

Get Your Ride Ready For Winter!

By Benjamin Hunting

That time of year is just around the corner – the three to four month period where most Chicagoland gearheads tuck their rides in for a long winter's sleep. The snow, ice, salt and cold might be tough to slog through on a regular basis, but if you are lucky enough to have a safe space to store your rod or custom car from November through to the end of March then you will at least only have your daily driver to worry about during the cold weather grind.

Storing a vehicle for the winter isn't quite as simple as parking it, pocketing the keys and pulling down the garage door. In order to make sure that you are doing everything possible to protect your automobile while it sits idle during the colder months there are a couple of considerations and preparations you should make prior to saying goodbye to the summer driving season.

To start let's start with the fuel. To avoid

any fuel problems it is recommended that you store your vehicle with almost a full tank of gas, to try to avoid any condensation issues. A good quality fuel stabilizer should be used following their directions. Use premium gas when storing and try avoiding "topping off" the tank. Fill up to about only 7/8 of a tank.

The next step involves choosing the right storage location. Ideally, you will want to find an enclosed area that is as dry as possible, regardless of whether it is heated or not. Moisture is the number one enemy of any vehicle that is sitting for an extended period of time as it can attack wiring, sheet metal and paint, leaving you with a dull finish and possible corrosion issues. Even the inside of an engine can see significant damage if it is left sitting in an moist spot for months at a time.

Once you have made sure that your storage area is as dry as possible, the next step is to ensure that your vehicle is protected from any of the small creatures which might want to carve out a nest inside of it while they themselves hide from the winter chill. Logically, the best protection is to select a garage that doesn't offer access to the outside world, but it's always a good idea to employ secondary measures just in case mice, squirrels or other rodents manage to find a way into you storage area. Usually, blocking the exhaust pipes

and air intakes with steel wool (which rodents cannot chew through) will help you to keep vermin at bay. Sprinkling moth balls throughout the passenger compartment, under the hood and in the trunk are also effective at keeping these critters out of the picture.

Acting as a barrier to both moisture and mice is a good quality car cover. An indoor car cover should hold tight to the bottom of your vehicle's bodywork and include pockets for the side mirrors. It should also be made of a breathable fabric that will allow air to circulate underneath it to further prevent moisture from being trapped against your car's finish. Prior to putting



the cover on, make sure that you have washed and thoroughly dried your vehicle. A fresh coat of wax also helps to protect your car's shine and reduce any wear from having the cover sit on it all winter.

Aside from keeping your car clean, wrapped and snug against the wet and nature's gnawers, there are a few other areas of car storage that are often overlooked. Not all enthusiasts change their car's oil before putting it away for the winter, for example, which is an important step according to Royal Purple's Greg Parker.

Greg told us that making sure to swap out old oil for fresh oil is necessary to help protect the engine from the grime and dirt

that is suspended in the used lubricant sloshing around the engine at the end of the driving season. If the oil isn't changed prior to storing a car, then sludge and other contaminants can pool and thicken at the bottom of the oil pan over time. This means that when the vehicle is fired up when being brought out of storage, chunks of sludge could either block important passageways or even stay stuck to the oil pan.

Parker recommends changing the oil immediately prior to storing a vehicle, and then driving it for about 30 minutes the day it is scheduled to be put away for the winter. The fresh oil will ensure that the engine stays clean throughout the storage period

and is properly lubed up when restarted several months later, while the short drive helps to remove any moisture from the motor.

Moisture build-up in an engine is in fact the main reason why a vehicle should not be regularly started and idled during the storage period. While folk wisdom might suggest that this is the best way to keep an engine healthy when not regularly being used, this type of cold-start and

idle procedure will actually increase wear as well as the moisture inside an engine and possibly lead to corrosion or other issues.

A good practice is to "fog" the motor with a spray type of "fogging" solution. This prevents cylinder corrosion during lay up. This involves spraying the fogging oil into the carburetor while the motor is running. Fog the motor until you get a bit of smoke from the tail pipes. Check with your storage guy first as he may not want to have you accidentally smoke up his building. If this is the case there are other products that you may be able to use that are a combination fuel stabilizer and cylinder protectant. Such products are "Store-N-Start" and, EZ-



to-Store EZ-to-Start. The spray type fogging oils and these fuel additives should be available from your local parts stores, or if they can't help, the local boat store will have them. Cars with fuel injection and catalytic converters should use the later method for cylinder protection. Please check with your manufacturer first.

Another often misunderstood aspect of vehicle storage has to do with battery care. Matt Ingram from CTEK (ctek.com) explained to us that modern batteries are much better built than those of even ten years ago. Unfortunately, says Ingram, battery chargers have not quite kept up the pace, which means that older battery tenders are not necessarily safe to use with the latest in battery technologies.

Matt told us that in order to keep a battery fresh while a car is being stored for the winter the best option is to use a "smart" charger which can detect when the battery has been fully charged and cut the juice flowing to it until it once again requires topping up. This prevents the overcharging that is common when using an older trickle charger with a newer battery. It is also important to match your battery type with the right kind of charger, as some enthusiast batteries from Optima or AGM require a more robust charging solution in order to stay in good shape. A smart charger is particularly important when storing a more modern car, as the electronics installed in recent vehicle place a greater drain on a sitting battery than the typical energy demands of an older hot rod.

Matt Ingram was also able to dispel a few other myths surrounding battery storage during the winter months. There is really no need to remove a battery from a vehicle while it is connected to a smart charger – the system will charge properly despite being connected to the automobile. Keeping the battery fully charged will prevent it



from receiving any damage from the cold weather, as it would take temperatures of -80F to damage a fully topped-up battery. On the contrary, an empty battery can be damaged if it is stored anywhere near the freezing point, so a charger is a must to protect your investment. If you don't have access to electricity at your storage site, then removing the battery and keeping it connected to a smart charger in your basement is the next best course of action.

Our final word of advice when it comes to winter storage has to do with tires. Some custom car owners choose to store their vehicles on a set of older rubber in order to avoid flat-spotting a set of good tires. While a storage period of only a few months is unlikely to cause any damage to radial tires, if you do not have access to winter wheels for your car then you can simply over-inflate your tires by five pounds per square inch or so to help the sidewall remain stiff. There is no need to resort to propping your car up on jack stands – your wheels and tires were designed to maintain a heavy static load over time, while your jack points were not. It's not worth the risk of discovering potential frame or crossmember damage at the end of the winter season.

By following these tips, there is no reason that your hot rod shouldn't emerge from its hibernation in the spring looking and driving as great as it did the day it was put to bed.