

SPINNING WRENCHES

BY SCOTT PARKHURST

PROTECTING AGAINST CRITTERS

A friend and I were discussing the various methods we'd used to keep mice out of our cars. Winter storage and mice are just part of life with hot rods and custom cars here in the Midwest. Mice get into seats to make nests, chew up rubber lines and wiring, and leave droppings everywhere they go, while leaving a urine trail to follow when they return. Mice will hop into exhaust pipes to build nests inside mufflers. They are notorious for nesting atop intake manifolds and inside stock-type air filter housings. Once they set up shop, they are very difficult to evict.

The damage they do is often hard to find (like damaged wiring behind the dash or under the hood) and can be expensive to repair. The putrid smell they leave inside your car's interior is more than just unpleasant – it is typically buried deep in your upholstery or headliner, and very hard to eliminate. If you think you've gotten it all, you might be reminded that you missed some the next time you turn the heater on.

My friend and I talked about our strategies to keep mice out of cars. The old methods involving various soaps, moth balls, and dryer sheets just don't seem to work (we've heard tales of the soap being found with

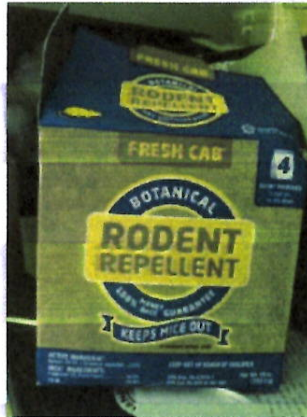
ucts designed to make your car an unappealing place for them to be. There are also poisons to tempt them into eating their last meal. Most agree that a combination of these efforts works best. Or, get a cat.

Trap-wise, there are the old-school snap traps and modern spin traps to consider. When placing these, remember that mice typically travel along walls and straight edges, so place your traps accordingly. Placing baited traps close to, underneath, or inside your prized car is only inviting them to come closer. It's best to place an array of traps and check them often. Some will inevitably be more successful than others.

Some enthusiasts dislike poisons for several reasons. If the mouse eats the poison, it won't die immediately. It will probably return to its nest and die there. If that nest is deep inside your car, you now have a dead mouse rotting inside your car. If the poisoned mouse goes outside to forage and then dies, the odds are good another animal will prey upon it and also be poisoned. This is common with predatory birds like owls, hawks, and eagles. It's also a problem for local cats that are allowed outside, and even dogs. A poisoned mouse will be easy to catch if it's not dead yet.

Glue traps are also highly criticized. They catch the mouse in a carpet of glue, but don't kill it. It's just stuck there, and it'll scream its little head off until it starves to death. Not a pleasant thing to hear, and if you investigate the source of the noise, and find the little guy stuck there, what do you do? You have to kill it yourself, and there's no joy in that either. Apparently, there's a reason the old-school wooden spring traps are still so popular! They do the dirty work quickly, efficiently, and without forcing the animal to suffer. They don't endanger other animals either.

While there are "better" mouse-traps, the original design was pretty



darn good. I like the new-school spin traps, too. These are also baited, spring-loaded mouse traps, but the trap snaps in a circular direction and the whole trap is disposable once it has done its job. This way, you don't have to see or handle the dead mouse either. It's more expensive, but it's very clean and effective.

I've seen several products designed to keep mice away from cars, too. The problem with these repellants is that you never really, truly know if they work or not. This is especially true if you've previously had issues and no longer do after using the product. But we try and do something to prevent the mice from bothering our cars and if dropping a few dollars on a repellent helps, I'm for it.

I've seen a few different types of repellants. Some are chemical sprays, others come in small satchels, and others are plug-in ultrasonic noise generators that claim to make noises mice cannot stand. Most of the research I've done on the noisemakers says they are effective for a while, until the mice get used to the noise and it doesn't bother them anymore. It makes sense that a mouse's drive to find a dry, indoor place to camp out for the winter would not be swayed by an annoying noise forever. People don't always like living in noisy environments, either, but they still do it.

Overall, I can only encourage you to proceed with a multiple-product strategy. If you can find where the mice are coming in, seal the hole. Sure – they might find another way in, but make them do the work. Use the repellents in the car – I like the satchels and they seem to be working. They are only supposed to work for 30 days, so replace them with fresh ones every month. Put some traps out and check them regularly. Keep ahead of them! Put your sun visors down (they act as a convenient place for mice to step into the headliner if they're up). Finally, once the weather breaks and spring is upon us, make inspecting the car for evidence of rodents part of your seasonal preparation. Look for chewed wiring, or mouse droppings (they look like dark brown rice). Clean thoroughly, regardless. Look carefully under the hood, in the trunk, and under the seats. Dispose of old rodent products – most baits lose their effectiveness over time and aren't good for more than one winter. If you put forth a good effort, the odds are strong you'll be able to keep mice out of your car, or minimize the damage they do. Good luck! ■

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mouse teeth marks in it!) and we also agreed that maybe these strong-smelling products had a chance when they were new. Plus, a lot of these strong smells stay in the car once you pull it out of storage. Who wants a cool car that smells like moth balls?

There are many styles of traps to catch and kill mice and various prod-