What Should I Put in the Radiator

During these "COVID" times when we are not getting out as much with our Model A's, we have time to do some maintenance. One thing that is often overlooked is what is in the radiator. Because we live in a warm climate where we do not worry about freezing temperatures, we do not pay as much attention to the cooling systems of our Model A's as owners in the colder climates do.

Before moving to California, I lived in Missouri where we would regularly experience temperatures below freezing in the winter. It was a regular ritual every fall to clean and flush the cooling systems and fill with the proper ratio of anti-freeze and water. I used alcohol based antifreeze in my Model A because if the head gasket should decide to leak a little, the alcohol antifreeze would not harm the old original babbitt bearings. The alcohol antifreeze would only last until spring when the weather was warm and the alcohol would boil off and leave only the water behind. To try to keep things from rusting up, we would add a little water soluble oil to the radiator. Today, here in Southern California, where we do not experience freezing temperatures, we have several options. We can only use water, we can use antifreeze, or we can use a synthetic coolant.

Many owners do not use antifreeze but just use water with additives to help prevent rust from forming, lubricate the water pump and reduce the surface tension of the water to help with heat transfer. I recommend using distilled or de-mineralized water with either "Water Wetter" or "Purple Ice" added to the coolant. Both of these additives contain anti corrosive properties, water pump lubricants and an ingredient to reduce the surface tension of the water. These additives have been around for many years and are available at most auto parts stores.

Some owners use ethylene glycol antifreeze. Preston, Peak and Xerox are just a few trade names. Today it is common to see several different types of anti-freeze in the stores. But if you look carefully, you can still find the older formulated green ethylene glycol type antifreeze, either the premixed 50/50 with water or the concentrated where you add water to provide the mix you want. It is most common to use a 50/50 solution but a lesser concentration will suffice in the climate we have here. Be sure to use only distilled or de-mineralized water to help prevent rust from forming in the cooling system. The long life type antifreeze is not recommended for our cars. There have been reports of the "Long Life" coolants degrading of some of the gasket materials that are used in the Model A engines.

A few owners are using Evens, a non-water based, permanent coolant. Evans is a synthetic coolant that has a very high boiling point, will provide lubricant to the water pump, will not form rust and is permanent which means it does not have to be changed. Evans is becoming more commonly used in older engines where overheating is a problem or when the owner wants to be sure the cooling system will stay clean and free of rust. One disadvantage with Evans is it is several times more expensive than antifreeze based coolants.

It is recommended that straight water with additives or Anti-freeze solutions be changed every two years. But most important, do not overlook the cooling system in your Model A. Keep the cooling system clean and use the type of coolant you feel is best for your car.

Tech Tip

When changing the coolant in your Model A, be sure to flush the cooling system with water to remove all the old coolant and any deposits that may have formed. If the cooling system is especially dirty or rusty, a good cleaner to use is Rust 911 Radiator Cleaner. It does a good job of cleaning the cooling system and removing minor rust deposits. For cooling systems with heavy rust deposits, use Rust 911 rust dissolving solution. Rust 911 products are available online direct from the manufacturer at rust911.com.