

TECHNICAL TIPS – “Wench With A Wrench”

By Gail Wagner – Midstate Miata Club of NY



Back in Action – Bringing Your Baby Back Out of Storage

Hi, Miata Folks,

Yes, that’s really me under there. As always, I welcome your comments and suggestions at: gwagner@ithaca.edu

Here’s a quick but important “labor of love” checklist to consider when you’re ready to bring your Miata out of storage in the spring. This is a duplicate article I run every spring first-thing. I hope you find it useful either as a reminder or as a new MCC member.

Let’s hope it’s another early spring !

- Check your NYS inspection sticker for 2017 inspection date and jot it down on a calendar or your mobile device as a reminder.
- Check under the hood for evidence of rodents, as in chewed belts, hoses, wires or nests. They seem to love to snack on wiring insulation and can do some serious damage. Even so, hoses can crack or dry out on their own without the assistance of little furry critters. Also check for any loose wiring or loose connections while you’re under there.
- Reconnect the battery, if applicable, and make sure battery terminals are clean. If corroded with white crumbly stuff, make a thick paste of baking soda and water and remove the offending gunk with an old toothbrush. Dab some plain old Vaseline on the clean terminal before reconnecting to prevent corrosion.
- Check all fluid levels to make sure there are no leaks and they’re at the recommended levels. This includes fuel, brake fluid/clutch fluid, coolant, battery (if applicable), automatic transmission fluid (if applicable) and motor oil. Check your plastic drop sheet if you put one under the car to make sure there are no puddles of lost fluid! If there is, find the source and correct the problem.
- It’s also a good time to check your owner’s manual based on your vehicle’s mileage to see if any fluids, spark plugs, air cleaners, etc. need checking or replacement and do it.
- If you’ve covered the muffler or air intake, remove all the material before you start the car or you won’t be able to start and you’ll wonder why! You don’t want a “duh...” moment, do you? ☺
- Check your windshield wipers to see if they are brittle or cracked and need replacement.

- Check COLD tire pressure (after you lower it off the jack stands, if applicable) and inflate or deflate to the recommended pressure located on a sticker inside the driver side door or owner's manual.
- Inspect your tires for any cracks, cuts or scrapes in the sidewalls or between tread rows. Check tire tread and replace if necessary. I love "www.tirerack.com" for tire recommendations and on-line purchases. Do the Lincoln "penny test" by inserting a Lincoln penny upside down into the tread. If you can see the top of Mr. Lincoln's head, your tread is too worn less than legal 3/32" and needs immediate replacement.
- If you are mechanically inclined and a stickler for detail, you may want to consider lubing your cylinders with a few drops of motor oil before starting the engine for the first time BUT you'll have to temporarily remove your spark plugs to do so. (Warning: Removing spark plugs is a bit tricky if you're not familiar and you'll need a few special tools but it's not that hard.)
- Check the brakes. There may be some rust on the rotors and you may hear some squeaks or squeals during your first outing but this should dissipate after driving for a short time. If it doesn't... well, time to see your friendly mechanic. It's always a good idea to pull the wheels and check your brake pad thickness for possible replacement. Hopefully, you didn't leave the parking brake on during storage and seized the brakes. ☹
- Check the check list you left on the steering wheel (recommended in my Winter Storage Tips October 2013 column) to see if there are any leftover maintenance issues that you need to address now.
- Wash your vehicle thoroughly to remove accumulated dirt and dust and use a good convertible top cleaner/reconditioner/waterproofing. I like *RaggTopp* products. (My personally recommended obsessive-compulsive detailing/washing instructions are located on the MMC website under "Tech".)
- Important: Be sure to change your oil and oil filter as soon as possible - I know, I know - even though you may have changed it prior to storage. It's all about moisture in your crankcase and you want to limit rust and corrosion as much as possible especially if your Baby is "mature". As I suggested in previous columns, I highly recommend buying and taking an OEM (original manufacturer's equipment) Mazda oil filter and some good brand-name motor oil to your mechanic to change for you or, if you're a masochist like me, do it yourself (see above picture!). You can use regular petroleum-based motor oil (I like Castrol GTX) but I have recently switched to 100% synthetic motor oil (Mobil One or Redline). Just don't combine the two types of oil together. Additional tip: when you check your oil fluid level, check your dip stick for any white liquid residue on the top of the stick which would indicate moisture in the motor oil (definitely not good) and change the oil and filter immediately.
- AND FINALLY, before you commit to a long drive, consider a twenty-minute test drive around the block and at highway speed to make sure there are no remaining problems: Does the car pull to one side when braking? Does the brake pedal "fade"? Does the clutch pedal feel correct or goes to the floor too easily? Can you hear a miss in the ignition or a backfire? Are any belts squeaking? How's the oil pressure? How's the engine temperature? How's the steering - lose and wandering?

The bottom line: The better you take care of your Miata, the better it will take care of you.

Zoom Zoom Safely!

Sail

DISCLAIMER

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