

Avoiding Disaster

I am sending this story with the hope that it will save someone the hardship and danger I went through.

It all started one Saturday morning. I was planning to work on my 1965 Mustang in preparation for the "Stampede to Dearborn" show. My house has a two-car attached garage with a breezeway leading to the kitchen and basement. My Aerostar van was parked in the driveway directly behind the Mustang in the garage. I had been planning all week to start detailing the Mustang. It didn't need a lot of work, mostly cleaning and a change of oil. I also planned to install the concours-correct carburetor I use for large shows.

I started by jacking up the car, putting a jack stand under the front frame rail extension, and placing a wedge behind the driver-side rear wheel. I drained the oil, changed the filter, and did the normal clean up under the front end. I took out the jack stand and lowered the car. I started to put in fresh oil, but as you know that takes time. So in the meantime, I started to change the carburetor, every so often putting in another quart of oil. After five quarts, the carburetor was in place with all the nuts, fittings, and lines finger tight. I tightened the carburetor base bolt and vacuum line along with the automatic choke heater line, and installed the throttle linkage. For some reason I didn't check the tightness on the fuel line. I replaced the air filter and oil breather cap and was ready start the coupe.

I began cranking the engine knowing it would take a little time for gasoline to reach the carburetor. After one or two pumps of the accelerator, the engine came to life. As usual I was watching the aftermarket oil

pressure gauge I have installed. After maybe three to five seconds, Wham! I look up - flames and black smoke are coming out from under the hood. My first instinct was to shut off the car. I grabbed the fire extinguisher from the back seat, pulled the pin (I thought), aimed and pulled the trigger. Nothing! I then grabbed the home extinguisher located in the breezeway about eight feet away, point, and nothing. Smoke and flames are getting bigger. The only thing I had left was a furniture-packing blanket I use for a fender cover. I threw it over the engine. I ran out of the back of the garage and grabbed the garden hose. I know water and gas don't mix, but it's all I had left. I sprayed the top of the packing blanket but I still saw fire, so I tried to spray some water under the blanket and onto the engine. Immediately the fire got larger.

Now all I can think of is to get the car out of the garage, but the van blocked the way. Luckily I had the keys on me, but it seemed like an eternity until I got the van out of the way. I then took the Mustang out of gear and tried to push it out of the garage, but I couldn't do it. I tried to make myself calm down and remember that there was a wedge behind the rear tire. Finally the car was out of the garage. I then grabbed the garden hose and soaked the blanket. The fire and smoke seemed to be out. This whole episode took about two minutes.

What had happened? What could go so wrong? I've asked myself these same questions many times. A lot of small errors added up to one big accident. Let's go back and see what went wrong.

First, changing the oil was okay, but change it and be done with the job. Clean up and remove the jack stand and wheel stop. Second, changing the carbu-

retor is okay but pay attention to completing the job. Double check. Third, check your fire extinguisher. Does it have a gauge? If it is a powder-type, using it even a little bit requires recharging. Is the safety pin installed correctly? If you find one that is out, you must assume it has been used. Do you have a backup system in good order? A good fire extinguisher would have stopped this accident within seconds.

I no longer park the Aerostar behind the vehicle on which I'm working. I've also purchased two new fire extinguishers for the home and a new one for the car. I plan on adding a second one to the car to be kept in the tool box.

I urge MCA to raise the point deduction from one to 10 for anyone not having a valid fire extinguisher in their vehicle at a Mustang Club of America show. At MOCSEM's "Stampede to Dearborn" we had three large fire extinguishers placed at strategic points - one at tech inspection, one near registration, and one in the center of the car show.

I also recommend that MCA and other car clubs find out more about fire extinguishers. Members out there must have comments and suggestions.

As a little side note -

Last year at what is called "The Woodward Dream Cruise" here in Michigan, MOCSEM had the fortune of having curbside parking at one of our member's shops. Ron Movinski, our club vice president, was able to put out an engine fire on a car from a rival manufacturer that was potentially very, very serious. Ron told me later that he was glad MCA requires its members to carry a fire extinguisher.

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