CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1: The Truck That Died at Forty Thousand Miles

Picture a pickup with forty thousand miles on the clock. It has had clean oil changes and a dealer stamp in the book, and the paint still shines. One morning on the highway the engine goes quiet and the dash lights up. By lunch the truck is on a flatbed, and by suppertime the owner learns the engine is finished.

That scene is a composite, a typical case built from many owner stories I've read and heard. The details change from truck to truck. The ending usually doesn't. A machine that should have run another fifteen years dies before the loan is half paid.

Here's the part that keeps me up at night. In many of these cases, the engine was trying to say something before it quit. Nobody was listening, because nobody had been taught how.

The low-mileage failure nobody saw coming

This kind of failure has documented, public versions. One 2022 Toyota Tundra owner wrote that his truck sat at the dealer for **30 days** with a failed engine. Then he was told it would be another month. The dealer kept promising "a week or two," because his VIN wasn't yet part of the recall remedy (Torque News, owner account).

The Tundra is supposed to be the safe bet. That's the point. Toyota has now recalled the Tundra's twin-turbo 3.4L V6 three times: May 2024, November 2025 and May 2026. The latest round added about 44,000 2024 Tundras and pushed the total past 250,000 trucks[19]. The company's own explanation is plain:

> "There is a possibility that certain machining debris may not have been cleared from the engine when it was produced." (Toyota Motor North America, via Motor1, 2026-05)

GM's big 6.2L V8 has its own story. So does Honda's 3.5L V6, and so do some Kia engines. Chapter 2 walks through how each trusted name ended up on a recall notice. For now, hold on to one fact. The federal safety regulator describes the risk in five blunt words: "Loss of motive power due to engine failure" (NHTSA Office of Defects Investigation, via TruckDaily, 2026-08). In a working man's language, that means the truck dies on you while you're driving it.

Why the warning was there weeks before the breakdown

An engine rarely goes from healthy to dead in one step. The failures in these recalls live in the **bearings**. Bearings are the thin, smooth shells that let the crankshaft spin on a film of oil. When those surfaces are damaged, the damage grows a little with every mile.

Toyota says debris stuck to the crankshaft bearings can make them fail under high load, such as hard acceleration or towing[19]. Honda's 2023 recall covered about 249,000 vehicles. Its crank pins (the polished journals the connecting rods ride on) may have been ground improperly, which could cause rod-bearing seizure[24]. Neither defect explodes on day one. Both wear the bearing down over time, and worn parts make noise.

Owners notice it in hindsight. On the Piloteers forum, Honda Pilot owners describe connecting-rod bearing failures that came with **engine knock** (Piloteers forum). That's a hard, rhythmic sound, and it doesn't belong in a healthy engine.

> **The Quiet Countdown:** most engines that die at low miles start making the sound of dying first. Whether you catch it depends on whether anyone is listening during the countdown.

I learned this in my own driveway years ago. My father's old pickup developed a faint tap on cold mornings that faded as it warmed. He called it "just the old girl waking up." Three months later we were pulling the engine, and I've never forgotten how ordinary that tap sounded at first.

A recall repair doesn't always stop the countdown either. GM's fix for the 6.2L L87 was a new engine, or, if the engine passed inspection, a switch from 0W-20 oil to a thicker 0W-40 synthetic[13]. Here's how that has gone so far.

> **499** owners have told federal investigators their L87 failed *after* the recall remedy: 473 after the oil change and 26 after a full engine replacement[26].

Paperwork that says "remedy completed" doesn't mean the engine is safe. Your ears still have work to do.

What a dead engine actually costs out of pocket

People think of the repair bill first. I'm going to skip the dollar guesses. Engine prices swing too much by model, shop and region, and I won't print a number I can't stand behind. Here's what the record does show about the costs that sneak up on you.

Time without a vehicle. That Tundra owner went 30 days without his truck, with another month promised (Torque News, owner account). Think about a month of borrowed rides, missed shifts or a rental on your own card.

The VIN that falls just outside the line. NHTSA has 173 complaints of 3.5L V6 rod-bearing failures in Hondas the 2023 recall didn't cover (CarBuzz; NHTSA). One Piloteers thread follows a bad rod-bearing diagnosis into a cost and coverage fight. In another, owners talk about joining a class action after paying for engines themselves (Piloteers forum). When your VIN sits outside the range, the bill usually comes to you first.

A fix that isn't there yet. NHTSA opened an audit of Kia's piston-ring recall after 47 complaints between April and June 2025. Owners said the fix didn't work, wasn't done properly, or wasn't available[32].

The everyday baseline keeps rising too. AAA puts maintenance, repair and tires for a new vehicle at **11.04 cents per mile**. That's about $1,656 a year at 15,000 miles and about 23.5% above the 2019 figure. Pickups cost the most to maintain[2].



AAA maintenance, repair and tire cost per mile, new vehicle

A household that already spends that much every year can't absorb a surprise engine on top of it. Catching the problem early is what protects the budget.

The skill this book gives back to you



You don't need a lift or a scan tool or a salesman's word. You need about **ninety seconds** at a cold start, a quiet morning, and the know-how to sort normal chatter from trouble. Chapter 8 teaches that listen step by step. This chapter just asks you to start paying attention.

- ✓ **Tonight:** find the 17-character VIN on your registration or insurance card, then run your VIN on NHTSA's recall lookup. Write down any open campaign.
- ✓ **Tomorrow morning, before the engine has run:** park outdoors, never in a closed garage, because exhaust carries carbon monoxide. Set the parking brake and leave it in Park.
- ✓ **Start it and record 90 seconds** on your phone from beside the front fender. Keep hands, sleeves, loose cords and long hair away from the belts and fan. Don't touch the exhaust or manifold, since they get hot fast.
- ✓ **Label the file** with the date, the outside temperature and the mileage. It becomes your baseline.

CHECK FIRST

CAMPAIGN (PRIMARY SOURCE)	ENGINE AND VEHICLES	THE DEFECT	STATUS TODAY (AS OF OUR OCT. 2026 CHECK)
GM Recall `25V-274` (NHTSA recall report)	6.2L L87 V8, ~600,000 2021-2024 GM trucks and SUVs	Rod and crankshaft manufacturing flaws; fix is a new engine or 0W-40 oil	NHTSA upgraded its probe to Engineering Analysis EA26005 on Aug. 21, 2026. It covers 997,743 2021-2026 vehicles, now including 2025-2026 models[31]
Toyota Tundra twin-turbo V6 recalls (Toyota statement)	3.4L V6, more than 250,000 Tundras	Machining debris on crank bearings	Third recall issued May 2026. Some engines built after tighter controls are also affected[19]
Honda Recall `23V-751` (NHTSA recall report)	3.5L V6, ~249,000 Honda/Acura	Improperly ground crank pins	A separate NHTSA probe of ~1.4 million vehicles opened Aug. 2025, including 2016-2020 Pilot and MDX[33]
Kia Recall `25V-099` (NHTSA recall report)	2.0L, ~137,000 2021-2023 Soul / 2021-2022 Seltos	Faulty piston oil rings; oil burning, rare fire	NHTSA opened an audit of the remedy in 2025 after 47 complaints[32]

Before you buy, and again before your next oil change, run your VIN. Then compare the result against this table.

Bottom Line

- Ask the seller for the dealer's written recall invoice, not a verbal "it's been done."
- If your L87 got the oil remedy, use only the 0W-40 synthetic shown on the new oil cap[13].
- On a used twin-turbo Tundra, ask whether it has been towing hard. Heavy load is when debris-damaged bearings fail[19].
- On a 3.5L Honda, don't treat a clean recall result as clearance, since failures have turned up outside the recall range.
- On a 2.0L Soul or Seltos, check the dipstick between changes and ask whether the piston-ring software was installed.

Key Takeaways

- Treat any engine noise that started recently as a dated event. Write down when you first heard it.
- Keep your cold-start recording, because a sound you can compare is worth more than a sound you remember.
- Plan for the cost of losing the truck for weeks, not just the repair bill. :::

So far we've seen famous, trusted engines fail at low miles. That leaves a harder question. If buying the right badge used to be enough, what changed, and how did names like Toyota and Honda end up on the same recall lists as everyone else?