Technical Notes

Model A Sweating Distributor Body & Cap

By Lynn Sondenaa

I got my start into old cars with Model A's and then I switched to 1934 Fords, and now back to Model A's. Now, if you have ever owned the early Ford V-8, then you know the distributor is way down on the front of the engine. It is very prone to road moisture and condensation in the distributor caps. This is caused by sweating or leakage. This moisture can cause the car to not start, run rough, or just stop running, because it interrupts the flow of electricity. When the weather is warm and dry there is not much humidity in the air, so there are no condensation problems. When the weather is cold and wet there is high humidity in the air. If you're old car is stored inside, maybe even in a warm garage, you won't experience problems. Even on a tour where there is moisture and high humidity, the heat of the engine compartment usually will burn-off the humidity (sweat) on the inside of the distributor cap. Like most of us, our Model A's are not treated to the luxury of a heated garage. So how do we prevent the sweating?

Back in my 34 Ford days I would spray a light coat of WD-40 on the inside of the bakelite distributor cap. This seemed to stop the sweating and keep the car operating. I use dielectric grease on the electrical contacts of my Model A and still put a small coating of WD-40 on the inside of the distributor cap and body. This practice seems to stop the condensation (sweating) problem.

Here are some myth buster's about WD-40. It was developed in San Diego, California in 1953 by Norm Larson (owner) and Ken East (chemist) of the Rocket Chemical Company. They were trying to develop a product for the aerospace industry to repel water and prevent corrosion. It took them a little over 40 experimental mixtures before they had success.

I also use WD-40 to remove pitch residue from my saw blades. I spray it on zippers to keep them lubricated and working. I also use it to clean rust stains off of painted surfaces. Often having granddaughters in the house I have learned it works to remove color crayons from tile and wall paper. There are many more uses for this product.

WD-40 has a competitor, CRC-3-36 made by CRC Chemicals from Warminster, Pennsylvania. Both products displace moisture, stop rust, lubricate with micro-thin coatings, clean and penetrate.