



Good PARENTING

ALL OF OUR BABIES NEED TO GET OUT AND PLAY. EVEN THE ONES WE KEEP IN THE GARAGE



Running a GTO through the gears is good for both car and driver

As a new parent (Remington Marie Comer, six months and counting), I'm sure I have pondered the same basic question every parent has since the beginning of time: "Will I be any good at this?"

I don't want to say I walked into this parenting thing blindly, but I contend even partial ignorance is blissful. The basic reality is that there was the time before having a child, of which I remember little, and now the time after. To date, at least as far as I can tell, I haven't screwed up any part of this parenting gig, but I know the real verdict may take a few decades. Wish me luck.

So what does this have to do with cars? Well, the act of caring for this little person who can't care for herself yet has also made me look at how good of a guardian I am to my cars, because they can't, and will never, care for themselves. And, as luck would have it, these first months of parenting have coincided with the first months of car season here in the Midwest.

Waking them up

It's the time of year when we all try to jump in cars that have sat through the winter and expect them to act as if they didn't. Problem is, cars don't act. I have a fairly large stable of cars, too large according to She of Too Many Shoes, and I have always thought I kept on top of maintenance pretty well. I keep them in a nice, climate-controlled environment, attached to maintenance battery chargers, and rotate through them keeping gas (non-ethanol only) and lubricants fresh. Each

car has a maintenance log sheet in it, on which I record each fueling, fluid changes, repairs and the like, along with what types of fluids and fuel, tire pressures, and any other important care and feeding each car needs. I'm sure this is similar to the instructions future baby sitters will be given.

I'm a stickler for details. I have always been adamant that every car in my garage be ready to be started and driven anywhere, at any time, by anyone. That means no special instructions like "don't use the parking brake because it sticks" or "if it doesn't start there is a hammer in the trunk" kinda stuff. No dead batteries, no repairs needed. This has always been accomplished by the note pad I keep next to the log sheet — if I notice something wrong when I'm driving a car, I make a note to myself so I remember to fix it.

For years this system has worked remarkably well. However, the past year or so I've been pulled away from being a nearly full-time lot attendant, and have also been able to find little time to simply exercise all of the cars as much as I'd like to. So some have just sat, and while they have strong batteries, round tires, and fresh fluids, it isn't all sunshine and lollipops, as I have been finding out lately.

Don't ignore me

Case in point: my 289 Cobra, one of my favorite cars. I purchased it from the original owner in 2007 and proceeded to make it mechanically perfect. The first few years of ownership, I drove it every chance I got. It



Not stone chips — badges of honor



Colin's 289 Cobra suffering disuse atrophy

went on the Copperstate 1000, saw many trips to Road America, went to California, Arizona, and back, and took a lot of Sunday morning drives. It never skipped a beat, never leaked a drop of oil, always ran like a Swiss watch, and performed just like the sweetheart it is without asking for anything other than fuel in return.

But, other than a trip to Watkins Glen last year for the SAAC convention, I didn't drive it much in 2012. And I didn't try to again until June of this year for a trip to an SAAC event at Road America. Of course, it started instantly and drove flawlessly like it always does, but after a few days of driving I noticed it was leaking brake fluid from under the pedal box. The clutch master cylinder, the same one that was re-sleeved and rebuilt in 2007, was leaking.

The next day, I opened the garage door to find a trail of fuel from

under the rear of the car. Yep. The gas tank I had boiled, repaired, and sealed in 2007 was leaking again. And when I fired it up to drive down to the shop, I noticed the parking lights came on with the ignition switch. There is no doubt in my mind that, with the possible exception of the gas tank, these are all things that would have not failed if I had driven the car more. Even if I had just put a few thousand miles on it last year like I normally do and then put it away for the winter. But for now, the master is rebuilt again, the gas tank is fixed again, and the ignition switch (original 1964 Ford with 133,000 miles worth of starts on it) is again working perfectly after just being used — so no more auto-on parking lights.

A little play keeps the wrenches away

In the weeks since this episode, I've been making a real effort to get on the road in all of the cars, even if it is just driving back and forth to work or a quick 30-minute drive to get them limber again, and let them know I still care. Thankfully, none seem worse for their extended bench times, and doing this has helped me remember each car's unique qualities that attracted me to them in the first place.

It is no secret mechanical things need exercise as much as humans, and the more the better. Ever notice how good you feel after a good bike ride or an hour at the gym? Sure seems like our cars feel better after a good run as well. They sound and perform better, the exercise helps keep everything working well and keeps that crucial mechanical handshake between parts intact.

I'm trying to break that habit of letting cars sit idle and to drive them more often. Lately that means driving the old cars my daughter's baby seat won't fit in as much as the ones that it does. Well, in between diaper changes, that is. The bottom line? All of our babies need to get out and play. Even the ones we keep in the garage. 

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