

Winter Storage Tips For Your Alfa

Proper winter storage for our Alfas is a topic that comes up each autumn. We went to the best source of information we know, a person who has made a decades-long study and career of long-term storage and preservation of collector cars and motorbikes. Betty Schoepke recently pulled her Montreal out of storage after ten years. The paint, trim rubber, exhaust, even the brake rotors looked the same as when the car went into its unheated, dirt-floor barn in Michigan. The outside of the zipped-up protective cover had piles of debris left by birds and rodents, but the inside remained pristine. A couple of small rust blisters under the paint plus usage wear that were present before storage did not heal themselves (darn!), but aging had completely stopped for the 1971 Alfa. After 26 years, those rust blisters are still small and under the paint. "This car is actually exactly the same, in every respect, as the day we bought it 26 years ago" says John Schoepke.

Information on obtaining a CarJacket® is included later in this article.

Three things are needed to produce the same results (hopefully without the bird and rodent dung) and keep your Alfa preserved until next spring: **preparation, preventive maintenance and proper storage.**

Repair and Maintenance

- Dean Russell, a local mechanic who has worked exclusively on Alfas for over thirty years, will tell anyone who asks that autumn maintenance is critical for prevention of problems next spring. The time to get repairs done and have everything checked out is before sealing the car away.

Winter (or other long-term) Storage Prep

- Add a gas stabilizer like Sta-Bil.
- Wash and detail the car, preferably including seats, carpets, truck, engine compartment, everything. Treat leather and vinyl surfaces.
- Drive the car to remove any standing water that gets trapped in the hidden areas. Do not drive on wet roads or even wet grass just before storing.
- If your Alfa has air conditioning, some experts say to run the air conditioner for 10-to-15 minutes on that last autumn drive to help moving parts get lubricant circulated so the seals will not dry out. Betty suggests not running the a/c 24 hours prior to storage because the evaporator may continue to drip water. Dry any damp areas that you might

spot. Perhaps you have noticed a moldy odor when first turning on the a/c the following year. This is because the unit can cause moisture to form in part of the vent system, promoting mold growth. Shut off the air and run the ventilation fan for the last 10 to 15 minutes of a drive to help dry the vent system.

- Apply silicone lubricant or WD-40 to door and trunk seals.
- Mice, red squirrels, chipmunks and other rodents will chew anything. Mothballs on small paper plates might help, are not 100 percent effective, but it is 100 percent certain that the car is going to smell of mothballs for a long time. Bounce fabric sheets have been reported to repel mice from car interiors, but others have said that mice merely make a nest of it.
- Spray a bit of fabric deodorizer where it should not stain if left for months, such as on both floor mats.
- Drain some of the windshield washer fluid if the container is full, because it will likely freeze at approximately minus 10 degrees F and there is no sense having a split bottle or bag.
- Repair any fluid leaks. Especially check fuel tank, fuel lines, radiator, water hoses and windshield washer system. If you find leaks, repair or make an appointment with a mechanic.
- Top off other fluids under the hood.
- Check the anti-freeze with an instrument or by age (change every other year) and adjust as needed.
- One debated item is use of an "oil fog spray" in the cylinders. Spray cans of this are made just for engine storage. The idea is to keep a coat of oil film on all the internal engine parts to coat everything in the cylinders so that moisture cannot reach the metal. This is good for an engine stored for years. For one season, it is more likely for corrosion to occur inside an engine from contaminants in the oil, such as acids, not moisture. Probably the best thing to do for winter is change the oil, run the engine to circulate the new oil, then just leave it.
- If the battery is not sealed, fill the battery cells with distilled water (not tap water). Remove the battery and clean with a baking soda and water mixture. Connect it to a battery tender (differs from a trickle charger because a computer chip on the battery tender senses when the battery is fully charged, turning off the charger). The old rule of never stor-

ing a battery on concrete is unlikely to apply to modern battery case materials. Sill, it won't hurt to get it off the concrete either.

- Inflate the tires to 10 PSI over the maximum rating. This helps deter flat spots caused by the tires sitting. Some fanatics (especially Porsche owners) advise removing all four wheels and jacking up the car on blocks, but that is extreme and we have not heard of even one car having a problem with leaving the wheels and tires on.
- While you are at it, sweep floor and check tires to remove stones and grit that could damage the CarJacket™ enclosure. If floor is not smooth, place tarp or other padding under Jacket. Sweep the garage floor and lay down a plastic tarp. If using a standard car cover, do the same because concrete gets damp in the winter, but a plastic sheet or tarp will keep most of the moisture away.
- Cushion the wiper blade arms with a rag to keep the blades from deforming against the glass.
- Store your vehicle in the Jacket enclosure during low humidity. Mid-afternoon on a dry day is best.

Use A CarJacket

Spread out the unzipped jacket on the garage floor, drive or push your Alfa onto it, then zip the jacket shut. When it's time to take your Alfa out and back into the real world, there's no rust, no aging. That is not just slogan, but a guarantee: The car comes from storage as perfect, in every respect, as when stored or your money back. Simple as that. No one paid for mentioning this product and it is described here only because I know that it preserves automobiles and bikes, which is pretty amazing considering Michigan winters.

When your CarJacket is not storing an Alfa, it can help preserve parts, (or furniture, a piano, almost anything that could use protection from light and humidity). John and Betty Schoepke have been doing this since 1984, and our Duetto which we have kept for 24 years is going to be zipped into one come late October. Here is their contact information:

Pine Ridge Enterprise
13165 Center Road
Bath, MI 48808
www.carbag.com
1-800-522-7224

By the way, the CarJacket is not for use outdoors or with aging spouses or Keith Richards. And if your Alfa goes in looking like a rusted recycling project, it will come out looking as wretched as it did



before. Sorry. The Schoepkes are car storage experts, not magicians.

The Next Day

Call your insurance agent to suspend some of your insurance while the car sits in the garage (keep the theft and damage coverage). They will probably insist that the license plate be removed.

If you need to take the car somewhere for repairs during storage, call and have the coverage restored for one day. I have done this with State Farm and other companies will likely do the same. If your car is over 25 years old and you can live with the restrictions, you might want to look into historic vehicle plates and collector car insurance.

After unzipping the jacket, check the tire pressure and return to normal. Start the car, take it slow and easy until the oil and coolant reach normal operating temperatures, then drive it in the normal Alfa fashion for another ten minutes.

Note: A freshly painted vehicle should not be bagged. Fresh paint should be properly dried/cured two to three months before storing a car or bike in any carbag

Standard Car Cover

If using a standard car cover, follow the above advice, plus:

Fill the gas tank. The idea is to have the smallest air gap in the tank because temperature changes will cause condensation to form.

Stuff a cloth into the airbox intake and push a rag into the end of the exhaust pipes to keep out mice, then leave a note attached to the steering wheel reminding you to remove it next spring before cranking over the engine.

Roll the car $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ turn 3 to 4 times per winter to ensure the rotors don't stick to the pads and work the pedals. Keep windows down half way to keep condensation and moisture from collecting in the car. Do NOT set the ventilation selector to 'recirculate.' Leaving it selected to "vent/floor" will allow for air to expand and contract in and out of the car.

If using a standard car cover, keep the parking brake off to avoid having the pads rust to the rotors (not necessary if using a CarJacket because there will not be any rust), and put the transmission in gear.

Now For The Best Part

By special arrangement, AROC members can receive \$25 off the price of a CarJacket ordered by October 30, 2008. Just ask for the AROC discount.

Dean Russell is providing an Alfa Winter Storage Special to AROC-Detroit members with 5 percent off on parts for repair and maintenance work scheduled between October 1 and November 15, 2008.