

## WINTER STORAGE

(Reprinted from The Octagon, Volume 51, Number 4 – Winter 2006)

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Ask a dozen MG owners how each of them stored his MG last year and you will receive a dozen different answers. Methods range from abandoning the MG under a tree in the front yard, to complex routines involving raising the MG off the ground and removing the seats.

There is not a “proper” method as each owner has slightly different considerations and requirements – yet there are basic rules to follow in any storage procedure that will reduce the probability of damage during storage. In addition to the normal precautions for freezing temperature, some thought must be given to location, access, traffic around the stored MG, humidity, rodents, etc. It is important to develop a plan that you can easily follow and that you implement before winter shows its icy Arctic fury.

**DAMAGE WE HAVE WITNESSED!** Damage during storage results from neglect or abuse and we’ve “seen it all!” Cars stored without antifreeze resulting in cracked blocks, burst radiators and heaters; old gasoline evaporated until all that’s left are giant, hardened blocks of varnish knocking around inside the tank, gasoline lines, fuel pumps, and carburetors plugged with gooey aged petrol. Dented fenders, cracked glass, perforated soft-tops caused by carelessness or accidents from adults and children. Corroded chrome, scaly under carriage, frozen brakes and interiors mildewed from damp storage. But the damage from rodents is most pervasive. Those nasty creatures burrow into the seats, the bonnet insulation, the interior and even the exhaust pipes. We have found nests in the boot, fender wells, pedal boxes, inside the heater boxes and air cleaners, in the folded tonneau...nearly everywhere. We disassembled an engine once to find a mouse nest INSIDE a cylinder. We’ve removed 20 pounds of dog food from the engine bay! One MGB had a perfectly round hole the size of a silver dollar gnawed right in the middle of the top – it had remained stowed all winter.

**BASIC RULES:** Freezing temperatures require a 50/50 solution of antifreeze and water to prevent the coolant from freezing in the engine block, radiator or heater. A full tank of gasoline reduces the amount of water that can be absorbed by the petrol and allows the rate at which the gasoline turns to varnish.

Fresh oil in the sump reduces bearing etching caused by dirty, acidic, contaminated oil. Topped off master cylinders reduce water contamination in the hydraulic lines.

Store the MG with the top up and windows and vents closed. The folding hood (or soft top) can develop nasty creases when left folded throughout the winter. Closed vents and windows make it more difficult for small furry creatures to foul or devour parts of the MG. It’s always nice to clean the MG’s interior prior to storage – discarded bottles and cigarette butts do not enhance the interior bouquet. Ensure that the boot (trunk) is dry. The boot seal is not always positive and some moisture can collect on the floor. Left to nature throughout the winter, this can rust the floor or inner fenders about the boot area.

Discharging an entire can of WD-40 (or similar product) on all the engine components, especially the bright metal or aluminium parts (carbs, coil, anti run-on valve, etc.) easily protects the under bonnet (engine bay). A large piece of plastic on the floor protects the underside of the MG from moisture rising up through the concrete. Finally, take the MG on the last run of the

season allowing it to heat up fully. A half-hour run is wonderful. This will evaporate all the moisture in the exhaust and engine. Park the car in its winter home and leave the hand brake OFF. If you will not see the MG until Spring, it is necessary to remove the battery to prevent freezing. Should the battery freeze and burst, sulphuric acid will cover everything around the battery area. If you cover the MG, use cloth, never plastic.

**STORAGE CONSIDERATIONS:** Consider the following questions and make your own storage plan from these concerns:

- Location – Will the MG be stored in a building to which you will have little or no access or will it be available every day? Will it be possible to drive your MG during the winter or will it be positioned in the corner of the garage?
- Traffic – Will the MG be isolated from movement, or will the family Vista Cruiser discharge four energetic careless children who will open doors against it?
- Humidity – Will the storage area be very dry or will there be a puddle of melting snow forever swilling under the MG?
- Temperature – Will the storage temperatures be room temp, just above freezing, or dead cold?
- Animals – Will the family cat use the soft top as a spring board, will Spike jump against it, are there furry rodents which may use the MG as a hotel or find the leather seats tasty at mealtime?
- Owner Maintenance – Will you really have the opportunity, inclination, time, and resolve to visit your MG every week or month?

**INSURANCE:** Insurance is a MUST – even on your stored MG! Always keep a theft/damage/vandalism/fire policy in effect on your MG. MGs are still stolen; garages collapse under the weight of snow; nasty neighborhood children may wish to redecorate your MG – or worse; and fire is always a possibility. This comprehensive insurance is very inexpensive and you simply cannot afford to be without it. Be certain to establish the value of your MG with the insurance agent before the loss!

### **SYSTEMS PROTECTION:**

1. ENGINE: Fresh oil will adequately protect the engine for several months of relatively dry storage. If you are going to store the MG longer than the winter, or if the humidity is high, then start the engine at regular intervals and allow it to warm up (with the garage door open, please). If this is not possible, introduce oil into the cylinders (perhaps six squirts from a normal oil can). Turn the engine over slowly, before replacing the plugs – by the crank in the earlier models, or pushing while in fourth gear – as this moves the oil throughout the head, pistons, and valves. Cover the tailpipe outlet with duct tape to prevent moisture (and rodents) from entering the exhaust system. Cover the air inlets at the air cleaner(s) with tape to keep moisture from the carb internals and cylinder head.

2. **IGNITION:** Normally there are no preventive measures but if you are going to store the MG for several years, oil the distributor cams. Even moderately damp storage will corrode the points. If the engine fails to quickly start the next season, drag a piece of fine sandpaper through the points to remove the oxidation.

3. **COOLING:** Ensure the cooling system is filled with a clean 50/50 solution of glycol antifreeze and water. Some owners suggest that Armorall or a similar product can extend the life of the radiator hoses.

4. **FUEL:** If you plan just a winter's storage, then a full tank of gasoline with the addition of a can of "dry gas" or "Stabil" is satisfactory. If you plan to store the MG for a year or more, then drain the float bowls to prevent a build-up of varnish and oxidation of the metering needle. Gasoline purchased years ago seems to last forever; gasoline purchased today goes bad after a year or so. Starting the MG with "old gas" or "bad gas" requires fresh gasoline in the carburetor just to get the engine to start running. Sometimes starting fluid (carburetor cleaner or ether) is necessary. Once warm, the engine will run on old gasoline.

5. **CLUTCH:** Two problems can occur in long term storage: the clutch hydraulics can leak; and the clutch disc can rust to the flywheel or pressure plate. Exercising the pedal on a regular basis can avoid these trouble spots. Damp storage is a real problem with the clutch and aggravates this rusting. Start the MG and drive it fore and aft even a couple of feet every so often!

6. **SUSPENSION:** Winter storage causes no problems with the suspension. Very few MG owners place their MGs on jacks for the winter – but if this is done, place the stands under the outer portion of the front A Arms and under the leaf springs where the U bolts surround the axle and spring. This keeps the suspension from dropping away from the body and straining the shocks and the rebound rubbers/straps. If you place the MG on stands, then reduce tire pressure to 10-15 lbs. Whether on stands or on the ground, be certain to move the wheels a couple of times during storage. Several rotations work well to prevent the bearings from rusting and will prevent flat spots from developing on the tires.

**BRAKES:** Rolling the MG back and forth prevents the brake pads from rusting to the rotors (just as the clutch disc can rust to the flywheel). Operate the brakes on a regular basis to prevent the cylinders from freezing. Some owners back off the adjustment on the brake drums so that there is no chance of the shoes rusting to the drums – this also allows the cylinders to move farther while exercising the pedal.

Exercise the hand brake too! Rapidly work the handle up and down to keep the cable and linkages free. Store the MG with the hand brake OFF!

**BATTERIES:** No battery will hold its charge forever. If the battery charge is reduced far enough, the electrolyte freezes, the case cracks, and the battery is ruined. If you store the MG in freezing temperatures, then you must charge the batteries several times throughout the winter. Use a "trickle charger" or run the engine to recharge the battery(ies). Sometimes it is easier to remove the battery! On the 1977 and newer MGBs with the electric clock, remove the bottom fuse in the fuse box. This stops the drain (albeit tiny) caused by the clock. Next to the coolant in the radiator, the batteries are one of the two most important considerations in winter storage. One of the truly "new and improved" devices is the battery monitor. This unit checks the battery voltage on a regular basis (minutes? seconds? Milliseconds? I don't know) and if the battery voltage falls below a certain mark, a tiny charge is made then the unit rechecks the voltage and the cycle repeats. These are truly wonderful units!

**BODY:** To prevent oxidation or scratching, cover the MG with a cloth mitten. Plastic is NOT suitable. Plastic does not allow the MG to breathe and can exacerbate oxidation and rusting. If you plan to store the MG in a heavy traffic zone (the family garage, for example), then additional protection is in order. Thick cardboard, a suitably supported piece of wood, or even an old mattress suspended from the ceiling prevents damage from winter tools and car doors. If the bonnet or boot lid will be used for a shelf (even if just to place groceries in transit), then more protection (such as a thick blanket) is in order. Humidity is the body's enemy. Make every effort to keep the floor dry!! If you plan to store the MG outside, then keep the car well ventilated and do not allow snow to pile up under and around the car. Park the MG on a large sheet of plastic to keep the MG dry. Expend a whole can of WD-40 in the engine bay and on the wheels, REALLY! Another truly wonderful improvement is the car bag. Some of these are giant envelopes into which you drive your car and zip closed for the season. Others have blowers to keep air circulating.

**INTERIOR:** Low winter humidity dries leather seats, allowing them to contract and crack. Prepare the leather with LEXOL to keep the hide supple. Mice cause the greatest damage to interiors! They eat the seats, the foam, the carpeting, the wiring insulation, they eat EVERYTHING!! Close off access to the interior. Keep the vents tightly closed. Erect the hood (soft top). Close the windows. Some owners remove their seats prior to storage. Several dishes filled with mothballs, in the foot wells, on the battery compartment, in the boot and in the bonnet will repel most mice. Use the "Old Fashioned" mothballs – naphthalene. Develop your plan and store your MG carefully!

We'll see YOU and YOUR MG next summer!