I assured her that I had been awake, but there would be no one at the dealership until 7:30 a.m., at the earliest. She gave me her direct access number (866 790 5700, Ext. 42721 good for 8-11 a.m. and another 800 462 8782 good from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. M-F. The case number is 71-107-6220381. She thanked me and said she would get back to me soon. She called a few hours later to tell me that my case was being referred to an area specialist.

Later in the morning on Tuesday, I called the service manager to get an update. He said the parts had been ordered and would be in later that day. Also, that morning, I received an email from Action Line representative, Stacey Allen, who recommended contacting the GM warranty department to see if they would contact the dealer directly. I responded with a description of actions taken, thus far. Stacey and I had several more email exchanges with her promising to give it her best effort if I would send her a copy of the final bill. I did that on June 20th, the creation date of this summary.

Early Tuesday afternoon, Amber, the GM “area specialist” called and we went through the same Q&A that I went through with Lady. She said she would contact the dealership tomorrow morning. Amber's direct number is 866 790 5700 ext. 41020.

Also on Tuesday afternoon, L.J. called me back to tell us the truck was ready and running well. He also noted that the front axle, rear axle & transfer case were all due for service since the truck had passed the 30,000 mile mark. Since it was late afternoon and we had already paid for two more nights at the KOA, I told him to go ahead and have the services performed. He said the truck would be ready around noon the next day and that he would send a shuttle vehicle to pick us up. He also told me that I would have to pay \$100/ea core charge for the 8 injectors if I wanted to take them with me. Since the bill was already close to \$10,000, I decided not to put another \$800 on my credit card.

Wednesday, June 12th, around noon, Steve from the dealership picked us up in their courtesy van and took us to the dealership. L.J., the service manager, was very cooperative in providing the fuel samples, taping the bottles shut and signing the tape and doing the same thing with the bagged and boxed filters they had removed from the truck.

As I was walking away from the service department, I got a call from the GM rep, Amber, who stated that she had talked to a Byron (or Bryan) and he had told her our fuel had been contaminated with home heating oil and that's what had caused the damage. I told her that I was looking at the repair bill and there was nothing on it about home heating oil and that there had been no mention to me about home heating oil. She said she was sorry, but they had no choice but to deny my claim since the engine wasn't designed to burn home heating fuel. I went back

inside and asked the service manager if he or anyone named Byron or Bryan had talked to a rep from GM. L.J. said he hadn't talked to anyone from the GM warranty department, but the service department phone operator admitted that he had talked to someone named Amber and had told her it looked like home heating oil that had separated out from the diesel fuel. I asked the guy if he realized that home heating fuel and diesel fuel mix very easily and there would be no separation. He replied that he had just told her that's what it looked like to him. L.J., the service manager said nothing more, but didn't very look happy about the situation. I was pretty upset so I just got in our truck and drove off.

I walked out of there with fuel samples, the two filters they had replaced and a three page list of services rendered. The fuel looks like it has water in it, but the sensor didn't trigger a "water in fuel" warning. I didn't take the injectors because of the \$100/ea core charge. So, we got off easy... only \$9,607.81. GMC had requested no verification in the form of fuel analysis, filter analysis or a check of the functionality of the water in fuel sensing system and/or fuel pressure sensor. Our claim was denied on the basis of the opinion of a phone operator.

At that point, we were upset with GMC, but very grateful to the folks at Tow Pros and generally satisfied with McKie Pontiac/Buick/GMC so, after filling the tank with diesel from a Sinclair station down the road, we bought six dozen assorted donuts and delivered three dozen to each of the companies

We then took the truck for a long test drive and it seemed to be running well so we returned to the KOA where I picked up my camera before returning to the dealership to get photos of some of the injectors. The injectors I was shown had carbon deposits all around the shoulders of the injector tips.

I then returned to the KOA to prepare for departure on Thursday morning. During that process I discovered that when the mechanics remounted the rear wheels they didn't align the wheels to provide access to the air valve on the passenger side inner dual. The dealership had already closed so, later, I had to jack the truck up, pull the outer wheel and rotate it to the proper position. In addition to the improper wheel mounting, I discovered that they had not re-connected the ground cable and the antenna cable to my ham radio antenna mount and had left the cables dangling beneath the truck. When I checked the oil, I noticed that they had left a cap off some sort of port on the engine so I covered it with aluminum foil. The worst sign of incompetency was that they didn't replace the passenger side front wheel well liner fasteners. The liner was just flopping around inside the wheel well so I had to improvise with a few metal screws of my own instead of using proper fasteners. At that point, given the mistakes I had just found, I wasn't confident that the truck would make it out of South Dakota. I was thinking I should have saved the money I spent on three dozen of those donuts.

My worries were unfounded because we eventually made it to our destination in Yellowstone National Park with no further difficulty.