Wheels: *Joe and Bob write by e-mail: "Jim, we sure enjoy your weekly articles in the DDN. My neighbor, Bob, and I, are a couple shade tree mechanics and manage to keep 6 vehicles going to save money wherever we can. Since you seem to excel at the unusual problems in the 'little guy' world, we'd like to share a recent mystery with you. May be you can shed a bit of light on the puzzle.*

One of the six vehicles is a 2002 Mercury Sable GS with 185,000 mi. This is a one-owner car and still runs and looks great. A couple days ago, we noticed transaxle fluid under it. The car was parked in the driveway facing the street at about a 20 degree angle and had not been driven for 36 hrs. Fluid leaks drive us nuts! We found the fluid coming out of the dipstick hole. Removing the dipstick, the fluid was at the top of the tube and just overflowing. Lots of head scratching and theorizing at this point. We started it up and, of course, the fluid receded back to whence it was useful. After warming it up, we put it in Joe and Bob's garage for further investigation...NOTHING. The fluid was slightly down on the dipstick; we had lost only about 4 ounces. We haven't a clue as to what caused the tranny to just start pushing its life-blood out the fill hole. Over the past 3 years, the car has been parked in this same location too many times to count, without incident. We also can't be sure the dipstick was fully seated, but the rubber seal is still round and supple. Does this seal prevent fluid from leaking out or is it more of a dust catcher? Do you have any thoughts on how to solve the mystery? Thanks for your time."

Halderman: I did not know off hand so I asked Dick Krieger, from the Michigan Institute of Technology, for his opinion. Almost immediately he wrote back to me that he found a technical service bulletin (TSB) that addressed this exact issue. The Ford TSB 06-18-13 states that "erratic fluid level reading on transaxles dipsticks and/or leaks" can be caused by a clogged or restricted vent line. The vent hose needs to be replaced and secured so it cannot be restricted to solve the problem.

Thanks Dick for your help solving this seemly strange problem.