

Dry Rot

.....a nice walk

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I know that in our little club there are many of you who own multiple old British and sometimes-non British collector cars. It is an illness that some of us are afflicted with from a younger age. We grew up at a time when there really were a lot of neat cars around that we could not afford in our youth. Now that we have reached a degree of affluence and maturity, both relative terms you understand, many of us have managed to put together small collections. It is interesting to note some of the weird and wonderful old relics that we have stashed away. Unfortunately the sad state of affairs is that most of them don't run or are in a rather serious state of decay!

I know, I know there are a few of us who have the ability to get two old British cars started at the same time and actually be drivable, but I think this is the exception rather than the rule. For many, jobs and family issues have prevented these projects from going forward, but I have to tell you that growing older can be detrimental also. Laying out on a cold garage floor under flickering fluorescent lights is no longer as attractive as it once was when we can simply watch Barrett Jackson at the flick of a remote. I live in mortal fear of not completing a project and leaving my spouse with boxes of greasy parts that cannot be identified as to their derivation. It is an unsettling thought at this point in my life and you should think about it also. I have a friend who has a garage and basement full of old and wonderful parts and cars, some in original boxes and wrapping and I know he will never finish all these projects. I used to tease him about his wife selling them all at auction for pennies on the dollar, seems he had a heart attack a couple of years ago and I don't tease him any more.

So keeping this in mind, one must also think about maintaining in drivable condition what we may have actually managed to have restored or purchased in running condition, or restored ourselves. I can tell you that I generally take my cars to bits if they are not already in such a state when I get them and rebuild them piece-by-piece. I get some reassurance by touching every part and making sure it is somewhat serviceable. I do confess that when

one of these vehicles is completed, I tend to drive it and not worry too much about keeping my eye on things. Oh yes, I change the oil and check fluids and so forth but I don't get under and tighten up nuts and bolts and try to determine what obscure part is about to fail suddenly. And yes, I have been lucky; I haven't been stranded very often, so I guess the original rebuild must have been done to an ok standard. But nothing is perfect and nothing lasts forever, sometimes inconvenient things happen when not expected.

I was lucky as I had a vacation day on the last nice warm sunny day of November. I picked up a friend in the Morgan and we had a sumptuous breakfast that I really didn't need but felt I deserved. All was well with the world, we went for a little run and I dropped him off afterwards and headed to Anderson's General Store to look for some obscure fasteners I needed for the TC. Now Anderson's General Store is a truly wonderful place, you can buy a nice Chablis or get fluxed wire for your MIG welder all under the same roof, or maybe some nice strip steaks or a rebuild kit for your toilet bowl, but I am digressing here. Well I found what I needed and headed out to the parking lot, inserted key in ignition and heard only a faint anemic buzzing of the electric fuel pump, and no starter motor churning that little V8. The ignition light glowed with a rather faint mocking look to it. I wasn't going anywhere.

One would think that this was a simple battery death, they do that now, they give no warning as they used to do.....they just die and leave you stranded. Smart money would have gone back into the store, borrowed some tools and bought a new battery. But then you would have to go through that exercise with the clerks, "Now I've never heard of a Morgan, are you sure about that make?" I just wasn't in the mood and my middle name is not "smart money" and besides I had a nice battery just sitting in the TC not doing a whole lot at the moment. But the other issue was that I just put that car on the road.....13 or 14 years ago and this was the second battery I have installed in that time. So that means I only got six or seven years out of it and it just couldn't be a bad battery, could it? See my point?

Time goes quickly and keeping on top of these things tends to be difficult at best and is not one of my strong points as mentioned.

I have no cell phone, whom would I call or who would answer it, or what would we talk about? So I decided to just walk home as it was a very nice day and

I can do a couple miles no problem. I won't even mention that Katie drove by on her way to work without even seeing me. About forty minutes later I arrived home, grabbed a reasonably fresh battery, some tools and jumped into the Miata, which always starts. In a couple of minutes I found myself contorted over the black hole behind the seats that houses the Morgan battery. This is the reason I only look back there every three or four years at best. Eventually I had the old one out and sitting on the ground, as I couldn't lift it over the seats, given my bench-pressing ability. This required me to jack up the car and pull it out from underneath. As I was going through this exercise a steady stream of Honda and Toyota drivers went by gaping at this loser contorted over this funny old car. Eventually the new battery went into its place and was hooked up ready to go. The key went into the ignition switch, the light glowed brightly, the fuel pump provided its usually raucous buzz, and the starter turned things over nicely.

I drove the Morgan home and into the garage and thought about how I would get the Miata home. I could always wait for Katie to come home or call another retired Morgan buddy to give me a lift. But sensing it was me on the line nobody answered, he did email me three days later, but that wasn't helpful at that moment. So I jumped into my shoes and walked a couple more miles to pickup the Miata. Remember I said it was a nice day and I needed to walk off that breakfast!

There is no moral here so don't look for one. I guess the truth is that even when you spend a lot of time and money restoring your old car, if you use it, it may very well let you down when least expected. There just isn't much you can do about it. However it is much better being able to use it than just leaving it sit in bits in a dark garage or using it as a shelf for storing lawn implements. I guess it might not be a bad idea to look over our old running cars now and then to make sure nothing is about to fall off as given use there is always that possibility!