

Wheels: In an e-mail Sam says, “My wife’s 1988 735i BMW runs rough when first started (infrequently). When it happens, the engine chokes, the check engine light comes on and off, and then dies after 1 to 2 minutes of struggle. It also makes some noise under the car when this symptom occurs. The problem may go away and 30 minutes later, the car will run fine. The car has new spark plugs, air filter, fuel filter, and all the fluids are in normal level. This symptom started about 4 months ago, and then it went away. It was looked at twice by the local independent BMW specialist in foreign cars, but the car ran fine both times at his shop. The mechanic adjusted the fuel intake mixture at the first visit and did nothing at the second since the car ran just fine. The problem started again two weeks ago, and then it ran fine again two days later. It is now at another BMW mechanic. He cannot find anything wrong with the car. It starts every time he tries and it drives well. Nothing was stored in the computer code to indicate otherwise.

Halderman: It is very difficult to diagnose a problem that occurs intermittently. What I would do is connect a scan tool to the vehicle and while watching the data from major sensors, such as the mass air flow (MAF) and the engine coolant temperature (ECT), wiggle wires and harnesses and watch for changes. I think that will be about the only way to spot this type of fault easily. If this test fails to find anything, have the engine decarbonized. Because the vehicle is driven infrequently, carbon can accumulate on the valves and in the cylinders. When the engine is first started, these carbon deposits can absorb the fuel entering the engine, reducing the amount of fuel entering into the combustion process. As a result, the engine will stall after a cold start or idle roughly and hesitate during acceleration until the engine reaches normal operating temperature. A decarbonization is almost a maintenance procedure now and it usually costs less than \$150.00.

