

It's time to review winter maintenance issues that might affect our Corvairs.

Keep in mind that heater efficiency can diminish slowly over time and not be noticed. Compare your car with another and whoever has the lesser heater has to get to work. Every part necessary to bring your car up to peak efficiency is available.

The following are some of the common and uncommon winter related items:

Early model and F.C. owners should know that the "Air" control is for defrost in warm weather. It actually collects fresh air off of the cooling fan before it is heated (at the 3" hose at the back of the engine). For maximum heat, leave that lever up.

Check the cable travel at the heater box to see that the cable actually opens the door completely. Late models are adjustable at that point; check the shop manual.

Early model cars have a diverter door at the front floor outlet that closes to make the defroster work. With the defroster lever down, check for leaks at the floor and replace the foam door material if it is leaking.

The lower outside air vent doors have rubber seals that are easily replaced if they leak. Vendors have all the parts. Also check the speedometer and brake line grommets for leaks. You can remove the front grill on F.C. models and seal the back with tape – it will stop most of the air leaks on your feet without doing anything else.

Install a new high speed blower motor with a new plastic fan in lieu of the metal fan (the center comes loose). Check for rodent nests in the heater box while the motor is out. Many Corvairs have slow blower speeds due to a voltage drop at the motor box. Run a voltage drop test or simply connect a jumper from a known good ground to the motor while it is running – if the motor speeds up, make the jumper permanent. You can add a high speed relay that raises available voltage and blower RPM. Instructions are on a separate tech sheet.

No matter how good your blower system is, if you have holes in your lower engine shrouds or the carpets are a swamp, you will get fogged up windows. Patch or replace bad shrouds and fix the interior leaks.

Disassemble, clean and lube your blower switches and they will last another 40 years. The early model cars have the blower speed resistor in the passenger side defroster duct, so do not stick a wire down there. If you have foam bits coming out of your defrosters, you may get smoke from the glowing resistor wire on low and medium speed.

Check your exhaust system! A rich gaseous smell that seems to go away when the engine is warm could be deadly. Use a stethoscope to check exhaust packing and head gaskets. Exhaust pipes need to exit out from under the body or the exhaust can get pulled in to the heater. Check thermostats and operation: Remember they fail in the open position.

Key elements of cold weather starting: 1. Battery, Starter and Cables, 2. Engine tune, 3. Clean dry fuel, 4. Clean Oil.

Many people think a slow cranking car in cold weather is due to the oil – not so unless it is dirty. Clean 30wt will allow faster cranking than dirty 10wt.

A battery will have only 30% of its cranking capacity at zero degrees. Also check cranking with a voltmeter; the minimum allowable voltage is 9.6. Corvairs should always be above 10. Try taking your battery inside overnight and notice the wonderful difference. You could also leave a drop light on beside it all night.

Battery cables need to be removed from the battery with the inside of the cable and the outside of the post cleaned until shiny. Many jumper cable sets are almost worthless since the wire gauge is too small – look for 4 gage or smaller. You get what you pay for.

There is a difference in fuel blends between winter and summer and you should use the grade that your car works best with. You should add some gas antifreeze just to be safe, but only the brand that uses isopropyl alcohol. Read the label, the yellow bottle of HEET is worthless, the red bottle works great. Rubbing alcohol will not work because it already has 30% water in.

All tune up items are important, but plugs, plug wires and the cap top the list of culprits in cold wet weather no-starts. A simple check of the wire boots that fit over the plug may show brittle rubber with cracks - guaranteed to misfire, particularly if the plug gaps are excessive.

Avoid starting fluids, the knocking noise that accompanies the starting is attempting to pop out valve seats and break top piston rings.

Tire pressure always drops in cold weather, and although radial tires try to keep their footprint, proper pressure and alignment are critical when it is slick. Check tread depth and tires must be matched to be effective on slick roads. Radials work good, an “all weather” radial is better and an actual radial snow tire is best. If you compare a snow tire with an all weather tire, you will see a “chunkier” appearance at the outer edges of the tread pattern. They will be a little noisier on the highway.

Sixty to eighty pounds of weight in the trunk seems to help front stability (GM suggested 60). Shift automatics to neutral when braking at a slick stop – it makes a difference, a BIG difference when the chokes are on.

If you park in the garage, check the gas tank bottom.