

Look beyond ...



Tim Stock, Helpline

We recently had a call from a garage regarding a 1992 Mercedes SL500 model W129. The customer had been having flat battery issues for some time. He took the vehicle to his local garage for checks on the battery and charging system, which passed without any problems found. On questioning the customer several symptoms were present,

- The alarm goes off intermittently
- The instrument display surged on warning lights and gauges
- Battery goes flat over several days

The garage removed the instrument cluster and checked all connections. All looked clean and tight. The alarm system was aftermarket and, due to its age, it was removed. The fault of the alarm still persisted to show up, indicating that the factory alarm was the problem, so the garage disconnected the siren. It was then the customer wanted an Auto Electrician to get involved, and more involved testing began.

Battery parasitic load testing revealed that an intermittent surging current was present. It was not until this point that the auto electrician noticed that the passenger seat was all the way forward and very close to the dash. It would not operate from the switch assembly.

It was then the customer mentioned the seats had been behaving in a strange way, intermittently working and sometimes in reverse to normal operation.

The focus shifted to the seat system, to reveal the root cause of all the problems. Water damage to the seat control module, located under the seat, was shorting out power supplies affecting the alarm system, surging the instrument cluster power supply and was the cause of the underlying battery drain.

So it pays to talk to the customer about all of the complaints, and don't focus on one particular area with no apparent data connections (CAN, LIN or VAN) with unrelated systems. Just sharing a power supply can be enough to affect its operation. So is always worth looking at all issues, before focusing on one area.

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The seat control module, above, and its water damaged interior circuitry, below

