

Tech Article: February 2010

I know it is still very cold outside and occasionally we get some snow, but it is time to start thinking about early spring driving of your LBC (little British car). If it has been snoozing all winter or whether you have been driving it, doesn't matter which you need to do a few simple things. I am sure you want to have a good year driving it without any major repairs required.

If I still had a running LBC and it had been sitting out the winter, what would I do? Hopefully you changed your oil to get rid of the contaminants in the old oil before it was parked; filled the tank up with fuel (more about this later), topped up all other fluids, cleaned the battery posts. Etc. If not, now is a good time to do some of this.

Old, dirty oil has contaminants in it that eat at the internal parts of your engine like the bearings and lifters to name some. If you did not change it before, do it now but run the engine to get it warm so all the oil will come out and hopefully bring all the sludge in the bottom of the pan with it. Use any good quality oil that you like. I still like Rotella as it contains zinc compounds but there are web sites that will tell you if the oil you like contains them as some oils still do.

Even though there is controversy about needing or not needing the zinc compounds in your engine, why not err on the side of it is better to have than not have. The zinc aids lubrication where you have actual metal-to-metal contact in your engine and that is between the cam and lifters. I do not remember the last time an engine rebuild did not need new lifters and cam because of pitting and wear.

Next, check the battery. I know in MGBs it is a pain but now is the time to open up the battery compartment and take another look. Again, if you have taken my advice, your battery should be clean and the terminals still covered in petroleum jelly or battery protectant spray. You may have even put a penny on top. If everything looks clean and the battery is full, some can still be checked, then check the charge.

If it shows a little weak, charge it before trying to start the engine. Lucas alternators can overcharge themselves right into the rebuild shop or trashcan if you let them charge a very weak battery. That means, no jumping your LBC from another car without letting the other car charge up your battery some. Should you have been one of the lazy owners last fall and not prepared your battery, then do it now.

Remove the terminals and clean then install with either the Vaseline or spray. Then charge the battery. Do not forget to clean where the ground strap goes to ground. Scrape or sand away any rust between the battery ground strap and

body. I also like to put a sharp star washer between them to get a better bite into the metal.

Now, if you have taken my advice and filled your tank with fresh gas and Sta-bil before you parked it, then you should be ready to crank it up. Set your choke and go for it. If you did not fill your tank and only have enough gas to get it cranked, I would add some fresh gas first. Now onto the gas controversy. First, ask any pilot landing at any small airport what is the first thing they do after landing their plane and parking it. They fill the tank with fuel. The reason being is to reduce condensation. This also reduces the amount of extremely clean fresh metal in your tank exposed to rusting from this condensation. With a full tank and Sta-Bil added, it will be fresh enough to run until the tank gets to about ½ level when you can top it up. A full tank of gas will not go bad in just a few months. And, as almost all gas around here contains alcohol, the moisture will stay mixed with the gas and not settle out on the bottom.

If you allowed your tank to be almost as empty as possible and still drive the car to it's parking place then you may not have enough of the volatile compounds left to run the engine. It could have started turning to a "varnish". Do not run your car on gas that smells like that. A small amount of gas will allow more of the good stuff to evaporate leaving behind sticky goo. You may need to add ½ tank to it to make it safe to run before it will fire. This old stale gas is bad for the engine. It can gum up the carbs and in some cars, we have seen it cause intake valves to stick open. Much less what ever it does to the fuel pump.

You also will have left the vast majority of your clean metal tank (at least the inside) exposed to condensation. This can cause rust and water droplets that can accumulate on the bottom of the tank and start rust down there. Now notice I say most of this can or may happen. I am covering all the bases here by not saying any of this definitely will happen. But I would rather take the risk that a full tank is better than an empty one.

OK, that should be the last controversial items I will discuss here. Other items I would check is the front end wheel-bearing play as it could have gotten looser last year and you never noticed it as it happens so slowly. If the car had been greased less than 10-12,000 miles ago, then I would not do it again now. But I would check the steering play. Again, it wears slowly enough that as it wears, you get used to it and never notice it keeps getting a little worse the more you drive it.

I may have lied in the last paragraph. There is one more area of controversy, anti-freeze/coolant. If it is still bright green or orange and looks like it did when it went in, then test it to see if it is still good down to at least 0 degrees. If is not, replace it. But, and here comes the controversy, if it is still good, why change it. At most, you could just a small bottle of booster for it, although I have never done it.

This stuff (I was going to say crap but thought better of it) you hear about it needing changing every year is bull. Now, if it is brown and nasty, yes, it needs to go and you need to flush out your system, not just the radiator but also the entire system. But saying you need to replace it every year because of the pump lubricant is a pile of stuff (you can substitute crap here also). The bearings in your pump are sealed away from any coolant and if coolant ever got to them, the hot water would flush out all the grease.

There is a special seal between the pump and impeller that keeps out water. If water gets into this seal, then the seal gets worn away by the minute grit in the coolant and the pump leaks. Clean coolant that still protects from freezing need not be changed for years. Just check it yearly. OK, I know some of you will refute this and I understand that you may have other beliefs. But that is ok, change your coolant yearly and waste money and resources and contaminate the environment some. After all, it is your car.

Some of the newer fluids for cars are a whole lot better than they used to be and need not be discarded as quickly. Did you know that a lot of new cars only require oil changes every 7,500 miles? Even Patty's Honda S2000 recommends 7,500 intervals and it revs to 9,000 rpm. Gear oil, anti-freeze, motor oil, etc are all better than the old days. Save some money, time and the environment and expand your changing mileage.

OK, I think I have stirred to pudding enough for now. I will finish my thoughts next month. Hope to see yall on the road somewhere. Barry Rosenberg