

Use It or Lose It

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Lack of use is just about the worst thing that you can do to your car; or shall we say, can't do. More mechanical problems happen because vehicles aren't driven regularly than you could ever imagine. Nothing does more damage to a vehicle than long-term storage. In fact, the list of potential problems is quite lengthy.

Let's start with the engine itself. Even if you are not able to drive your car for a half-year or more, at the very least you should turn the engine over. This will ensure that the cylinder walls get lubricated, which will help prevent tiny rust particles from forming and corroding the walls, thus reducing the sealing quality of the piston rings, which will then affect, and reduce, the engine's compression.

If you don't have the time to let the engine warm up to operating temperatures, then you must disconnect the coil wire so it doesn't start; otherwise, you will not be able to remove all the condensation in the exhaust system that forms and it will soon start rusting away the pipes. But if time is on your side, then by all means get the engine running, and let it run until it gets nice and hot—but not overheated. The heat will remove all internal moisture that had formed during its slumber, thereby eliminating the formation of corrosion.

Another reason to start the engine is to allow the oil to circulate throughout the block, guaranteeing that all the components get covered in oil, especially the rocker assembly, which is the farthest removed from the oil pan. And the hotter the oil, the better it will flow into all the tiny oil-ways. Most importantly, you don't want the rear crankshaft oil seal to dry out, because if it does there will be no way to stop it from leaking later on, other than removing the engine and replacing the seal.

Always make sure that the carburetor bowl is filled with gasoline, otherwise the gaskets and associated rubber parts such as internal diaphragms and fuel lines will dry out and shrink, thus causing fuel leaks in the future. This also happens to the transmission, especially automatics. In fact, transmissions are probably the biggest sufferers when

it comes to lack of use. There are many seals, gaskets and rubber O-rings inside the hydraulic maze that makes up an automatic's control system, and lack of use will make several of these parts dry out in a relatively short period of time, turning your garage floor into a slippery rink of red transmission fluid.

These same issues will also affect certain shocks and water pumps. And let's not forget the heater core. Without the regular flow of hot water through the core, rust will form, which will lead, to failure. And that means ruined carpet when the heater starts leaking. In fact, even when you use your car during the summer, you should turn on the heater every two weeks or so in order to circulate hot water through it and keep rust from corroding the heater matrix. Ditto for the air-conditioning system; In the winter, it should be turned on every few weeks for the same reasons.

Keeping a car stored in one spot all winter long will cause the tires to develop flat spots; this will also happen to the tubes that are used with wire wheels. Come spring, the car will have a very bumpy ride and give off annoying vibrations. So at the very least, roll your car fore and aft a few feet every few weeks to make sure that the tires don't come to rest on the same spot.

If your car is fitted with a hydraulic clutch, push in the pedal a few times every few weeks so the rubber seals in the master and slave cylinders get lubricated and don't shrink. If they do, come spring, when you push in the clutch, the pedal will have no resistance, and you won't be moving anywhere. This goes for the brakes as well, as the master cylinder and the wheel cylinders have small diameter rubber seals that will quickly dry out. Even if your car is fitted with disc brakes, a few pushes on the pedal every now and then will ensure that the pistons in the calipers don't freeze in position.

There are several other problems that can develop over time, as well, all of which can be easily avoided through regular use. Like they say, if you don't use it you'll lose it.