



ESL Podcast 58 – Having Car Trouble

GLOSSARY

to act up – to cause problems; for something to behave in a way that shows that it might stop working soon

* The refrigerator was acting up and not keeping foods cold.

to run roughly – to work in an imperfect way; for a car or machine to run in a bumpy, loud, or uneven manner

* The old truck ran roughly and made a lot of noise as it went down the road.

to pop open – to release a lid so that it opens; to open something quickly

* Robyn popped open the bottle of wine by removing the cork.

hood – the front cover of a car; the front lid of a car, which covers and protects the engine and other machine parts of the car

* Moshe opened the hood of his car and tried to determine if something was wrong with the engine.

shop – workshop; a building where physical or manual work is done

* Brent worked at a nearby shop, where he fixed cars and trucks.

mechanic – someone who fixes cars, vehicles, and other machinery

* When Darla's car stopped working, she took it to a mechanic to have it fixed.

no worse than most – of the same quality or level as others belonging to the same type; a phrase used to say that someone or something from a group is as good as most of the others that belong to the same group

* Even though people did not enjoy visiting Dr. Blumberg, he was no worse than most other dentists.

to narrow it down – to reduce the number of options from many to few

* Amy could not decide which new camera to buy, but she managed to narrow it down to two models.

fan belt – a band or strip of material that turns a spinning fan inside a car, preventing the car from becoming too hot

* The car began to overheat because the fan belt needed to be replaced.

to set (someone) back – to cost someone money; to require that someone pays a certain amount of money

* The unexpected doctor's bill set Esteban back \$750, but thankfully, he was able to pay it.



ESL Podcast 58 – Having Car Trouble

part – a piece of a machine; a section of a machine

* When the old washing machine broke, the repairman needed to replace several parts to repair it.

labor – physical work; the work someone does and gets paid for when making or fixing something

* The repairman said that the repair would cost \$50 for materials and \$75 for labor.

ripped off – cheated; forced to pay more money than one should pay

* The new music player was only worth \$80, but Myles was ripped off and tricked into paying \$110 for it.

to be straight with (someone) – to be honest with someone; to tell someone the truth

* Even though Consuela did not want to talk about her mistake, she decided to be straight with her mother and tell her what actually happened.

to dust off – to use something after not using it for a long time; to pull something out of storage that one has not used recently

* Oswaldo dusted off his old guitar, even though several years had passed since the last time he played it.



ESL Podcast 58 – Having Car Trouble

CULTURE NOTE

“On Edge,” “On the Edge,” and “Over the Edge”

There are three phrases that are quite similar, but that have very different meanings: “on edge,” “on the edge,” and “over the edge.”

We use “on edge” to describe someone who is nervous and anxious, someone who is the opposite of relaxed. For example, if your wife is pregnant and the baby will be born any day, you may be feeling on edge, though your wife may be feeling even more on edge! Someone who is trying to stop smoking may also feel on edge.

“On the edge” can literally mean on the outer part of something. For instance, you may be sitting on the edge of the swimming pool when your brother walks by and pushes you into the water. However, on the edge is also often used “metaphorically” (not literally; not the exact meaning of each word) to talk about something that is just about to happen, or to talk about someone who is just about to do something. For example, we might say: “She was on the edge of becoming a singing star when she lost her voice in the accident.” Or, “He was on the edge of winning the election when the newspaper reporters found out about his gambling problem.”

Finally, “over the edge” is used to describe someone who is “insane” (crazy), and is usually used in situations where the person was “sane” (not crazy) at some point, but because something happened, has now gone insane. For example, you could say: “The boss has always wanted to know what each employee was working on, but I think he’s gone over the edge by making his employees report to him every 15 minutes.”



ESL Podcast 58 – Having Car Trouble

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 58 – Having Car Trouble.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 58. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

In this episode, we're going to discuss having problems with your car. Let's get started.

[start of story]

As I was driving home from work, my car started acting up. It was making a strange noise and the engine was running roughly. When I got home, I popped open the hood to see if there was anything wrong. After looking around for a few minutes and not seeing anything, I decided to take my car to the shop.

I took it down to street to Manny's Car Repair. I've never had luck finding a really honest mechanic, but Manny was no worse than most. I explained to Manny the problem and he took a look at it right away. Finally, he narrowed it down to the fan belt. I asked him how much it would set me back, and he said \$80 with parts and labor.

I usually feel like I'm getting ripped off when I go to a repair shop, but for once, I thought Manny was being straight with me. I asked how long he needed to keep the car, and he said at least until the end of the day tomorrow. He said he would order the part right away and he'd call me when it was ready.

Oh, well. I guess it could have been a lot worse. I better dust off my bike to take to work tomorrow. It's about time I got some exercise!

[end of story]

In this podcast, I had more trouble with my car. I said that I was driving home from work and my car "started acting up." "To act up" means here that something is going wrong. "My television is acting up" means it's not working properly. I said it was "making a strange noise" and that "the engine was running roughly." The "engine" is the motor – it's a part of the car that makes it go. We talk about an engine or a motor "running smoothly," meaning running well – working well,



ESL Podcast 58 – Having Car Trouble

functioning well. Or it can be “running roughly,” meaning it’s not functioning; it’s not working correctly.

When I got home, I said I “popped open the hood.” The “hood” (hood) is the part of the car that lifts up, usually in the front of the car where the motor is. It’s like a door that you lift up. And we use the verb “pop open.” “To pop open” means that you push a button inside your car and that unlocks the hood so that you can open it.

I said I had to “take my car to the shop.” And, you probably know, “the shop” is somewhere where you get something fixed, something repaired. There can be a car shop, a camera shop, a computer shop. Anywhere where they fix or repair machines can be called a “shop” – (shop), as a noun. I said that I took my car to “Manny’s Car Repair.” I don’t have a lot of luck finding an “honest mechanic.” A “mechanic” is someone who fixes cars. But I said that Manny was “no worse than most.” When we say someone or something is “no worse than most,” we mean that he is not any worse than any other or most other mechanics. He’s about the same in terms of – here, in terms of honesty.

I explained to Manny my problem, and he “narrowed it down to the fan belt.” “To narrow something down” means to eliminate other possibilities, other options, and focus on a small group or one set of possibilities or choices. So, I want to go see a movie tonight, and I want to see a horror movie and my wife wants to see a romantic movie. We have to “narrow it down” to one or the other in order to make a decision. Of course, we go see the romantic movie because my wife is always right.

Now, the “fan belt” is the part of the car that connects the motor to a “fan.” You know what a “fan” is – that spins around to keep you cool. Well, there’s a fan in your motor – your engine – to keep your engine cool, I guess. It connects the fan to the motor so the fan will go around.

I asked Manny how much it would “set me back.” When you ask somebody how much it’s going to “set you back,” that’s an informal way of saying, “How much is it going to cost?” A “setback” as a noun is a disappointment or something that moves you backwards instead of forwards either in terms of your finances, your money, or something else. You can have a setback in your job, meaning you didn’t get a promotion or you didn’t get a raise. These could be considered setbacks. But when we say, “It set me back \$20,” we mean it cost me \$20.

Manny said that \$80 was the cost for “parts and labor.” “Parts” are the physical objects, the things that have to go into your car. And “labor” (labor) is the work;



ESL Podcast 58 – Having Car Trouble

it's the time the mechanic charges you for to do the repair. So, "parts and labor" are the two parts of, or two things that go into, repairing your car.

I said I usually feel I'm getting "ripped off." "To rip off," two words, is a verb which means to steal – to have somebody steal something from you, often because they are cheating you. They are cheating you in some sort of business transaction or business situation. "I feel I am being ripped off by the grocery stores," or "I'm being ripped off at the gas station because the price of gas is so expensive." That's what we mean when we say "to rip off." It means someone is taking your money – and not taking your money honestly for what they give you.

I said that I thought in this case Manny "was being straight with me." "To be straight with" someone means you're being honest with them. You're telling them the truth. If someone says, "He's not being straight with me," we mean he's lying. He's not telling the truth. Now, that's different from "to be straight." "To be straight" means that you are a heterosexual – that if you're a man you like women, and if you're a woman you like men. That's being "straight." It's used as the opposite of "gay" or "homosexual" people.

The end of the story . . . at the end of the story, I said that I better "dust off my bike to take to work tomorrow." "To dust off," literally, also can mean to take a piece of cloth – a rag, a towel – and remove dust or little pieces of dirt on a table or on a chair, and so forth. Here, however, when we say, "I'm going to dust off my piano," "I'm going to dust off my bike," we don't mean physically remove dirt. We mean I'm going to start using it again, but it has been a long time since I have used it. In fact, it's been so long, there's dust on it, there's dirt on it. So, you can use that for lots of things. "I'm going to dust off my Spanish to talk to my friend in Mexico" means I haven't used it for a long time.

Finally, I said that "it's about time I got some exercise." When we say "it's about time," the idea is that it's been too long, and it's often something of a complaint. When you say to someone who is supposed to come to your house at seven o'clock and they show up – they arrive – at seven thirty, you say, "Well, it's about time," meaning it's taking too long for you to do whatever you were supposed to do.

Now let's listen to our story, this time at a normal speed.

[start of story]

As I was driving home from work, my car started acting up. It was making a strange noise and the engine was running roughly. When I got home, I popped



ESL Podcast 58 – Having Car Trouble

open the hood to see if there was anything wrong. After looking around for a few minutes and not seeing anything, I decided to take my car to the shop.

I took it down to street to Manny's Car Repair. I've never had luck finding a really honest mechanic, but Manny was no worse than most. I explained to Manny the problem and he took a look at it right away. Finally, he narrowed it down to the fan belt. I asked him how much it would set me back, and he said \$80 with parts and labor.

I usually feel like I'm getting ripped off when I go to a repair shop, but for once, I thought Manny was being straight with me. I asked how long he needed to keep the car, and he said at least until the end of the day tomorrow. He said he would order the part right away and he'd call me when it was ready.

Oh, well. I guess it could have been a lot worse. I better dust off my bike to take to work tomorrow. It's about time I got some exercise!

[end of story]

Thanks to our great scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse, for all of her hard work. And thanks to you for listening.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Come back and listen to us again here on ESL Podcast.

ESL Podcast is produced by the Center for Educational Development in Los Angeles, California. This podcast is copyright 2006.