

“WENCH WITH A WRENCH”

By Gail Wagner

WINTER STORAGE TIPS

Hi, Miata Folks,

As I do each fall, it's apropos to print this column again for the Club newbies and as a refresher to us “oldies” as we tuck our Miatas away for their long winter's storage nap.

Below are some tried-and-true pointers I have found invaluable to keep our Miata's in good condition over the long, cold, NY winter and ready for spring reawakening. Warning: Most of you know I am obsessive-compulsive about Miata maintenance. ☺

- ☐ **Change the oil and filter BEFORE storage** to remove acids and other waste products that can corrode your motor if you changed it in the spring. I recommend using the OEM Mazda genuine filter or a Mobil One filter with anti-drain back valve in it. (Our Mazda dealer sponsors can give a parts discounts.) Use a good quality motor oil too. I now use Mobil One 100% synthetic. It's your choice to use 100% synthetic oil or real petroleum-based oil but do not mix both together. Use one or the other. (In my opinion, I think the 50/50 blend synthetic on the market is a waste of money.) You can always DIY or buy your own oil and Mazda filter and take it to a trusted mechanic to change for you. (Note: If you wish to switch from petroleum oil to 100% synthetic, just be sure to drain ALL old oil first, then add the 100% synthetic and vice-versa.)
- ☐ **Wash, wax and thoroughly clean the interior of your car.** This includes washing underneath with a hose, especially the wheel wells, to remove dirt. Vacuum inside thoroughly to remove any food crumbs that entice small creatures to picnic on leftover Doritos or the like. Critters can be unbelievably destructive, not to mention their indiscriminate excretory habits. ☺ Consider taking your removable carpets indoors for the winter to prevent becoming musty or mildew-laden. Place a couple of really stinky scented dryer sheets inside the cabin to discourage critters. Important: DO NOT use mothballs; nasty naphthalene fumes are toxic to breathe.
- ☐ **Check all fluid levels** before storage, especially the coolant/antifreeze level. Buy a little hydrometer at an auto parts store and check the freeze point or have it checked and coolant flushed/replaced, if necessary, before winter. This ain't California, ya' know. Old coolant can corrode the engine, cooling system and heater core.
- ☐ **Fill the gas tank completely** to prevent condensation that may contaminate your gasoline and corrode the fuel system. Some, including me, suggest ethanol-free gas. **IMPORTANT:** add a gasoline stabilizer additive such as “Sta-bil” brand and run the engine to mix it in to prevent the gasoline from becoming “gummy” to prevent clogging injectors from sitting over time.
- ☐ **Check your tire pressure.** Some suggest a slight tire over-inflation may prevent flat spots on your tires if you're not putting the vehicle up on jack stands. (More on jack stands below.)
- ☐ **Consider placing a sheet of heavy plastic polyethylene sheeting or a large piece of cardboard** under the entire vehicle to prevent vapor buildup, plus it's easy to spot any fluid leaks (I hope not!).

- **Remove the battery** to a warm, dry place (and charge once a month, if possible) OR leave it in the vehicle and consider plugging in a trickle battery charger if you have access to an electrical outlet. Or, merely disconnect the battery terminals and leave the battery in the car which is what I do because my storage space is heated to 40F 24/7. It's a popular myth that the battery will discharge if stored on a concrete floor. It won't, but if you're a non-believer, set it on a piece of wood.
- **Wrap the wipers in plastic wrap** to prevent the rubber from sticking to the windshield or remove completely and store indoors. I told you I was O-C.
- **Jack Stands:** If you're considering putting your vehicle up on jack stands to prevent flat spots on your tires, don't put the jack stands under the frame as it will stress the rubber bushings in the suspension if the suspension "droops". Try to keep the weight as it is now... that is, put the jack stands under the outer ball joints to approximate it sitting on the ground.
- **Release the parking break.** If left on, the brake pads may stick to the rotors.
- **Exhaust & air intake:** Remove the air filter, wrap it in aluminum foil and replace it for critter-nesting defense. Cover the end of the exhaust pipe with aluminum foil to prevent warm, fuzzy critters from nesting and causing havoc. Note: A plastic orange juice bottle top (such as Tropicana) fits snugly over the exhaust tip of NC's. Again, do not use toxic moth balls.
- **IMPORTANT:** leave yourself a little note taped to the steering wheel to remind yourself to move the aluminum foil from the intake air filter and exhaust pipe or the car won't start and you'll be wondering why. Also, note any maintenance issues you might want to address in the spring so you don't forget, i.e., new wipers, fluid replacement, coolant flush, new tires, etc.
- **Insurance:** You might be tempted to cancel your auto insurance when your vehicle is in storage, that is to cancel completely the Collision insurance and just keep Fire and Theft only. Although that might initially save money, there is a chance that the insurance company will raise your rates due to the gap in coverage when you re-insure which could cost you more in the long run. This can vary based on where you live and who your provider is so contact your insurance company to see what options are available to you. Also, it's a pain in the neck to remove license plates and get new plates or store at DMV each fall and spring with accompanying paperwork, standing in line, etc. I personally keep all insurance coverage 100% while in storage. (I insure with Haggerty – it's so inexpensive for great coverage older Miatas.)
- **Car Cover:** Consider a good, ventilated, breathable car cover to allow water vapor to leave the vehicle surface and to keep dust and dirt off the finish as well as any felines who love to sleep on convertible tops.
- **Lock the doors,** give 'er a little pat on the fender and say, "See you in April".

Zoom-Zoom Next Spring!

Gail

DISCLAIMER

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