

TECHNICAL TIPS - "Wench With A Wrench"

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Bringing Your Miata/MX5 Out of Storage

Hi, Miata Folks,

Yes, it's time again to think about getting our Miatas out of storage and back on the road for some top-down fun. But...before you do, make sure your Miata is road-worthy and ready to give you hours of trouble-free driving pleasure. I usually aim for out of storage on or about April 1st but only after I am assured of a couple of good rain storms to wash away any residual road salt from the (hopefully) last and final snow storm of the season.

Remember, most of our Miatas are oldies but goodies and in order to keep them running smoothly and trouble-free, a bit of extra (and on-going) attention is required of these older cars.

Please don't neglect checking out my annual "labor of Miata love" checklist (see below) when you're ready to bring your Miata out of storage this spring. Let's hope it's another early, warm, dry spring and wonderful, warm summer driving season! So far, it hasn't been too bad of a winter. Yea, Global Warming!

I hope you find this check list useful as a continuing Miata Club member or as a new member and Miata owner. This is an annual column I run every year in the spring.

BRINGING YOUR MIATA OUT OF WINTER STORAGE

- Check your NYS inspection sticker for 2020 inspection date and jot it down on a calendar or your mobile device as a reminder. It' so easy to forget! Maybe it's a good time to get your oil and filter changed too.
- Check under the hood for evidence of hungry rodents, as in chewed belts, hoses, wires or nests. They seem to love to snack on wiring insulation and can do some serious damage. Additionally, hoses can crack or dry out without the assistance of little furry critters. Also check for any loose wiring or loose connections while you're under there.
- Reconnect the battery, if applicable, and make sure battery terminals are clean. Tip: If terminals are corroded with white crumbly stuff, make a thick paste of baking soda and water and remove the offending gunk with an old toothbrush. Dab some plain old

Vaseline on the clean terminal before reconnecting to prevent corrosion. Throw away the toothbrush! ☺

- Check your spark plug wires if you have them. Are they old, cracked, funky-looking? Time to replace. (Newer models have “coil packs” and not traditional spark plug wires and hardly ever need replacement.)
- Check all fluid levels to make sure there are no leaks and they’re at the recommended levels. This includes fuel, brake fluid/clutch fluid, coolant, battery (if applicable), automatic transmission fluid (if applicable) and motor oil. Check your plastic drop sheet if you put one under the car to make sure there are no puddles of lost fluid! If there is, find the source and correct the problem.
- Check your battery. Do you know how old your battery is? You might want to consider replacement if it’s over 5 years old. Some auto parts stores will check your battery life but some say this is not a truly predictable method. Some batteries have warranties so be sure to check. If it is a “wet” batter, be sure to fill with distilled water only, not tap water.
- Check your owner’s manual based on your vehicle’s mileage to see if any fluids, spark plugs, air cleaners, etc. need checking or replacement and do it now. Tip: if your brake fluid has not been changed in a couple of years, think about replacing it perhaps during annual inspection. It does break down after a while. Fresh is always better!
- If you’ve covered or packed the muffler or air intake to prevent furry invaders over the winter, remove all the material before you start the car or you won’t be able to start it and you’ll wonder why! You don’t want a “duh moment”, do you? ☺
- Check your windshield wipers to see if they are brittle or cracked and need replacement.
- Check COLD tire pressure (after you lower it off the jack stands, if applicable) and inflate or deflate to the recommended pressure located on a sticker inside the driver side door or owner’s manual and.....
- Inspect your tires very carefully for any cracks, cuts or scrapes in the sidewalls or between tread rows. Check tire tread and replace if necessary. Do the Lincoln “penny test” by inserting a penny upside down into the tread. If you can see the top of Mr. Lincoln’s head, your tread is too worn and less than legal 3/32” and needs immediate replacement. Tip: I love “www.tirerack.com” for tire recommendations and on-line purchases. And....
- **SO IMPORTANT: Even if the tire tread looks acceptable, check the tire manufacturer date on the outside of the tire. Tires over 6-7 years should be replaced even if they look OK on the outside due to interior degradation. Your tires could be extremely unsafe at any speed. (Read my column on "Tires 101" on the Miata website to find out how to check for tire manufacturer's date.)**
- If you are mechanically inclined and a stickler for detail, you may want to consider lubing your cylinders with a few drops of motor oil before starting the engine for the first time BUT you’ll have to temporarily remove your spark plugs to do so. (Warning: Removing sparks plugs is a bit tricky if you’re not familiar and you’ll need a few special tools but it’s not that hard. If I can do it so can you. ☺)

- Check the brakes. There may be some rust on the rotors and you may hear some squeaks, squeals and scraping noise during your first outing but this should dissipate quickly after driving for a short time. If it doesn't... well, time to see your friendly mechanic or D.Y.I. , A.S.A.P. It's always a good idea to pull the wheels and check your brake pad thickness at the start of the season for possible replacement. Hopefully, you didn't leave the parking brake on during storage and seized the brakes. ☺
- Check the check list you may have left on the steering wheel (recommended in my "Winter Storage Tips" column) to see if there are any leftover maintenance issues that you need to address now before serious driving season.
- Wash your vehicle thoroughly to remove accumulated dirt and dust and use a good convertible top cleaner/reconditioner/waterproofing. I like *RaggTopp* cleaner and conditioner products and so do Audi and MBW manufacturers as they recommend this product for their convertible vehicles.
- Important: Be sure to change your oil and oil filter as soon as possible - I know, I know - even though you may have changed it prior to storage last summer. It's all about moisture in your crankcase and you want to limit rust and corrosion as much as possible especially if your Miata/MX5 is "mature" like my '06 NC. As I suggested in previous columns, I highly recommend an OEM Mazda oil filter or the Mobil One oil filter (both have oil anti-drain back valves in the filter) and some good brand-name motor oil to your mechanic to change for you or, if you're a masochist like me, do it yourself (see above picture!). Tip: You can use regular petroleum-based old-fashioned motor oil (I like Castrol GTX) but I have recently switched to 100% synthetic motor oil (Mobil One or Redline) which I feel is better for your engine's moving parts. Just don't combine the two types of oil together. Additional Tip: When you check your oil fluid level if you see any white liquid residue on the top of the stick which would indicate moisture in the motor oil (definitely not good), change the oil and filter immediately. I'm not kidding.
- Wash and wax your car as soon as you can after taking out of storage. Your Miata's finish has accumulated dust and??? while languishing in storage that can affect the paint finish. Tip: Check out my column of detailing your vehicle on the Miata Club website.
- AND FINALLY, before you commit to a long drive, consider a twenty-minute test drive around the block and at highway speed to make sure there are no remaining problems: Does the car pull to one side when braking? Does the brake pedal "fade"? Does the clutch pedal feel correct or goes to the floor too easily? Can you hear a miss in the ignition or a backfire? Are any belts squeaking? How's the engine temperature? How's the steering - lose and wandering? If you notice any of these conditions, have them checked immediately, if not sooner, by a qualified mechanic.

The bottom line: The better you take care of your Miata, the better it will take care of you.

p.s. Remember to check out my previous archived tech and tip columns on our Club website under TECH: www.mistatemiata.net

See You on the Road and Zoom Zoom Safely!

Gail

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