

It's All About the NUMBERS.....

This column of the NUMBERS series is devoted to a serious subject. It was originally written and printed for the National Antique Olds Club (NAOC) publication. With the permission of the author, I have made some changes more appropriate to our cars, and offer it to you.

FIRE -Your Car's Worst Enemy

I think that we have all driven past a car that was fully involved in flames. Usually you see a guy standing nearby with a helpless and bewildered look on his face. Fires in vehicles usually start small and grow in size if it goes unchecked unless the fuel tank has been ruptured due to an accident.

As I walk the show fields at car shows I see fire extinguishers of all sizes and extinguishing agents. Some are small with very limited extinguishing capability. These were probably purchased to satisfy the judging or entry requirements and not with their purpose in mind.

Basically there are 5 classes of fire. However, we will only talk about the 3 most common classes as they relate to cars. These are:

1. Class A – Ordinary combustibles, wood, paper, upholstery, wiring insulation etc.
2. Class B – Flammable liquids, gasoline, diesel fuel etc.

3. Class C – Energized electrical equipment, wiring looms and switches etc.

If we look at a car we can generally divide it into 3 compartments which are the engine compartment, passenger compartment and the trunk. Obviously the engine compartment is the most hazardous as it contains all 3 classes of fire along with potential ignition sources such as electrical shorts, sparks and hot exhaust pipes etc. The passenger compartment is next as it contains a lot of electrical wiring, connections and switches most of which is under the dash. The trunk is the least hazardous.



The vast majority of vehicle fires start in the engine compartment usually due to a fuel leak caused by a stuck carburetor float, cracked fuel line, or a loose connection etc. It is rather common for the fuel filter fitting to be stripped or left loose on the Oldsmobile Quadrajets. An electrical short is probably the next most common cause.

The key to saving your car from possible total destruction is a quick attack with a fire extinguisher that is of proper size and content. At the first sign of smoke or fire, stop your car and turn off the ignition. Use the hood release cable as soon as possible to be able to open the hood. It seems the first thing that is ruined in an under hood fire is that cable with its plastic coating. If the cable does not release the hood, don't be timid trying not to damage the car. Do whatever you have to do and gain access to the engine compartment. Then with your extinguisher at the ready, open the hood and quickly extinguish or at least knock the fire down.

The next thing is to quickly eliminate the energized wiring by disconnecting the battery cables from the battery. Even though the fire could have been caused by fuel the wiring may have been damaged thus causing an electrical short. Following the loom these overheated and possibly bare wires can

travel through the firewall openings and cause the fire to spread to under the dash.

An electrical short in the wiring under the dash will probably cause a fire in the passenger compartment. It would be best to use the extinguisher and then quickly disconnect the battery cables. Check under the dash for complete extinguishment.

In my opinion, the extinguisher of choice is a 5 lb ABC rated extinguisher. This extinguisher has relatively good killing power as it has 5 pounds of extinguishing agent and is rated for all 3 classes of fire as above.

Keep your extinguisher handy where it is quickly available. Most come with a mounting bracket and mounting it in the trunk is an excellent place. Also, another item that you may want to have available is a pair of gloves to protect your hands when opening the hood. They will also be of value if you need to remove the air cleaner as it may be burning inside. A pair of Channellocks or adjustable pliers is also a good item as you can use them to disconnect the battery cables and they may be needed to pinch or kink the fuel line to stop fuel that may continue to feed the fire. These can be taped to the extinguisher with masking tape and therefore they will be readily available also.

When buying an extinguisher buy a good quality brand name unit. Remember you may need it to save your beautiful car

from total destruction. Periodically remember to check the pressure gauge to make sure that the pressure has not leaked down. It is also a good idea to turn it upside down and shake it to fluff the powder. This will help prevent caking and lumps that may occlude the nozzle if needed.

Become familiar with your



extinguisher by reading the instructions that are on the label. Don't wait until you need it.

Do not be complacent by thinking that the fire station is only 5 miles away. If they could respond at 60 miles per hour, which is a mile a minute, their response time would still be 5 minutes. This does not seem

like much time but it will seem like an hour as you watch your car burn. You can project that out to being on the road 20 or 30 miles from the nearest fire station on your way to a meet or car show.

My favorite quote is from the legendary retired UCLA basketball's coach John Wooden who said "Failure to prepare is preparing to fail".

If you are wondering as to my expertise I have spent 49 of my 73 years as a firefighter both in the municipal service and the private sector where I am still employed full time and currently hold the rank of Assistant Fire Chief. Bud Guyer

I would like to thank Bud for this informative article. He is an avid Oldsmobile car collector and has an extremely nice collection of Oldsmobiles.

I would also like to remind you to have a good NUMBER of fire extinguishers in your home, garage and work area. Remember to check them as well. Don't wait until you need one to look for one. Until the next issue, Judy Badgley.