

MID SUMMER MAINTENANCE REMINDERS

Hello Miata Club Folks,

It's the *Maintenance Wench* here. ☺

I hope everyone is having a great summer and lots of topless fun with their Miatas.

My topic for this month is, "Don't ask what your Miata can do for you, ask what you can do for your Miata", to paraphrase a famous quote. ☺

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Here's some important summer maintenance suggestions to consider.

You might want to use this column as a check-list to make sure you're up-to-date with Miata maintenance. Your friendly owner's manual is a good reference too. (Tip: I always write what maintenance I have done in the back page of my owner's manual with the date and keep a folder with receipts from major maintenance purchases like brake pads, inspections, etc.)

- TIRE PRESSURE/ROTATION – **Check tire pressure monthly.** Correct tire pressure should be in your owner's manual or on a sticker on the inside of your driver's side door. **Rotate your tires every 2000-3000 miles.** Rotating tires prevents uneven wear and is good for fuel economy not to mention helping to make your tires last longer.
- TIRE REPLACEMENT - THIS IS A BIGGIE, FOLKS. **Important: Tires 7-10 years old have expired and should be replaced regardless of how much tread is left. Tires can degrade from the inside out unseen.** (Tip: Read my previous columns about tires in our Club website [www.midstatemiata.net](http://www.midstatemiata.net) TECH archive.) The tires are the most important thing between your butt and the road. Make sure they're safe!
- TIRE ALIGNMENT – **Every couple of years at least.** Even if you don't buy new tires and have alignment and tire balancing done then, have your alignment checked on your current tires. It will improve handling and help prevent early tire wear.
- TIRE LUG NUTS – **Check monthly.** If you have a torque wrench and a socket set, check your tire's lug nuts and tighten to spec, usually about 80 ft. lbs. of torque or have your mechanic check them. This can be easily overlooked if you have had your tires replaced or rotated recently.
- ANTI-FREEZE/COOLANT - **Mazda recommends flush and replacement every 30,000 miles.** Antifreeze, also known as coolant, keeps the engine and its components from freezing or overheating. The chemicals in antifreeze eventually break down and lose their engine-cooling protective properties. Driving a vehicle with a faulty engine cooling

system can result in overheating, cylinder head gasket failure, engine block failure, or cylinder head warping. Read \$\$\$\$\$\$......

- **POWER STEERING FLUID REPLACEMENT** – If never flushed and replaced and you have at least 55,000 miles, think about it. Power steering fluid does break down eventually and can cause “gunk” to accumulate in the power steering lines affecting steering. The fresh fluid color should be translucent cherry red (not dark brown or black) just in case you see any that has leaked on your driveway. At least check it once a month to see if it needs topping up. Use the correct stuff per your manual.
- **NYS INSPECTION STICKER – Depends.** ☺ **Make sure you know when your inspection is due.** (Tip: I try to get mine done at the beginning of summer every year regardless of due date.) It’s also a good safety check if you use a good repair inspection shop as they check brakes, lights, tires, horn, etc. You can ask them to check fluids, battery, etc. too.
- **AIR FILTER- Replace after 60 months or 60,000 miles.** The new “permanent” filters are nice. You just take them out and vacuum occasionally. Worth the added expense, I say. If you don’t wrap your air filter in aluminum foil during winter storage or long-time un-use, you’d be surprised what critters can accumulate in there.
- **TIMING BELT - ?????** Well, the jury is still out on this. ☺ Are you a reasonable gambler? Some say replace after 60,000 miles BUT reported failures appear to be few and far between and it doesn’t hurt the engine if the belt does break; you’re just unable to drive the car until it’s replaced. Replacement is expensive, like \$600+. (Tip: It’s recommended that you replace the water pump, a relatively inexpensive part, if you do replace the belt since it’s buried “down under there”.)
- **ENGINE OIL – Check Monthly.** Checked your dipstick lately? It’s your engine’s life’s blood. Top up per the dipstick markings but **don’t mix conventional motor oil with synthetic oil** and make sure per your owner’s manual it’s the correct specified grade. Use conventional or 100% synthetic. 50/50 blend is a waste of money, in my opinion. I personally prefer 100% synthetic. More expensive but you don’t have to change it as often.
- **OIL CHANGE – 5 mo./5K.** If you didn’t change your motor oil and filter this spring after storage, do it now! Some Miata diehards (like me) recommend every 3 months or after 30,000 miles whether using conventional or 100% synthetic oil. Engine lubrication, especially for older cars, is so important.
- **BRAKE PADS – Depends.** This is obviously important. Brake pad thickness will be checked during your yearly spring or summer annual auto inspection but it’s recommended that they be **replaced every 2-3 years**, especially if you are a “spirited” driver and do hard driving/hard braking, lots of up and down hill driving, high

performance track days or lots of stop and go driving. If your brakes are squealing, then it's definitely time!

- **BRAKE FLUID/CLUTCH FLUID –Check monthly and completely replace every 2-3 years.** Brake and clutch fluid (same fluid) are located in the same little plastic reservoir under the hood. It's recommended you have your brake fluid flushed and replaced with fresh fluid every 2-3 years since it does break down eventually. Toss partially used cans of brake fluid after 2 years at the latest if you add it yourself; it degrades because it attracts water, even a partially-used, closed container on your garage shelf. (Tip: I mark the date I opened the bottle with a magic marker so I know how old it is. If you are a “spirited” driver who hard brakes a lot or someone who does high performance track days, it's recommended that you use higher temperature DOT 4 brake fluid indicated on the bottle as opposed to DOT 3 or use one of the new combo DOT3/DOT4 brake fluids.)
- **DIFFERENTIAL FLUID - Drain and replace every 30,000 miles per Mazda's factory recommendation.** Be sure to use the right kind per your owner's manual.
- **TRANSMISSION FLUID (ATF) - Drain and replace every 30,000 miles per Mazda's factory recommendation.** Be sure to use the right kind per your owner's manual.
- **PVC VALVE - Replace every 20,000 – 50,000 miles. If you normally drive short trips, change every 30,000 miles.** (Tip: See my past TECH article about PVC valves in website archives).
- **FUEL FILTER - Replace every 60,000 miles.** (If it's plugged, believe me, you'll know, i.e., lack of power driving up hills!)
- **CABIN FILTER – Replacement per manual.** If you don't change your cabin air filter, the filter will become more clogged with dirt and debris and compromising the efficiency of the filter and your car's HVAC system. The air volume into your passenger compartment will be continually reduced leading to the issue of odors inside your car.
- **SPARK PLUGS/WIRES –Check monthly (if you have these; newer models do not). Replace about every 30,000 miles.** When was the last time you had these changed? Check spark plugs and spark plugs wires (cracks, breaks, broken covering) if you have these for older Miatas and just the spark plugs for the newer models which have “coil packs” in place of wires that do not need regular replacement.
- **RAIN DRAINS – Check periodically.** These are the little holes under your convertible top that drain rain water and car-washing water down and away from the car. They can plug with dirt, grit, leaves, etc. Plugged drainage holes will allow water to back up INTO your interior cabin floor. (Tip: Run a garden hose on the back of your car with the top securely up and then with the top half-way folded down (have someone hold it or put a box under it to hold it from falling down). Have someone peek underneath the back of the car to make sure water is draining properly.)

- **ENGINE HOSES – Check monthly.** Take a quick peek at all of your engine hoses and hose clamps to make sure there are no leaks, cracks, breaks or any have come loose. Only takes a minute. Replace as necessary; new hoses are cheap insurance AND they come in cool colors now. 😊
- **BATTERY FLUID/REPLACEMENT – Check monthly and/or depends.** Do you have a battery that requires adding water or a closed battery system? Unscrew those battery caps with a rag and top off with distilled (not tap) water if the cells look low on fluid. How OLD is your battery? Some have a date printed on top. Clean corroded battery terminals (that gunky white stuff) with a toothbrush and a paste made with water and baking soda, cleaned off with a rag or paper towel. Please use rubber gloves, protective glasses and protect paint and clothing. This is acid gunk. (Tip: You can have battery life tested and checked free at many auto supplies stores.)
- **WASH/WAX – AT LEAST once a season.** To preserve your paint, especially on our older Miatas, your car should be hand-washed and waxed in spring after storage and ideally more often in mid-summer and just before storage. I’m talking “by-hand” here. Don’t forget to condition leather seating if you have it with a quality leather preservative product. Clean and condition your convertible top with quality convertible top cleaner/conditioner products like *RaggTop* or equivalent to help it last longer and protect from harmful UV rays deterioration. Yes, it’s time consuming but so good for the soul!
- **TREE SAP, DEAD BUGS AND OTHER PAINT-RUINING PROBLEMS – Check every day!** Tree sap, dead bugs and bird droppings can be ruinous on paint and clear coat. Wipe acidic bird droppings and dead bugs ASAP with a damp paper towel. Tree sap can be effectively removed with a few drops of waterless hand soap (i.e., *Purell*). Let it sit for a minute on the sap to soften and then wipe off with a wet paper towel to thoroughly remove the sap. Then wash with a little soap and water and then dry with a dry paper towel. I have not found a sap-removing automotive product yet that really works as well as this.

I hope this has been interesting and useful info.  
Take care of your Miata and it will take care of you!

Zoom Zoom Safely!

*Gail*

**DISCLAIMER**

*Please note these tips are not reviewed or approved by the Mazda Motor Corporation or any other corporation or entity other than the originator. The Midstate Miata Club of NY does not accept any liability for damage or injury as a result of utilizing these tips and pointers. Please use common sense and always remember safety first!*