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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Push the button Dud; excerpted from *Stories and Essays from Klinkapunk*; 2015

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## Push the button Dud

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My 35 Ford came with anti-skid braking. Any fool knows that if you stand on the brakes the wheels will stop turning and that the car will skid. This is why when I grew up you had built in anti-skid control – your foot by pumping. But starting in the 80s or so we got braking systems where the pumping is done for us.

Another thing I learned early on was that if you got stuck one wheel will spin and the other one sits. That being so, some engineer came up with traction control to reduce the likelihood of getting stuck by getting power to both wheels.

## Push the button Dud

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Pretty much, the traction control feature in the 1991 Gangster Lincoln Towncar went unnoticed because we never got stuck. Our first experience with spinning wheels was on the maiden voyage of the 1999 POS Lincoln Towncar to Stowe in January 2004.

A word as to the POS name. I cannot say exactly when I came to call it by that name, but probably soon after our voyage to Stowe. What would you call a car that masquerades as a big car that you can't get in without body contortions? What would you call a car where you bump your head on the roof when you hit potholes? What would you call a car where you have to duck to see out of the windshield? What would you call a car where you can't get your legs under the steering wheel? POS. That's the name.

For years, the two of us would go to Stowe Vermont in January or February for cross-country skiing. Early on we both skied; later just me and less and less by me at that.

Snow was scarce during our 2004 trip so we were excited to see a light dusting when we got up Sunday morning. To celebrate, we decided to go for a drive. We headed to one of our favorite skiing spots just off the main route to the Trapp Family Farm. The parking lot is about 10' below the road so there is a gentle incline coming out onto the road. The exit is blind so you have to stop on the incline to make sure things are clear before entering the road.

We sat enjoying the solitude and light snow. Eventually we decided to move on. By then there was probably 1/4 inch of snow on the ground.

We pulled up the incline and stopped to look for traffic. Dudley says "All clear" and I step on the accelerator. Traction control kicks in and 5 seconds later the engine dies. I back down the incline and try again. We come to the top. Dudley checks and gives me the all clear. I gun it. The POS Towncar shakes, the engine labors and then dies. By now I am getting an idea how traction control works. It keeps the wheels from spinning by slugging the engine!

After several more tries with the same result I turn to the owners manual and "traction control" to figure out if there is any way to turn the damn thing off because, I reason, with it off I can "burn" my way out.

## Push the button Dud

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I discover the control is inside the glove compartment on the far right. I wonder what genius put it there. It would not be so bad if, when you turned off the control, it stayed off. But no. It comes back on automatically. You have to keep turning it off. Location of the control in the glove compartment means you need two people: The driver and a person in the passenger seat to operate the button. If you are alone you have to recruit someone off the street to manage the button.

Fortunately I had Dudley for button management.

So here is the deal. I introduce Dudley to the "button" and put her through a crash course in pushing the button. Next, I back down the incline and start up with traction control on. Once the engine starts shaking I say "Push the button Dud" and I start burning up the incline. We move about 2 or 3 feet and that is it. After some temperate cursing I back the POS Towncar down the incline and start again. Me at the wheel and Dudley tensed over the button. I coax the POS Towncar up the hill until it starts shaking. Then again I say "Push the button Dud" and I start burning again.

Lots of blue smoke but not much movement.

More cursing and then we start the drill anew. Dudley on the button and me on the accelerator. On the 5th or 6th try we just about made it but had to stop for a car. Now more cursing, this time intemperate, and we start again.

It took about 15 minutes to burn out of there! By the time we got on the road, blue smoke hung heavy in the parking lot.

### **A side note**

Once we burned out of there, we decided to drive one of our favorite roads outside of Stowe. By now it was snowing pretty good but no wind.

We headed up the road. We got about half way up the hill when the car started sliding. I get Dudley behind the wheel so I can get out and push against the downside of the car to keep it from drifting into the ditch. I calmly shout orders to Dudley until we get back to level ground.

## **Push the button Dud**

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By now it is lunch time so we buy a picnic lunch and have it in the POS car in the school parking lot. When we fix to leave the battery is drained from running the heater.

Not a great day in the snow in Stowe!

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