



### **BRINGING YOUR NEW (OLD, USED) MIATA HOME**

Hello, Miata Club Folks,

This article will be devoted to many of you who have recently purchased your first new (and used) Miata. Congratulations! You're in for tons of fun with your new toy.

We all know Miatas, and Mazda in general, makes a wonderfully dependable and fun car, BUT that said, many of our Miatas are geriatric, some even 32 years old from the first generation NA's! My own 2006 NC, *Ms. Scarlet*, is going on 16 years, a fact that always amazes me since she only has 64,000 miles, and knock-on-wood, she's still running fresh and strong but I work very hard to keep her that way.

Our older, mature Miatas, mine included, are in need of special attention to keep them running well and out of repair shops and large repair bills due to lack of basic maintenance.

#### **Here's a checklist of items I suggest you consider when and after buying your new, old Miata.**

First of all, you need to do THE DEATH CHECK – that is, anything that might blow up, fall apart and/or can kill you: ☺

- Check or have checked the following as soon as possible:
- Tires (read the date code on each ([see my previous article on tires](#)). Make sure they are NO OLDER than 7 years old no matter how good they look. Make sure all tire are the same.
- Seatbelts – are they worn, frayed or is the orange “replacement required” label hanging out of the latch mechanism? Do they retract smoothly when you pull against them or do they stay tightened and continue to tighten every time you move with no easing up? Get these replaced. Soon. If not sooner.
- Coolant – Is your radiator filled with coolant? Do you know how old it is? See below. NOTE: If you have an third generation NC (2006-2014) take a good look at the plastic opaque coolant overflow tank. It is the only generation of Miatas that is pressurized and if it leaks due to old age, your engine will overheat quickly and well, guess what happens

next. \$\$\$\$\$\$. Replacement metal coolant tanks are available and very easy to install ([see my previous article about coolant tanks](#)).

- Brake/Clutch Fluid – Look under the hood for the brake fluid reservoir and make sure it is topped up. You need to stop when you want to stop, right?
- Motor Oil Level – Make sure it is topped up. Your manual will state what viscosity to use. Do not mix 100% synthetic oil with regular petroleum motor oil. No oil in the engine, it will seize and \$\$\$\$\$\$.

I will assume that you eyeball-checked for rust in the wheel arches, frame, subframe, door bottoms, under the carpets and trunk. Checked for tail pipe smoke, unusual wandering over the road, loose steering, stopping power, puddles underneath (other than A/C condensation water).

I also hope you did a quick *CarFax* on-line auto report check to see if there were any reported accidents or repair records or had the seller show you one.

Now the nitty-gritty.

**I WOULD NOT ASSUME ANYTHING THE OWNER SAID THEY HAVE RECENTLY DONE IN TERMS OF MAINTENANCE.**  
**REALLY. BE SURE AND BE SAFE.**

**Many of our Miatas are oldie-goldies and they need your consistent loving care that will include the following just as soon as you get your new baby home:**

- Check all hoses (radiator, heater, vacuum, etc.) for leaks, splits, fraying. Replace as necessary.
- If your tires are good, check tire pressure. PSI is listed in the driver's side door on a label. Helps with better gas mileage and saves tire wear. Check at least monthly.
- If your tires are older than 7 years, replace, replace, replace. Is your life worth \$400 + installation? Mine is. ☺
- Get the brakes checked – rotors and pads. You'll probably have to have your used Miata inspected to get your new registration. If your brake pads are less than 50%, I say, get them changed (see below) and you can forget about it for about 30-40K miles. Brakes are so important. Remember the Death Check above?
- While your mechanic is inspecting your vehicle for a new registration sticker, have them look at the suspension bushings and all electrical connections just to make sure all is well.
- I would heartily recommend changing the brake fluid even if pads and rotors look good. Who knows when this was done last? Brake fluid is hygroscopic meaning it absorbs water and that decreases the effectiveness of your stopping ability. Should be done every 2-3 years anyway. You want DOT3 unless you're a track-nut like me, then higher temp DOT4.
- For NAs (1990-1997) and NBs (there was no 1998 Miata: 1999-2005), watch out for the airbag light illuminated. Could be a failed control module under the dash and not that expensive to fix.
- Flush the radiator coolant and add fresh, the type as specified in your manual. Coolant also breaks down after time. Check your radiator cap too. Is it tight?
- Flush the following and replace:
  - Transmission fluid (read manual for correct fluid type)
  - Differential fluid (read manual for correct fluid type)
  - Coolant/radiator fluid (read manual for correct coolant type)

- Consider flushing and replacing your power steering fluid (if you have power steering). It's a controversial subject but I don't think it hurts on an older car.
- Change the oil and filter especially if the oil on the dip stick is brown or black and not pale golden or almost clear. Who knows when this was done? Always use 100% synthetic oil (not 50/50). Yes, it's more expensive BUT you don't have to change it as often and it contains better modern lubricants for older engines. Use a good quality oil filter. It really makes a difference.
- Change the air filter. This is cheap and easy. This should be done yearly anyway.
- Change the cabin filter. Another cheap and easy.
- Consider changing the gasoline filter. These are old cars, remember?
- Check your PVC valve. Not expensive.
- How old is your battery? A good auto supply shop can check battery life for you. By the way, does it need distilled water (not tap water) or is it sealed?
- Consider having the timing belt replaced. This is also controversial. If the belt breaks, the engine will stop dead and will not be drivable but a broken belt is "non-interfering" and it will not hurt the engine. I have never heard of this happening to anyone but some recommend it so this doesn't happen. Take a look at the belt. If it looks OK, not frayed or cut, you can hedge your bets and not change it. By the way, this is not cheap to have done. And it is recommended you replace the water pump while your mechanic is down in there.
- Consider new shock absorbers. If they are the originals, holy cow, by all means, change all four. These should be changed every 40K or so anyway. Your butt will thank you. 😊
- How old are your spark plugs and spark plug wires (if you have them. Post-2014 NC's do not have spark plug wires). Get new plugs and wires suggested in your owner's manual. Iridium plugs are expensive but last much longer.
- Check your windshield wipers. We usually don't drive in the rain but if you get caught unexpectedly, you want them to clear your windshield efficiently to you can see where you're going. Cheap fix.
- I hope you have checked to make sure the dreaded CEL (Check Engine Light) is not illuminated. If it is, get it checked out ASAP. It could be a faulty PVC valve or something as simple as a faulty gas cap or ..... ? By the way, your inspection station will not pass your Miata if the CEL is illuminated.
- This is slightly obscure, but if your smooth-shifting Miata is not shifting as smoothly as you think it should, there are shifter rebuild kits to replace the metal bushings and rubber boots that hold fluid for famous Miata smooth shifting. Boots deteriorate, rip, leak and dry out. Not expensive but a bit tricky to do yourself (ask me).

Zoom-Zoom Safely!

*Gail*

#### DISCLAIMER

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