

Wheels: *Al writes by e-mail: “The engine in my 2002 Oldsmobile Intrigue quits for no apparent reason at various times. Your suggestion to check all grounds was completed. Now notice that when this happens the odometer jumps to trip odometer. I even tried driving in trip odometer mode, but this did not help, it just jumps back to regular odometer. Took the car to a good mechanic and he thinks it could be the ignition switch. The only time the mode changes is when the car quits. There is no check engine light on so scanning would not help. I read your column weekly and value your opinion. I might add when this happens I turn the switch off and it restarts just fine.”*

Halderman: I would tend to agree with your technician that the ignition switch is the reason for this condition. The ignition switch is a pattern failure item for your vehicle. It can be checked using a Tech 2 factory scan tool and have the technician check for the proper “power mode” as displayed on the screen. Another possible cause is a bad alternator that has excessive AC voltage output due to failed diode. The output amperage will be normal and therefore will test as working normally, but a technician should test it for AC ripple voltage. If over 0.5 volt AC, the alternator should be replaced. This is tested by using a digital multimeter set to read AC volts. Connect the meter leads to the positive and negative terminals of the battery. Start the engine and turn on the headlights and the blower motor to create an electrical load on the battery. This load forces the alternator to produce current and this is when excessive AC ripple voltage can be detected. Look at the meter display. It is normal to read 0.2 to 0.4 volts. If over 0.5 volt, there is a potential problem. See a professional service technician before replacing an alternator based on this one test alone.

