Store classic cars for the winter using this 'scientifically proven' method

By STEVE LINDEN

It's October in New York, a time that I'm normally well into my winter storage planning. However, it's also 86 degrees outside, which makes it difficult to consider the possibility that cold weather is right around the corner. But it is. So once again, I'm going to pass along to you my "scientifically proven" method for storage of your collector car. My definition of "scientifically proven" is, "it's worked for me for 40 years."

I embrace the concept that it is better to do everything now, so that when spring rolls around you can simply get in the car, start the engine, and begin enjoying it for another season.

Before you begin winterizing your car, perform any routine maintenance that you've deferred. This can range from replacing a burned out cigarette lighter or taillight bulb, to a tune-up, to replacing an exhaust system. This is also the ideal time to complete any major repairs such as a transmission rebuild or rear axle rebuild. Tending to these items before storing the car for the winter will prevent repeated nights of sleeplessness as you toss and turn knowing that you've neglected your classic car. Or maybe that's just me.

Once you've tended to maintenance and repairs, it time to prepare the car for hibernation. There are many different opinions on the best way to do this. But trust me. My way is right. Remember, it's "scientifically proven." But more importantly, there is a method to my madness, which I'll explain as I go along.

Start by changing the oil and filter, unless it was just done. The old oil will contain contaminants, especially if you used the car infrequently, and on short trips. Drive the car to a gas station and add a fuel stabilizer such as Sta-Bil in the amount recommended on the bottle. Add a little extra. It won't hurt. Then fill the fuel tank to the tippy-top. By adding the fuel after the stabilizer, it will mix thoroughly in the fuel tank.

Take the car for a drive that is long enough for the engine to get up to operating temperature. By doing this you will accomplish several things. First, you will circulate fresh oil through the engine, much of which will (hopefully) remain there to prevent rust until spring. Second, you will burn off many of the contaminants in the oil, one of which is water. Third, you will get the exhaust system hot enough to burn off any moisture, thus preventing, or minimizing, rust in the exhaust system. Most exhaust systems rust from the inside out, not the outside in. Fourth, a trip that is long enough to get the car up to operating

temperature is also long enough for the fuel that you've treated with the stabilizer to reach the carburetor and all of its small passages.

There are two additional things that you can accomplish on this trip. You're going to have to the clean the inside and outside of the car before you put it away for storage, so unless you plan on doing it yourself, this would be a good time to take the car to the car wash or detailer. This would also be a good time to check the air in the tires and inflate them to 5 PSI over the maximum pressure indicated on the sidewalls. Keep in mind that the tires are warm, and the inflation pressure will drop when they cool off. Do not put the car up on blocks. Suspensions were not designed to hang in mid-air for months at a time. Conversely, the tires were designed to sit on the ground for their entire lives. If they are properly inflated, "flat-spots" should not be an issue.

The final step is to "fog out" the engine. Do this once the car is parked where it is to be stored for the winter, and while it is still warm from its trip. Remove the air cleaner and spray "engine fogger" into the carburetor with the engine running at a high idle. Once you see smoke coming out of the exhaust, shut off the engine and replace the air-cleaner. "Fogging out" the engine coats many of the internal engine surfaces, as well as the inside of the exhaust with a coating designed to prevent rust formation. Disconnect the negative battery terminal and put the battery on a "maintainer."

That's it. You're done.

Perhaps the best advice I can give you is what not to do during the winter storage months. Do not start the engine periodically. It does no good, and in fact it probably does harm. Most engine wear takes place when an engine is started cold. This is made even worse when an engine that has been sitting for an extended period of time is started, because much of the protective coating of oil on vital surfaces is minimized, or even gone.

So let your car hibernate for the winter months. It will awake clean and ready to go on that first spring day that you just can't resist taking it out.