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# How to Start a Car That Has Been Kept in Storage

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Cars that have [sat un-started](#) for months, maybe even without oil, don't take kindly to an abrupt wake-up call. They can be as nasty as a grizzly bear prematurely jolted out of hibernation, and you will pay the price of its wrath.

Whether a car has been sitting for three months or three years, certain steps must be taken before you can just fire it up and head down the road, especially if you want to ensure many happy years on the road. Before jumping in, do some basic checks, which include looking for leaks, corroded fittings, rotted hoses, or compromised seals. Also check for leaks in the power-steering system, engine, transmission, rear axle, and brakes.

## 01 | [Replace Fluids](#)

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The length of time the car has been sitting will determine what fluids should be drained and replaced. For instance, if you discover an oldie but goodie in someone's barn that has been sitting for years, you'll need to drain, bleed, and/or flush all [fluid systems](#) and then refill them.

If on the other hand, your car has only been in hibernation during the winter months, do a [complete oil and filter change](#), then drain any gas in the tank and carburetor float bowls. Then flush the fuel lines, and drain, flush, and replace the [radiator coolant](#). Check all other fluids to make sure they are filled to the required levels, and [fill your tires](#) with plenty of air.

## 02 | Check the Battery

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Hopefully, before the car was parked for the long term, its battery was disconnected, removed, and stored safely away from moisture. Then all you would have to do is clean the battery posts and terminals with a baking soda and water solution, give it a good charge, and reinstall it.

If on the other hand, the car had been sitting for many years with the battery left in place, you should buy a new battery and install it with new cables. The copper in the battery cables loses its conductive properties as it ages.

## 03 | Prepare for Ignition

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If the car has been sitting for over 90 days, you should remove the spark plugs and introduce some form of lubricant like Marvel Mystery Oil into the cylinders. Your spark plugs fire in a specific order, so you should label each plug wire before removing them. Be advised that new plug wires can be expensive, so make sure you pull them out by grasping them at a point that's closest to the engine. Inspect the car's spark plugs and replace them if they look corroded, white, or oily.

With the spark plugs removed, turn the engine over with the key several times to allow the oil you put into the cylinders to lubricate the cylinder walls and to prime the oil and fuel pumps prior to ignition. You should keep cranking the engine until the oil pressure gauge reads normal or your oil pressure light goes out before returning the spark plugs and leads back to their correct position.

Since you've removed all the old gasoline, you'll need to remove the air filter cover and liberally spray some engine starter fluid into the mouth of the carburetors. Then, with a couple of pumps of the gas pedal and giving it a little choke, your sleeping beauty should come to life.

## 04 | Before You Leave the Garage

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Don't take the car out just yet. Don't even rev the engine—just let it idle and warm up. With the car running, return the air filter cover, check the transmission fluid level, and check underneath the car for leaking fluids. Then turn off the engine and check all the hoses for dry rot and look for belts that are cracked or in need of tightening.

Give the suspension a good lube job and look for worn or loose ball joints, deteriorated bushings, rusted shafts, leaks at the shocks, and missing or broken bump stops.

Thoroughly check your brakes as well. With the car up on a jack, rotate each wheel by hand with someone working the pedal. Each wheel should brake solidly and release cleanly. Your inspection should include making sure the friction linings, drums, and rotors look in good order. Calipers and wheel cylinders are subject to corrosion, as well as leakage, so check those, too.

Finally, don't forget to check your running lights. With an assistant, activate turn signals, headlights, brake lights, and high beams to ensure they are functional. Replace any blown fuses and recheck.

## 05 | Now You're Ready to Roll

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A 20-minute drive close to home will loosen everything up and evaporate all the moisture in the exhaust and in the engine. It will also give you a chance to listen for any rattles and engine misses, while keeping an eye on the car's gauges for abnormal engine temperatures, battery charging, and oil pressure.

Once you get back home, make a list of what you uncovered on the trip, like knocking engine, brakes pulling to one side, stiff steering, etc. Also, re-check your fluids and look for any new leaks that the "loosening up" could have created. Only once you've addressed all issues should you take the car out for longer trips.

This may seem like a lot of work just to get a car running, but if you want the engine to give you years of hassle-free service, a little elbow grease now will save a big headache later.

