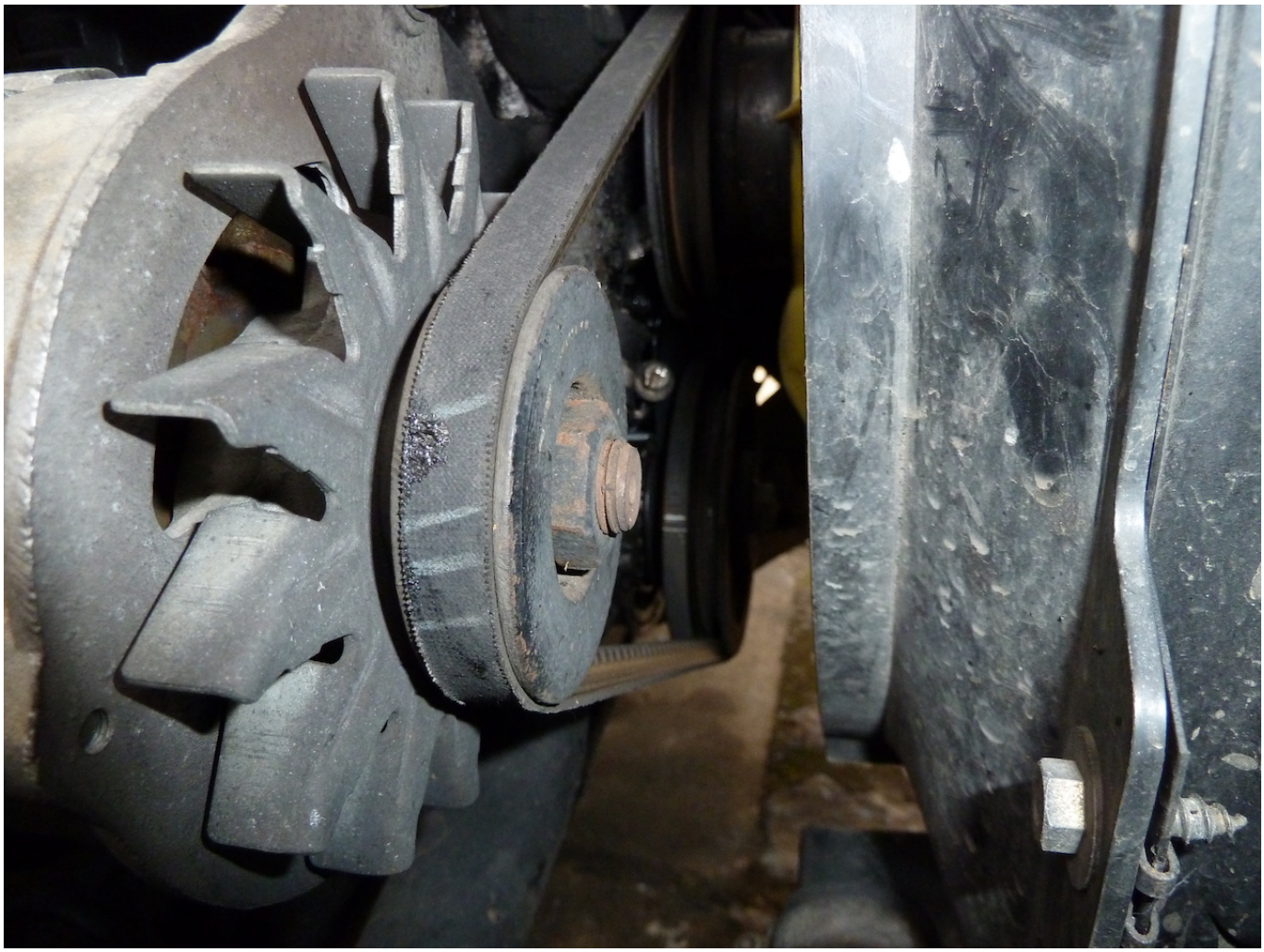
Kim’s Tips – Run the engine frequently to avoid alternator (and other) woes…

Published: January 15, 2021

Author: Kim Henson

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/kims-tips-run-the-engine-frequently-to-avoid-alternator-and-other-woes/



Kim says, “Cars don’t take kindly to long periods out of use; if possible run

the engine often, and on each occasion move the vehicle forwards and backwards a little, to prevent mechanical seizures".

Just one of the many unforeseen aspects of the awful pandemic through which we are living is that many cars, and especially some classics, have been used very little, if at all, during the last 10 months or so.

Vehicles don't like being idle for too long, with components such as brakes, clutches and even engines suffering/starting to seize.

Ideally, if your vehicle is at home, or when, in due course, the lockdown rules permit travel to where it is stored, it is wise to start the engine often and run it to normal operating temperature. Keep it running for 20 minutes or so at moderate engine speeds (ideally drive it, where permitted) to get the oil and coolant circulating, to get rid of moisture and to help recharge the battery.

While the engine is running, if possible drive the car backwards and forwards a little (at the very least), which will help the clutch assembly to stay operational, and carefully/repeatedly apply the brakes. Again this helps to avoid seizure through lack of use.

Recently I have encountered two cars in my own family, that due to the lockdowns had necessarily been 'resting' for a while, and in each case when the engine started, a loud screeching noise was evident, accompanied by illumination of the 'no charge' warning lamp on the dash.

In such situations, stop the engine immediately and investigate. It is possible/likely that the alternator has seized, and if you keep the engine running, the drive belt will overhead and burn/melt within a very short time.

Usually, the careful application of the correct size spanner on the alternator's pulley retaining bolt, will enable the alternator pulley to be rotated. If you try this, make sure that the spanner is a socket or ring type with a good tight grip on the bolt or nut, or the corners

could be rounded off. Be aware too that if the spanner slips, you might graze your knuckles…

In both cases with my family's vehicles, the alternator freed off very easily and then operated perfectly.

In such instances always inspect the drive belt very closely (with the engine stopped!), and renew if there is evidence of overheating or cracking or other damage to the belt.

If the vehicle has been out of use for a very long time, and the alternator will not free up as described, it will need to be removed and stripped/checked or possibly even renewed.

CONCLUSIONS

As I indicated at the outset, it pays to run your car's engine frequently, and doing so helps to avoid problems like this from occurring. It is also wise to keep battery power topped up by trickle-charging every month or so, if possible, or by the use of a solar type charger.

When the engine has cooled down, the application of a water-dispellant spray to the ignition components will help to prevent the ingress of moisture, while a light coating of silicone grease will help protect battery connections and earthing points from the dreaded scourge of corrosion, which will result in multiple problems…