

Morgan Bedtime

By Dave Doroghy

Last November I cancelled my regular ICBC insurance policy on my 1966 Morgan Plus Four and switched to collector plates. Although I loved driving the car to work on a regular basis, the impending inclement weather, combined with the cost savings of switching to collector plates, which don't allow trips to work, made switching just too compelling. So let's just say my 1966 Plus Four went into semi-retirement for the off-season. And just as when we get old we will deserve a comfortable, warm and clean place to rest, Morgans deserve first-class retirement homes too. More than that, they deserve homes with class and character. They deserve respect.

I believe Morgans should be stored in classic settings: in the basements of old castles in Spain, in sturdy old barns on the rolling bucolic fields of Scotland, in old red-brick warehouses in Brooklyn and in century-old Douglas fir garages in Vancouver's Point Grey neighbourhood. Somehow the thought of cramming a beautiful old Morgan into a jam-packed, dirty, messy, modern attached garage in a boring subdivision – much less a self-storage facility – seems almost sacrilegious. Disrespectful!

The detached one-car garage next to my house dates back to 1911. The old grey wooden structure was well built in its time, and I am sure it will stand for another hundred years. It was constructed during a bygone era of true craftsmanship, and built to last. Just like Morgans. And two years after the first Morgan rolled out of the factory in England in 1909, some carpenters in Point Grey, halfway

around the world, were framing a building to store the newly invented automobile. My garage was meant to store a beautiful Morgan, and my Morgan was destined to wind up there. The two classic relics came together last fall, and it was a marriage made in heaven.

So with the ideal spot to store my car taken care of, my thoughts moved to other matters. Being new to the world of collector cars, I knew nothing about what preparations had to be made when retiring your Morgan. I didn't want to just put the car to bed for the winter; I wanted to "tuck it in." And there was no shortage of advice from a wide array of self-proclaimed experts on how to maximize the car's comfort while protecting its longevity. "Drain the oil, add more oil, put it up on blocks, inflate the tires, deflate the tires, disconnect the spark plugs, cover the engine block in olive oil, etc., etc." Everybody had an opinion. Finally I went to my mechanic, Dave Gilmour, who said that only three things really matter when storing a Morgan for the winter. He said you need to store it in a warm place, you need to store it in a dry place and you should consider getting a trickle charger.

My old garage is dry. It has a ton of moss on the roof but no leaks. To address the heat situation, I looked no further than the electric space heater at the foot of my bed that I bought at Hudson's Bay. If it kept me cozy all winter, it would be able to do the same for my car. And as for the trickle charger, I'm still not even sure what that is. Does it charge or does it trickle? I never made it to the trickle

charger store to get one.

Besides, it was just too much fun going into the garage occasionally to start the car.

Someone told me that to ensure the battery keeps a charge I should let the car run for a few minutes occasionally throughout the winter. They told me it was good for the engine too. Apparently unused cars don't age gracefully.

The regular car resuscitations became a bit of a winter ritual for me – a ritual I enjoyed and looked forward to. Every three weeks I'd look for the keys to my Morgan and venture out into the garage. I'd put on the hat and scarf that I wore in the fall while driving my Morgan. I'd stick the key in the car's ignition with nervous anticipation of her reaction. I felt as if I were stirring someone from a deep, deep sleep. And like the people I have stirred from sleep in the past, the Mor-

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gan had a grumpy reaction and a leave-me-alone attitude. The loud, annoying noise of the starter engine turning over and over and over sounded like someone complaining of being cheated out of their Saturday morning sleep-in. Then one piston would make a loud bang, registering partial compliance. This was followed by more complaining of the starter engine turning over and over and over. Then another piston shouted out, "Go away, I want to go back to sleep." Finally, with my constant poking and turning of the key, and my yanking on the choke, I woke my beloved Morgy up.

To say that my Morgan made a big stink over the whole incident would be correct, both literally and figuratively. Even with the garage door open, the smell of fumes was pungent and marked an interruption to hibernation. After the car was awake and firing on all four cylinders, I left the choke out at full throttle for two minutes. I figured the choke was the equivalent to a cup of coffee for a sleeping Morgan. The choke, like our morning java, allowed the Morgan to make that difficult transition from being fully asleep to firing on all four cylinders.

Even with my inexpensive collector plates on, I don't drive my Morgan much in the winter. It has no heater and the top takes too long to put on and makes the car look lousy. So as my sleeping beauty rested in the garage, I just had to settle for these intermittent interludes of sitting in a stationary car and listening to the engine roar. Thank goodness, spring is finally here and she is rested and raring to go, none the worse for her winter's hibernation.

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the Coquihalla Summit. We may have been wet and cold and a bit worried about some of the strange noises, but the speed that we could pass just about anything going up those mountain passes was impressive. By the time we arrived home, we were nearly used to the fact that with the Morgan, people would give us a smile, a wave, or come and talk to us about the car (Is it a kit car? Is this the one with the wooden frame? I used to have an old MG/ Austin Healy/Triumph. I owned a Morgan once and I wish I had never sold it! etc etc.).

What we didn't realise was that the rain and cool weather were a blessing in disguise. Little did we know about the over-heating problems often found with Plus 8's! The first warm day I took the Plus 8 out for a spin around town, a man pointed to the side of the bonnet while I was stopped at a traffic light. When I got out and had a look, I could see green foam blowing out the bonnet louvers! In my ignorance I hadn't watched my temperature gauge and the radiator was boiling over! To make a long story short, the Plus 8 was very prone to overheating and fixing that problem took the better part of a year.

Since that initiation into the Morgan world we have had a blast. There have been some frustrations with the car, but what a wonderful support network the club has been. Certainly without the technical advice and help of people like Ron Theroux, Ken and Pat Miles and Bill Button, to name a few, we probably would have sold the car in frustration.

During these past nine years we have made many new friends, spent many enjoyable hours behind the wheel of a Morgan, seen new places, had a lot of laughs and shared more than a few bottles of wine. Perhaps at this year's ABFM someone will have had a similar experience and take the plunge into the Morgan world! I know that they will not regret it!
