

TLC goes a long way

Nika Rolczewski – Car Crazy – Toronto Star - Saturday, December 18, 2004

Snow is a four-letter word. So are dirt, sand and cold, which lead to rust. All of those words bring heartbreak to us car collectors. For some, it means hiding the car under a cover in the corner of the garage.

With growing families and limited space, many of us scramble to find appropriate space for our prize possessions. Rental garages and storage units are all fine, but an obsessive auto enthusiast knows there is a lot more to proper car storage.

Gary Shapiro, president of Auto Vault Canada, a specialty automotive storage company, is a former luxury car salesperson. He noticed that the same concern kept coming up among customers. After purchasing a beautiful automobile, where do you put it in the off-season? He said he reasoned that if a facility was dedicated to the storage of fine motor cars, it would be a worthwhile venture. He was right.



So far, the 40,000 square foot facility is home to a diverse group of cars. From the builder with the Ferrari, the surgeon with the 500SL, to a businessman with a Fiat Spider, who has had it since the 1970's and is saving it for his kids. There's even a third-generation owner of a 1950's Chevy, passed down from his grandfather to his father then to him. But why take such care in storing your beloved automobile? Shapiro knows. "When it comes to long-term winter storage, we have all heard nightmare stories of some uninformed individual who put the car in Uncle Elmo's barn because they thought it was safe," he says. "It might have been safe from people because it was halfway to Wawa, but it wasn't safe from the mice that chewed through the wiring and nested in the engine compartment."

"In a few months, the battery leaked, corroded, then died and the tires that were once round, developed flat spots. The moisture made the interiors become moldy and seals started to crack," he adds. There are certain precautions an owner should take before putting the car away, including starting it regularly. First, Shapiro recommends adding a fuel stabilizer, because, over a few months, fuel starts to break down. "It can cause, at the least, a bad exhaust smell when starting the car, to more serious problems like a gummed-up carburetor or clogged up fuel injectors." "By running and exercising the car regularly, you also keep all the oil and grease seals lubed." "This keeps them moist and prevents them from drying out and cracking, leading to costly repairs."

Just leaving a vehicle in your garage next to your daily driver will subject it to moisture that forms on your everyday car. If a car is not kept in a reasonably dry environment, rust will form on the brake rotors and/or drums within days. Keeping a car in an atmosphere above the freezing point prevents shrinking of plastic and vinyl parts.

“Some other problems that can be prevented by storing a car properly are having condensation not collect inside the exhaust system, therefore keeping rust from the inside out,” Shapiro says. These are just a few problems that are preventable with some time and energy.

“I saw a Rolls-Royce Shadow that a person put in a barn when her husband died. She would have been better off putting the husband in the barn,” he says. “The car was worth scrap in the end. What a shame.”

Auto Vault Canada (www.autovaultcanada.com) offers several tiers to customers, ranging from \$229 to \$299 a month. Auto Vault offers 24-hour security, as well as staff who can detail the vehicle, trickle-charge the batteries, warm up the vehicle’s engine, check and adjust the tire pressure, cover the car and make other checks.

I got to thinking about the issues as I prepped my yellow Ferrari 308 for his hibernation – a little TLC now will save me aggravation in the spring.