

WINTER LAY-UP



— WORDS: COLIN GRANT —

If, like many of us, you own an MG that is not used during the winter months, now is the time to start thinking about putting it into hibernation before bringing it back into service next spring or summer.

GENERAL PREPARATION

Before storing your car, make sure it is thoroughly clean, inside, outside and underneath. Removing dirt and road grime will help prevent moisture and contaminants from accumulating in crevices where corrosion can take hold.

If you own a soft-top, it is also worth cleaning the hood, as dirt can encourage mould to form. If the car is being stored indoors, do not be tempted to leave the hood folded away. Doing so can trap moisture and may permanently mark the material. It is best to store the car with the hood raised.

Check all fluid levels and ensure that anything containing water, such as coolant and windscreen washer fluid, is adequately protected against freezing temperatures. Use a suitable premixed screenwash or mix concentrated screenwash according to the

manufacturer's instructions. Distilled water can help reduce the build-up of mineral deposits in the washer bottle.

It is also worth checking for any coolant leaks and having these rectified before storage. Dried coolant can leave stains and residue that may be difficult to remove. Check the strength of the antifreeze mixture using a suitable tester or hydrometer and ensure that it provides adequate protection for the temperatures likely to be encountered.

Take the time to remove and inspect each wheel nut in turn. Clean the threads and apply a small amount of suitable anti-seize compound, such as copper grease, where appropriate. By removing and replacing one nut at a time, there is no need to

remove the wheels. This can help prevent the nuts from seizing through corrosion and becoming difficult to remove in the event of a puncture.

When refitting the nuts, always use a torque wrench and tighten them to the specification given in the workshop manual. If a car is left standing for a long period, particularly outdoors, corrosion-related problems can become more pronounced, so this is well worth doing.



BRAKES

After washing the car in preparation for winter storage, make sure that the brake discs, where fitted, are thoroughly dry. Leaving them wet can encourage corrosion and may cause the brake pads to stick to the discs. Taking the car for a short drive after washing can help dry the brakes thoroughly.

Brake fluid is hygroscopic, meaning that it naturally absorbs moisture from the atmosphere. For this reason, brake fluid should normally be changed at the intervals recommended for your particular car, often every two years. As moisture content increases, the boiling point of the fluid falls, which can adversely affect braking performance under heavy use.

However, if the brake fluid is due for replacement, it may be preferable to carry out the work when the car is being recommissioned rather than immediately before storage.

It is also worth getting into the car occasionally and operating the brake and clutch pedals. When storing the vehicle, avoid leaving the handbrake applied for extended periods if it is safe to do so, as the mechanism or rear brakes can seize. Ensure that the vehicle is securely prevented from moving by using suitable wheel chocks.

FUEL SYSTEM & ENGINE

There are two commonly used approaches to preparing the fuel system for storage. One is to drain the system, while another is to fill the tank and add a suitable fuel stabiliser. If using a stabiliser, follow the manufacturer's instructions and run the engine long enough to ensure that the treated fuel has circulated throughout the system.

Before laying the car up, it is also a good idea to change the engine oil and filter. Used oil can contain contaminants and acidic by-products that are best not left in the engine for an extended period.

For longer-term storage, some owners also remove the spark plugs and apply a small amount of suitable light oil to the cylinder bores to provide additional protection. Take care to follow the recommendations appropriate to your particular engine before doing so.



TYRES

Tyres are easily overlooked when a car is being prepared for storage, but if a vehicle remains stationary for a long period, flat spots can develop. There are several options to consider:

1. Raise the car and support it correctly on suitable axle stands, following the manufacturer's recommended jacking and support points. If the suspension is left hanging, this may not be suitable for all vehicles, so always check the workshop manual.
2. Increase the tyre pressures slightly for the storage period, within safe limits, and remember to reset them to the correct pressures before driving the car.
3. Use tyre supports or 'tyre trainers', which spread the load over a larger area of the tyre and can help reduce the risk of flat spots.

The first option is not practical for everyone, particularly if the car may need to be moved during storage. Increasing

tyre pressures has traditionally been a popular approach, but the pressures must be returned to the manufacturer's recommended settings before the car is driven.

Tyre supports are often the most convenient option, as they allow the car to remain on its wheels while supporting a larger area of the tyre. Standard tyre trainers are available for wheels up to 17 inches and can be joined together for wider tyres. Heavy-duty versions are also available for larger wheel and tyre combinations.

Finally, inspect the tyres and remove any stones or other debris lodged in the tread wherever possible.

If you intend to cover the car, you may also wish to consider protecting the wheels and tyres from prolonged exposure. Wheel Spats, designed for this purpose, are available through the Club from Hamilton Classic. >>





COVERING YOUR CAR

If you intend to cover your car, there are numerous options available, but choosing the correct type of cover is important.

There are two things that should generally be avoided.

First, never use a completely non-breathable material, such as an old tarpaulin or plastic sheet. Moisture can still find its way underneath such a cover, whether from the ground or from the atmosphere, and become trapped. The result can be condensation, mould, water marks and, in some circumstances, damage to the paintwork.

Secondly, unless the vehicle is stored in a genuinely dry environment, avoid covers made from highly hygroscopic materials that absorb and retain moisture. Cotton and some natural fibres can hold moisture against the bodywork and may also offer limited protection against fine dust.

The most important rule is simple: only place a cover on a clean car. Dirt trapped between a cover and the paintwork can act as an abrasive and cause scratching.

IF STORING YOUR CAR OUTSIDE

For outdoor storage, a good-quality, breathable, semi-tailored cover is generally

a sensible choice. By semi-tailored, we mean a cover designed to fit the general shape and dimensions of a particular type of vehicle rather than a completely generic 'one size fits all' product or a tightly fitted bespoke cover.

A loose-fitting universal cover may flap excessively in windy conditions. Apart

from causing the cover itself to wear prematurely, this movement can potentially damage the paintwork beneath.

At the other extreme, a fully tailored cover may fit very closely to the bodywork. While this can look impressive, moisture that finds its way beneath the cover may take longer to disperse if there is



insufficient air circulation.

A well-designed semi-tailored cover provides a useful compromise, offering a good fit while allowing better circulation of air around the vehicle. Think of the difference between a well-fitting mitten and a glove: the cover should fit securely without clinging tightly to every panel.

Ideally, an outdoor cover should be breathable across the whole surface rather than relying solely on a small number of vents. Multi-layer construction can help provide protection from rain and dirt while allowing moisture vapour to escape.

A lighter-coloured cover can also reduce heat build-up and exposure to ultraviolet light. Strong seams, secure elasticated edges and suitable underbody straps can all help keep the cover in place during high winds.

One important point concerns snow. Although a cover will prevent snow from lying directly on the car, a heavy layer of snow can restrict the cover's ability to breathe. Wherever practical and safe, brush snow from the cover as soon as possible.

IF STORING YOUR CAR INDOORS

Indoor storage offers more options, although the same principles regarding cleanliness and moisture still apply.

Unless the garage or storage area is consistently dry, cotton and other hygroscopic natural-fibre covers are best avoided. There are many non-hygroscopic, man-made dust covers available, including semi-tailored versions that provide a better

fit and reduce the amount of dust able to reach the vehicle.

If the car is stored in an open barn or an unheated garage, a breathable semi-tailored cover can be a good solution, as it helps protect the vehicle while still allowing air to circulate.

If you have the luxury of a warm, dry garage and wish to spend more, a fully tailored indoor cover can provide an attractive finish. Whether it offers

can look superb.

There is also a school of thought that garages should be sealed as tightly as possible to prevent draughts. In many unheated garages, however, some natural ventilation can actually help reduce the build-up of moisture. The situation may be different in a heated or purpose-designed storage environment.

Dehumidifiers can also be useful, but care is required when setting them.



significantly greater protection than a good-quality semi-tailored cover is open to debate, but there is no denying that they

Excessively dry conditions can potentially affect leather, rubber, vinyl, soft plastics and wood veneers over long periods. They can also be expensive to run and, depending on the type, may require regular emptying.

Another option is an air-circulation storage system. These units are designed so that the material does not normally rest directly against the car and use fans to circulate air, helping to reduce moisture and dust.

Examples available in the UK include the Cair-O-Port, Airchamber and Carcoon. Some are available with supporting frames, and the Cair-O-Port uses filtered fans to maintain air circulation around the vehicle.

Hamilton Classic also offers the Autopod - Outdoor, an enclosed vehicle-storage system designed for those with sufficient space. With a built-in floor and separate outer layer, it provides a protected environment for long-term storage. A fan kit can also be fitted to provide additional air circulation. >>



BATTERIES

One of the most common frustrations with a car that is rarely used is finding that the battery has gone flat when it is time to start it.

Batteries are not getting any cheaper, and a good-quality battery conditioner such as the CTEC range, can be a worthwhile investment. A modern automatic or electronic conditioner monitors the battery and maintains it at an appropriate charge level without the risk of overcharging associated with older, less sophisticated units.

The advantage of a modern automatic conditioner is that it can be connected after the car has been used and left to maintain the battery during the storage period, subject to the manufacturer's instructions and safe electrical arrangements.

If mains electricity is not readily available, a solar-powered battery maintainer may be worth considering. While dependent on available light and generally less capable than a mains-powered conditioner, it can help reduce battery discharge during periods of inactivity.

GENERAL POINTS

Clean any chrome components and protect them with an appropriate product before storage. Ensure that grease points are lubricated and apply suitable protection to exposed moving parts where required.

Do not be tempted to cancel your insurance simply because the car is tucked away for the winter. A vehicle can be vulnerable to theft or damage even when stored in a locked garage.

If the car is being kept in a barn or

another building where vermin may be present, take suitable precautions. Mice and rats can cause remarkable damage by chewing wiring, trim and upholstery.

One thing it is generally best **not** to do is start the engine at regular intervals and allow it to idle briefly. A short run may not bring the engine and exhaust system fully up to temperature and can allow moisture to accumulate.

If you are going to run the car, take it for a proper drive, allowing sufficient time for the engine, gearbox and exhaust system to reach normal operating temperature. A journey of at least ten miles may be suitable in some circumstances, although

the ideal distance will depend on the car and conditions.

For cars fitted with a starting handle, some owners of older vehicles choose to turn the engine periodically by hand, following any appropriate manufacturer guidance.

Finally, inspect vulnerable electrical connections and use a suitable moisture-displacing or protective product where appropriate.

With a little preparation and the right storage conditions, your MG should emerge from its winter lay-up ready for a new season of enjoyable motoring. 



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