

# Putting your Bug to Bed

Story by Wayne Dean

Every year around the 1st of November, I perform a ritual that I really don't look forward to. It marks the end of another season of Beetling and the beginning of hibernation time for my Bug. I'm talking about storing my VW for the winter.

Storing your VW for the winter (or for any other extended period of time) doesn't have to be a pain in the neck or the wallet. There are differing degrees of storage that can range from parking it on your driveway (not really recommended), to storing it in a climate controlled, hermetically sealed, guarded vault at Fort Knox (okay, I went a bit too far with that one). With many different schools of thought on storing a vehicle, I'm going to go over as many different suggestions as I can, and let you decide just how far you want to go when it comes to your air-cooled treasure.

**Store your VW indoors.** This is a must. Dampness, water or snow when combined with salt in the air or on the ground (depending where you live), is going to rust your vehicle. If you are lucky enough to have a dry, heated storage area for your VW, then you can pretty much rule out the dreaded "R" word. But if you're storing it in your cold, damp, garage at home, then you should place some sort of vapor barrier beneath your vehicle.

Put a piece of heavy gauge plastic or a sheet of plywood on the floor underneath your VW. This will help to keep the moisture in the concrete from getting to the bottom of that pristine floor pan. Try to minimize the number of times that the garage door is opened and closed during the winter months. Every time that you open that door, damp air is going to blow in and under your vehicle.

Make sure that your storage area is free from mice and other vermin. Mice can enter your VW through a gap as small as a quarter inch. I've heard of mice entering through the heating ducts and making their way into the glove box, where they happily chew up the owners' manual to make a nest. There are plenty of ways of ridding your garage of mice. You could try traps, poison, or a more humane product called Mouse Away. This natural pest control is made with an exclusive formula that combines pure peppermint oil with pure spearmint oil in just the right combination to provide maximum repellency. Mouse Away doesn't harm rodents; they simply hate the smell and move away ASAP! A couple of mothballs in the engine compartment are effective (but might be a bit too stinky for most), and will keep them away from the wiring. I put a little steel wool into the tailpipe and cover it with a plastic bag, held on with an elastic band. The steel wool keeps the really adventurous mice out and the plastic creates a moisture proof barrier for the exhaust. Insects can also make their way into your vehicle while you're off watching

chestnuts roasting by the open fire. A couple of aromatic cedar shingles placed inside your VW will help to absorb moisture and keep the bugs out (they hate the smell of cedar) during the winter. You could also put a bar of scented soap in a tin can placed in the trunk and interior. This will make insects think twice about making your car a bed and breakfast.

**Remove the Battery.** If you leave the battery in your VW for an extended period of time without starting it, you can count on it being dead and pretty much useless come spring. Remove the battery and take it inside your house. Place it on a shelf or on a block of wood away from sparks and off the floor. Leaving your battery on a concrete floor can discharge it faster than you can say "Oval Window Beetle with a set of Empi 5 spokes". Invest in a battery charger and charge that battery once a month to keep it fresh and ready to go. You can also pick up a new product called BatteryMINDER. This unit remains connected to the battery while it's out of the car. This mini charger keeps the battery fully charged so you don't have to remember to charge it every month. If you have a radio that uses a security code, now's a good time to write it down on a piece of paper. Stick it to the fridge with a festive Christmas magnet so you don't lose it, or else it will be Ho, Ho, Oh, No!

**Wash it and wax it.** Give your VW a good wash and wax before putting it to bed. Be sure to pay special attention to areas where dirt can collect. Hit the inner fenders with high-pressure water to dislodge any grunge that has built up over the summer. Always wash your vehicle from the top down and use a high quality wax after you've finished washing it. Some people recommend applying wax to the vehicle and not buffing off the haze coat, DO NOT do this. That coat of un-buffed wax will be as hard as a rock by springtime and you'll need arms like Governor Schwarzenegger to get it off. Making sure that your VW is clean when you park it will get you back on the road faster in the spring. And a clean, waxed car will not be scratched by dust when you put your car cover on. It is also not advisable to treat your VW's interior (seats, dashboard and door panels) with any kind of protectant spray. Most of these contain water and over the months will actually encourage the growth of mildew and mold. There is a moisture-absorbing product on the market that is intended for marine use but can be used for automotive applications as well. Damp Away II by MDR will absorb over 25 times its own weight in water from the air, and it's reusable by popping it the oven or microwave. If you want to save like Scrooge you can go the less expensive route and put a tray filled with about ½ inch of baking soda in your VW. This will help to absorb moisture and odors too.

**Change the oil and stabilize.** When you drive your VW the oil gets contaminated as it begins to break down, so you don't want this toxic mess sitting in the sump of your engine for months. Grab your socket set and change the oil, and guess what? You're going to have to change it again in the spring before that first sweet drive. Oil does break down over time and it's best not to take a chance when an oil change is such cheap insurance. Some people take the time to squirt

some oil into the cylinders. This certainly can't hurt and you should crank the engine over by hand after to make sure it coats the cylinders evenly. Be prepared for some smoke and possibly some fouled plugs when it comes time to fire it up. Before you park your VW it's a good idea to fill your fuel tank to the max. This stops condensation from forming in the tank and rusting it from the inside out. Add a fuel stabilizer to the full tank and run it for at least ten minutes to allow the mixture to get through the entire system. POR-15 offers fuel preservative and stabilizer in one product. By adding this to your tank, oxygen is chemically isolated (preventing oxidation) and corrosive compounds are neutralized (stopping rust formation). Fuel stabilizer will help to keep the fuel from breaking down and turning into a gummy mess while you're off skiing somewhere.

**Cover Up.** Cover your VW with a good quality fitted cover made out of a breathable fabric. Make sure that you DO NOT use a tarp or any other kind of plastic to cover your ride. These can actually trap moisture on your vehicle and then we'll be talking about that "R" word again. I fitted my Super Beetle with a funky car cover from Bug Rug. These cotton and polyester covers boast double-sewn construction and are made by the leading car cover manufacturer. Each one is custom made and hand tie-dyed. No two are exactly alike.

**Brake down and lift up.** When you finally park your vehicle, do not put the parking brake on. This stretches the cables and you don't want them to seize with the brakes on. Leave your standard transmission in gear (with a block behind the wheels just in case) or your auto-stick in the park position. Make sure that your brake fluid is topped up to the full line. Pump the brakes once a month to make sure that the master and wheel cylinders are free and not starting to stick.

**Time to retire.** If you're running radial tires, inflate them to the maximum recommended pressure as listed on the sidewall. As a rule radials don't suffer from flat spots the way bias ply tires used to. Most tires will lose a few pounds (I wish I could after Christmas dinner) while being stored, so be sure to check and re-adjust them before your first cruise. If you do have bias ply tires, remove them (store these lying flat at maximum pressure) and put the vehicle up on blocks or stands while in storage. Make sure that you put the stands on the strong suspension arms and maintain the proper loading on all the shocks or struts. If a shock is fully extended, the shaft can rust, which will ruin the seals once the suspension is back in action.

**Last but not least.** Windshield washer fluid can freeze if it's not the proper strength. And if it does freeze it can crack your washer fluid reservoir and make a mess when it melts. Don't take any chances. Dump that old fluid into your winter beater. Then have a good time slip, sliding away.

All of the above items can be done for next to nothing. All you have to supply is a bit of time and a bit of elbow grease. The first year that I stored my Beetle I did the absolute minimum. I left the battery in and drove it for an hour once a month

when the roads were dry. That charged the battery up, heated the exhaust and kept the brakes free. But I never thought about the salt that was still on the dry road, and a few years later I was shelling out for some rust repairs and a new paint job. Did those winter excursions contribute to the rust? Who knows? But I'm not taking any chances. I'm giving my Beetle the "Royal Treatment" each and every time I tuck it in. Good luck, and good night.

Reprinted with permission from the author, Wayne Dean Check out his website:  
[www.superbeetles.com](http://www.superbeetles.com)