

Protect Your Car When You Deploy

By Bennett Leigh

When you get ready to deploy, many things require planning for your absence. One thing in particular is deciding what to do with your vehicle. If you are married, you can have your spouse routinely start and drive your vehicle, and attend to its regular maintenance. But if you are single, or otherwise in need of storing your vehicle, you must properly prepare it for the long haul.

Most installations, when a unit is deploying, allow for storage of vehicles in a secure lot. Keep in mind, however, that no one will be able to access the vehicle until you return, so proper preparation is key. You may opt instead to have a trusted friend or family member care for your vehicle while you are gone. Or, if you choose a private storage facility, the military will pay for one POV to be stored while you are deployed.

When a car isn't driven for a long period, rust can corrode its body, engine, and other parts. The fuel system can become gummed up and sludge can form in the engine's oil. The experts at Military OneSource offer these tips on preparing your vehicle for storage:

- Change the oil and filter. This will prevent corrosion inside the engine.
- Oil the cylinders. Remove the spark plugs and spray oil or add a teaspoon of oil into the cylinders to prevent rusting. Reinstall the plugs.
- Top off fluids, including coolant and transmission and rear axle fluids.
- Inspect the brake fluid. It should be clear and no more than two years old. If it looks dirty, flush the system and add new brake fluid. Dirty brake fluid can absorb moisture and cause the system to rust.

- Fill the gas tank. An empty gas tank can attract moisture, which can cause rusting. When you fill the tank, add gasoline stabilizer to prevent gum and varnish from forming.
- Drive the car. Take the car for a long drive — 30 or 40 miles — to ensure that the gasoline stabilizer thoroughly mixes with the gasoline and that the oil is distributed evenly. The long drive will also warm up the exhaust system sufficiently to remove moisture and condensation.
- Disconnect the battery. Clean it with a mixture of baking soda and water. Place it on a clean, dry surface. If possible, connect it to a charger designed to maintain a battery charge over long periods.
- Wash your car thoroughly. Remove all dirt. Pay careful attention to the underbody and wheel wells where dirt can collect and cause rust and corrosion. It's also a good idea to apply a few coats of wax and treat any vinyl, leather, or rubber in the interior with a protectant.
- Remove the windshield wiper blades. Or, flip up the wiper arms up so that the rubber blades don't make contact with the windshield. Or, wrap the wipers in clean cloth so that they don't stick to the windshield and leave marks.
- Protect your car against pests. Thoroughly vacuum the interior so that there are no food crumbs to attract insects or rodents. Seal all openings with aluminum foil. This includes the tailpipe, the engine air intake, and the fresh air intake in front of the windshield. Spread mothballs inside the vehicle.
- Remove the tires and place the car on blocks. Deflate the tires slightly and store them flat and away from

sunlight, which can break down the rubber. Consult your owner's manual for the proper placement of the blocks. A second option is to leave the tires on the car and add 10 pounds of pressure per tire to avoid flat spots.

Most installation vehicle storage lots are outside, so extra care must be taken to protect your vehicle from the weather.

- Place a large sheet of heavy-duty plastic on the ground to act as a vapor barrier. Put pieces of plywood on top and park your car on these.
- Place open containers of mothballs in the wheel wells and the trunk. This will help keep pests away.
- Cover your car. Use a thick, multi-layered car cover that will protect your vehicle from ultraviolet rays, rain, snow, and wind. The cover should extend to the wheel wells. Rust may develop if moisture gets trapped between the cover and your vehicle, so it's a good idea to cover your car with blankets and secure them in place before installing the car cover. Secure the cover with straps so that it stays snug on your car and doesn't flap in the wind.

Remember to check with your auto insurance company about any changes to your policy during the time your vehicle will be off the road.

It takes time to prepare your car or truck for storage, but the care you put into doing it properly will protect your investment and allow you to return to your car confident that it will be in much the same condition as when you left it. ●

Bennett Leigh is a military spouse and freelance writer who lives in Northern Virginia



Storing a vehicle properly while deployed doesn't have to be a hassle. Many installations offer free, secure long-term parking areas for deploying members. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Smith