

JAY LENO'S GARAGE

# Clean And Green

**I** F we all want to continue to have this car hobby that we all enjoy so much, we have to learn to police ourselves, or someone else will try to do it for us. Here in California they recently tried to pass a sealed crankcase law. So instead of a simple drain plug, there'd be a lock and only a dealer or licensed repair shop would have the key. The idea behind the law was to better control the disposal of the old oil. Luckily, it didn't pass—but it could have.

They have passed some crazy laws in a number of states that affect what you can do in your own garage. I mean, I've heard stories like, "I have a Model A Ford, and I kept it in my driveway. Well, I came home one day and the city had taken it away. They said it was an eyesore."

Bottom line is, we all have to learn to be responsible. That means, for example, disposing of used crankcase oil and cleaning fluids correctly. It's fascinating to me what some people consider ecologically responsible disposal methods. When I was a kid, some people would get a Hefty bag, pour the oil into it, seal the Hefty bag up real tight, and then throw it into the garbage. It would go off to a landfill somewhere. And then maybe nine years later you've got a guy saying, "Hey, this tap water tastes like the oil I threw out nine years ago."

People also used to take their motor oil, go out in the woods, dig a hole, pour it in and then put the dirt back on it. "What's the problem? I'm putting it back in the Earth." People think it's like mulch. It's not. It's dirty oil.

In small towns in the Northeast, like the one I grew up in, most of the gas station guys would heat their shops

The environment and the old-car hobby can coexist quite nicely. **BY JAY LENO**



**SOUND SOLUTION:** Leno cleans his delicacies ultrasonically and safely.

with used oil. Years ago, that was considered recycling. Trouble was, nobody bothered to look at the smoke-stack belching out the fumes.

Too many people don't comprehend the ramifications of their actions with all of these automotive fluids. Look at antifreeze: This stuff is particularly attractive to animals because it's sweet. So when you dump it out on the driveway, 10 minutes later you see

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the dog lapping it up, and next thing you know, he's lying dead in the road. "Hey, what happened to Rover?"

Here in California, right in Burbank where my garage is, there are a number of recycling centers. I take my oil there, and they dispose of it properly. Obviously, you have to keep your oil with oil, and paint thinner with paint thinner, that sort of thing. But they take it all.



**AROMATIC NOSE:** A safe solvent doesn't necessarily smell nice.

Besides recycling centers, nowadays there are a number of products that can be of tremendous help.

How many of us of a certain age have complained for the last 20 years that you can't get good carburetor cleaner anymore? You know, that stuff that eats your skin and goes directly into your pores, so you die when you're 62. There are a lot of effective, but gentle, new kinds of cleaners like some made by Meguiar's and Simple Green.

But the most incredible things I have found are industrial ultrasonic cleaning machines. They use sound waves, so they don't damage any sensitive small parts or even a paper gasket. Really, it's just a larger version of a jewelry cleaner. When you're through you push the machine out to the driveway or empty it near the drain, and you just flush the water away. It's no

worse than washing your car. Omegasonics ([www.omegasonics.com](http://www.omegasonics.com)), in Simi Valley, Calif., makes a big ultrasonic cleaner, like the one I have, called a Super Pro. The company also has little benchtop models. It only takes about half an hour to do a cylinder head that's covered with carbon. And the ultrasonic waves get into every little nook and cranny—a regular sprayer can't do that.

Then there's the Clean Express ([www.betterengineering.com](http://www.betterengineering.com)). It's a single-stage parts washer. I bought mine from Better Engineering in Baltimore. The one I have is about 5½ ft. tall. It's essentially a carwash for engine parts. It uses high-pressure steam and hot water to blast parts clean. It's faster and does a better and neater job than the old "spray it with cleaner, hose it off, repeat" way that we used to use.

A lot of these cleaning machines, especially the larger-size models, aren't cheap, but there's no reason all the members of a car club couldn't chip in to buy and share one.

Another cool thing is this Ingersoll-Rand ([www.irgaragesolutions.com](http://www.irgaragesolutions.com))

nitrogen generator I have. People don't realize how corrosive the air is—it's especially bad for a car's aluminum wheels. A lot of times, when you see old aluminum wheels, they're pitted on the inside. If you fill the tires with pure nitrogen, the wheels stay like new. Also, the pressure of a nitrogen-filled tire doesn't rise or fall like one filled with air. Put 32 psi on your Corvette tires, go out and do a few burn-outs, and now you have 38 psi. But nitrogen won't do that. It stays where you set it. The nice thing about this Ingersoll-Rand nitrogen inflation system is that it's a generator, so it extracts the nitrogen right out of the air—for free. You don't have to call a guy to bring a huge tank of nitrogen. I'm running nitrogen in everything now.

The odd thing about car people is that we love our sport so much we're willing to die for it. It's sad. You see some old guy hobbling around the Pomona show and you ask, "How old is that guy? Eighty?" Nope, he's 55. All those chemicals took their toll.

The thing that makes you a great hot rodder—that sense of individuality—is also what can kill you. If you don't take precautions, you may get liver disease, lung cancer or any number of horrible things. Here's my advice. Go out to your garage and safely dispose of all those old toxic chemicals. Then buy only environmentally safe products.

If we don't do this, someone else will do it for us. You don't want someone to tell you that you can't work on your car in your own garage anymore, and here in California we've come close to that. When I was a kid, you'd drive down the street and see garage doors open and a half-dozen guys working on cars. Now in California, you'd better close your door or someone will complain.

So let's help each other. If you're safely using a new product or machine that you feel helps the environment, let me know about it. Write to me at Popular Mechanics, 810 Seventh Ave., 6th Floor, New York, NY 10019, and tell me what you've got.