

Wheels: An e-mail from Carol says, "Within the last 30 days I purchased a 2001 Mercury Sable LS with 38,000 miles. I have noticed at times when I come to a stop light or stop sign, the car appears to have a rough idle. It has like one big bump, and then several in a row and then the idle will go back to normal. If this is happening while I am driving, I have not been able to recognize it or am not smart enough mechanically to recognize the problem. My gut says it is a malfunction within the engine and that greatly concerns me. What would cause this irregular running of the car? I believe I need to have the car checked out, which I probably should have done before the purchase. I will greatly appreciate any help/direction that you can give."

Halderman: The problem you described so well seems to me to indicate an ignition problem. It is not uncommon for the ignition wires to fail and as a result, could prevent all of the cylinders from receiving spark and therefore, the roughness you feel. A defective coil pack (three coils for the six cylinders) could also be the cause. If the problem is more common during wet or rainy weather, then I would suspect the spark plug wires. A technician can test for this fault by using a spray bottle with soapy water and spraying the ignition components, with the engine running, to see if the engine operation changes. A sticking exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) valve could also be the cause. A sticking EGR valve may or may not set a diagnostic trouble code. The problem could also be automatic transaxle related due to the late release of the torque converter clutch. Have a qualified service technician test drive the vehicle and perform a diagnostic check.

