

Concerned about your MX-5 lying idle?



Here are some pointers for looking after your pride and joy from Andrew Turner, NC owner, Club member and Technical Expert for a leading auto manufacturer ...

Prepping your MX-5 for storage

With the current "lock-down" situation and not being able to go for a nice drive anywhere, most people's weekend joys will be just sitting around eagerly waiting for that long-awaited next drive.

But ... if you just let your MX-5 sit in the driveway or in your garage for an extended period, you may return to a dead battery or worse yet a damaged engine, ruined tyres or a rat's nest under the bonnet.

Here are some helpful steps to take when storing your MX-5. These will help you protect your engine and ensure that your MX-5 starts, and is in good working order when you're ready to drive it again.

A Good Clean

It may seem like a bit of a waste of effort to wash the car when you're about to put it away for a while, but it is an easy step and one that shouldn't be overlooked. Water stains or bird droppings left on the car long-term can damage the paint and wheels. Make sure to clean the wheels and undersides of the fenders to get rid of mud and greasy oil deposits. This will prevent potential rust starting from moisture build-up.

It's also a good idea to clean any leaves or dirt build up in your plenum (lower windscreen/wiper area) and the folding roof storage area. This will also prevent moisture build-up and roof drain blockages.

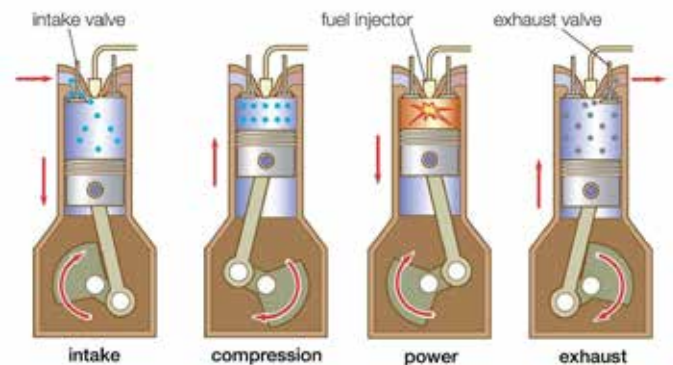
Keep It Covered

A garage is the ideal place to store your MX-5. This will protect it from the elements and keep it at a temperature that's relatively stable.

If you do have to leave the car outdoors, consider getting a weatherproof car cover, which will help keep the car clean and dry.

Do an Oil Change

Whenever you drive your MX-5 – or run your engine for that matter – your engine oil is slowly contaminated by combustion gasses. These include unburnt fuel vapor and carbon deposits from the exhaust gasses.



Because of the design of the combustion engine and the pressures inside the cylinder under the combustion stroke and exhaust stroke, small amounts of these gasses are forced past the piston rings and into the engine crank case. These contaminate the engine oil.

This contamination slowly breaks down and deteriorates your oil, causing oil degradation. This is why engine oil and filters need to be replaced at the manufacturer's recommended service intervals, as this degradation will cause your engine oil slowly to lose its lubrication properties and can lead to premature wear and internal engine damage.

This oil deterioration will slowly continue even if you are not using your MX-5; once your oil has been contaminated from previous driving, this deterioration will continue to occur. **This is why manufacturers also have a time period for service intervals.**

If this happens, the next time you start your engine or drive your MX-5 after a long period of sitting idle (the car, not you!), you could potentially cause premature engine wear or failure.



COVID-19 *and the* Art of MX-5 Maintenance

What About Fuel

There are two main theories with fuel storage.

The first is to fill the tank while in storage to reduce the moisture content that could build up in the void of your tank. But if your fuel system is in good working order, this should not be an issue. When you hear a vacuum sound removing your fuel cap after running a full tank, this means you have a good seal and there is no way moisture is getting in your fuel system.

The second is to keep a minimal amount of fuel in your tank while storing – one quarter to half a tank. This way you can top up with fresh fuel right away when you start driving your MX-5 again.

The second theory makes more sense to me, even though there is no hard or fast rule on the level and speed of petrol deterioration. Anyone who has smelled “off” fuel will know that fuel will deteriorate eventually. Off fuel smells awful and you would be lucky if you could start your lawn mower with it. It takes quite a long time to get this bad though. I have even seen fuel so old it turns to jelly in the fuel lines and injectors.

From the way I have been led to understand fuel deterioration, I believe **the octane level** is the thing to be mindful of.

If you have fresh 98 octane fuel in your tank, this octane level will slowly drop over time.

It may be as much as one octane per fortnight or may be only one octane per month. In six months’ time you may only be at 91 octane fuel or possibly lower.

In my experience this will be fine for you to take an easy drive to your nearest fuel station and top up with fresh fuel and increase your octane level up to where it should be.

The other option would be to fill a jerry can and top up with some fresh fuel before driving.

Don't Use the Park Brake (hand brake)

I would normally always recommend using your park brake when parking, but if you plan on leaving your MX-5 for a long period of time, *leaving the park brake on may cause the pad and the rotor to eventually fuse together, particularly if your MX-5 is left outside in the elements.* This may also cause brake shudder or pulsation once you do get them to release. **I'd recommend leaving your MX-5 in gear and use a wheel chock.** This can be as simple as a block of wood or an old brick paver you have lying around.

Keep It Charged

Batteries will slowly lose their charge just sitting around in your car.

Just keeping your radio pre-sets and clock on the correct time will cause a very low but inevitable current draw on your battery and will eventually cause it to go flat. The blinking security LED causes pulses in the current draw which is a sure-fire way to completely drain a car battery.

Disconnecting your negative terminal (*always negative*) is a good way to reduce the current draw on your battery. And cleaning the top of your battery between the posts and any corrosion build-up on the terminals will also increase your battery life. The oily deposits that tend to build up on top of your battery between the posts and the fuzzy corrosion build up on the terminals will also cause a low resistance between the terminals, creating a minor current draw which will also drain your battery over time.



continued

Protecting your MX-5 from the effects of COVID-19 (continued)

...from previous page

To clean the corrosion from the battery terminals, just boil the kettle and pour this directly over the corrosion. This will dissolve the powdery substance, water it down and wash it away so it no longer can harm your battery or other areas. *(Do not touch this powder: it's not good for humans either.)*

To clean of the oily dirt build-up on top of your battery, you can just take a clean rag and wipe this down. You can also use a bit of degreaser if it is really bad.

You may also need to remove the battery brace to get underneath it.

The best way to keep your battery in good working order is to use a battery charger, in particular a trickle charger. Keeping your battery at its optimum will increase your battery's life. The more your battery is drained, or the more often it goes completely flat, will decrease the life of your battery.

Give it a Run

Another thing you can do, if possible, is to run your engine every few weeks for five or 10 minutes.

Not only will this help keep your battery charged up but will also be good to keep your engine lubrication system primed and oil evenly spread around your engine.

Gravity will slowly cause your engine oil to drain back to the sump. After sitting for a long time, this can cause potential moisture build up inside the top of your engine and a lack of lubrication on initial engine start-up. *Both of these concerns can cause potential premature engine component failure.*

By running your engine every couple of weeks or months, this potential concern is dramatically reduced.

The beauty of the MX-5 is they have well-made and well-designed engines and this potential concern was already greatly reduced by the Mazda engineers.

Running your air conditioning at the same time will also keep the oils and gas in your A/C system in good working order.

If you need to pop down the shop for that inevitable toilet paper run, this is a good excuse to take the MX-5 for a spin and keep that battery charged and the engine in good working order.



This will also allow you to keep your tyres from developing flat spots and your brakes from developing any pitting from surface corrosion.

Check Your Tyres

If your MX-5 is left stationary for too long, the weight of the vehicle pressing down on the footprint area of the tyre will cause flat spots around that foot print area.

This process occurs at a faster rate in colder temperatures and in MX-5s equipped with performance tyres or low-profile tyres.

Make sure your tyres are inflated to the recommended tyre pressures, or even a little higher won't hurt.

This will prevent your tyres from sagging around the footprint area of your tyre. Simply rolling your MX-5 back or forth slightly on occasion will also help to prevent this.

The two main symptoms of a flat spot will be a visible flatness to a certain part of the tyre, or a vibration when driving, particularly on acceleration.

If you do develop a flat spot:

- » if it's minor, simply taking your MX-5 for a good drive will usually correct this
- » another thing you can try is to lower your tyre pressures to around 20psi, then take your car for a short drive. This will cause the tyres to rollover on themselves, and get them hotter than normal. Then, while the tyres are still hot, pump the tyres back up to their correct pressures and go for another drive.

If the flat spot is really bad, the tyre will need to be replaced.

Mice and Rats

Depending on where you live and where your car is stored, your MX-5 may become the ideal nesting place and food source for mice or rats.

Engine bays and air filter boxes make perfect nesting areas for rodents, and they love to chew on wires.





Placing some baits or mouse traps around your garage or under your MX-5 is a good way to keep them out for your engine bay and folding roof area. Just be sure to check them on occasion ... a rotting rodent smell in your garage (or car!) is also not ideal.

Or, if your wife is like mine and won't let you use mouse traps or baits, then mouse catcher devices and ultrasonic rodent repellents are also a good option. Blocking your air intake with steel wool can also help.

I've also read that moth balls and peppermint dipped cotton wool left lying around your MX-5 are good ways to keep mice and rats away from your MX-5. *I haven't tried this myself.*

Crisis over, and ready for fun?

Here is a list of things to check once you're ready to get back on the road again:

- » If the battery cable has been disconnected, make sure that you reconnect it and that the battery terminals are clean and tight.
- » Check under the bonnet for any evidence of rodents. Look for chewed belts, hoses, wires or nests. If you covered the air intake or any other areas, remove that material before you start the car.
- » Check the windshield wipers to see if the rubber is cracked or brittle.
- » Check the tyre pressures and inflate the tyres to the recommended pressures.
- » Check the brakes. Rust may have accumulated on the rotors. This may cause poor brake quality the first couple of times you use them. Give them a couple of good, hard pumps on a straight section of road to clean them up.
- » Check fluids to make sure there have been no leaks, and that they are at the recommended levels.
- » Top up your tank with fresh fuel.
- » Wash your MX-5 to remove any dust or dirt that may have accumulated.
- » **Hit the road ... and have fun!** ■

Vale Pam Bown

■ Words: Coral Campbell

Long-term Club member and former Club Champion, Pam Bown passed away on 7 March, after a long battle with cancer.

I first met Pam at a Club run just over 20 years ago. She had driven her precious 'Clara' (the name for her claret-coloured 2000 Heritage edition MX-5 [above]) to the run with a friend, and my first sight was of Pam and her friend sipping on bubbly on a picnic table and laughing loudly at a shared joke.

From that day, Pam attended just about every run with her partner Tyrone (below), and we became firm friends. Pam and Tyrone's enthusiasm for the Club saw Pam win the Club Championship in 2003 and the Teams Award in the same year. Pam and Tyrone have been on the Club's six Tassie trips, the 2008 trip to New Zealand (when we managed to hire seven MX-5s), many NatMeets, most Vic/SA joint interstate meetings and, more recently, trips with various Chapters across the State.



Over the years, we shared many experiences. Although not part of the Committee, in the early days of the Club, Pam and Tyrone would turn up to help set things up or clear things away.

Pam was diagnosed with lymphoma over seven years ago and this altered her life. While still enjoying Club events, she also focussed on helping her family and trying to catch up on life by taking trips overseas with family and friends. Those of us who knew her found Pam to be a person in charge of her own life and she carried this trait through to the end. She prepared for death, while fighting it all the way. In typical fashion, Pam even organised her own funeral, months in advance.

I have many happy memories of Pam and the subsequent friendship which moved past the boundaries of Club events.

Our deepest sympathies are with Tyrone and Pam's grandchildren, especially Maddy and Ben. ■