

RPM TECH SECTION

Vinegar and "A" Gas Tank

by John E. DeGregory

With today's ethanol fuel having a rather short shelf life before gumming up, one can expect to see more fuel tank issues. This article is about my 1928 Ford Model "A" Roadster Pickup rusty fuel tank, but this same approach can be used on a Corvette or any vehicle with a steel fuel tank.

About two months ago I heard a rumor that plain old white vinegar could be used to clean out a rusty and contaminated fuel tank. Having never heard of that before but realizing that there is countless number of uses for white vinegar I investigated on line and was pleasantly surprised to see that I may be able to take a major shortcut with my truck. I found out that the motorcycle guys have been using white vinegar for years to clean out their small fuel tanks that had rust and old gas in them.

My old truck hasn't been started in about 18 years or so. Whew! Recently I have renewed interest in the truck, as my son John Thomas said he has never even heard the truck run. He does remember sitting in it as a baby.

The truck holds 11 gallons of fuel. So I went out and bought store brand vinegar and filled the tank up to the cap. Next I made a mistake as I didn't have enough patience. I only let the 1st round of vinegar in the tank for about 2 days. When I drained the tank a lot of rust and crap came out of it. Looking in it with a flashlight I saw that it was going to be a long haul to get this tank clean.

If you are wondering why I didn't remove the tank and have it cleaned out by a pro let me tell you why.

This tank is part of the body. It is painted body color both in and out. Also it's a major project to remove the tank. If you think a Corvette tank is difficult to remove let me say it's a piece of cake compared to the one in my old truck. Also the paint job is old (but perfect lacquer) and I figured we would never be able to match the paint.

Now I could have used paint filters to strain the dirt out of the vinegar before using it again but I didn't.

I went out and bought 11 more gallons and dumped it in the tank. Then I let the vinegar sit in the tank for about 10 days or so. Every once in a while I would go over and shake the truck for a couple of minutes to let the solution slosh around. When I drained the tank a second tank I was truly amazed at how much progress was being made.

But I think I expected too much as after all I didn't take care of the tank (or the truck) those long 18 years. It just sat in the corner with two car covers and was being used as a shelf.

So I went out and bought a third round of 11 gallons of vinegar. This time I let the vinegar marinate in the tank for almost 3 weeks. My son and I drained the tank a third time. But this time I saved the vinegar for killing weeds in the driveway, etc. I should have done that before.

Next step was to wash the tank out about 4 or 5 times with hot water. Each time my son and I filled the tank to the top and then drained it. We finally reached success and now I am pleased.

So to recap we used 33 gallons of store brand vinegar and spent less than \$70.00.

How am I going to stop the tank from rusting again you may ask. Since I cannot remove it or since I don't want to do all the work and painting involved here is what I plan on doing. I will start by mixing 9 gallons of pump fuel (or better) with 1 or 2 gallons of diesel fuel or kerosene. Remember the old 4 cylinder engines have very low compression so maybe they will in fact run on kerosene without lead in it.

Marcel Mystery Oil is my all time favorite and I may use that instead of the kerosene.

Corvette owners are lucky in that there are excellent reproduction fuel tanks available. But if your tank is just filthy, has slight rust and is all gummed up try the vinegar trick. Remember dirt can wipe out a fuel system in but a few minutes.