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Just a quick note to say goodbye and thank you to Tom Magliozzi, one half of Click and Clack, the Tappet Brothers, and co-host, with his brother Ray, of the popular NPR call-in show "Car Talk". Tom's death from complications of Alzheimer's disease was announced yesterday.



Tom and Ray Magliozzi, complete with fuzzy dice I guess you either loved Car Talk or hated it. (You've been in a sensory deprivation tank for the last 25 years if you've never heard the brothers' incessant and raucous laughter erupting from a nearby radio—it was instantly

recognizable if, to some, highly irritating.) But I count myself in the “loved it” category. While the show was ostensibly about car repair—a topic that generally leaves me cold—in fact, the brothers took on marital disputes, wildlife challenges, financial decisions, vacation planning and whatever else their callers brought to their attention. They brought self-deprecating humor and often embarrassing personal experiences to bear on any and all topics, putting their listeners at ease (no matter how ridiculous the questions) by suggesting that no one knew less than they did.



Of course, they were anything but dumb—both were MIT graduates and Tom had a PhD in marketing. Despite Tom’s unofficial motto “Unencumbered by the Thought Process,” week after week they put on a scientific method clinic: asking questions, eliminating possibilities, and requesting additional data (or, occasionally experiment) before coming up with a diagnosis. They were often quite explicit about their use of the scientific method. Back in 1997, in their syndicated “Car Talk” column, they advised a reader about how to locate a front-end problem, ending, “And if it’s not a bad axle, then either we or the scientific method has failed you.” (In which case, they added, “So try writing to an automotive creationist and see how that goes.” I love it.) In a nod to the fact that even the experts can get things wrong, they had a regular segment called “Stump the Chumps,” during which previous callers would be brought back to report on whether Click and Clack had gotten it right.

They also brought a lot of scientists on their show, often to explain the answer to one of their Puzzlers—questions that sometimes involved cars, sometimes math, sometimes logic, and often physics. I remember a recently re-aired episode when a physicist from MIT called in to explain why Ray was correct when he said that you could read otherwise illegible small print by looking at it through a very tiny hole or in very bright light (turns out it’s for the same reason—but you’ll have to pony up \$0.99 to download [the episode](#) [4] yourself to hear why). I also recall detailed discussions about exactly how close you have to drive behind a tractor-trailer to save gas (short answer: too close for safety), and whether you get wetter by walking or running through a rainstorm. The important thing is that Tom and Ray were able to make discussions of complicated science fun and accessible, and even humorous.

Science is a lot of things, but one of the things it’s usually not, is funny. So to all of the well-deserved praise being showered on the late Tom Magliozzi, I’d like to add this: thanks for bringing science to millions of listeners along with a hefty serving of laughter. You will be missed.

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