

Sticky Valves?

By Bob Schuman

Sticky fingers from syrup, candy, or other stuff is easily fixed by washing with the proper materials, namely water and soap or detergent. Engines get sticky valves sometimes, and the fix is similar.

For several months the engine in my 1940 LaSalle ("Salle") would emit a terrific clatter for the first 5-10 minutes after a cold start, but only above about 1200 rpm. It sounded like it was coming from the valve mechanism, even though the engine ran fine. As soon as the engine warmed slightly the clatter was gone.

Discussing the problem with former CCCA and SSR member Marc Ohm, he explained what was likely to be happening. Marc said our modern gasolines tend to form gum deposits, especially in engines that are not run frequently, and when gasoline remains unused in the car's system for long periods. One place they will form is on the stems of the engine's intake valves, which makes the valves stick and not operate smoothly, just like the sticky fingers.

The fix, as suggested by Marc, is to use Seafoam® Motor Treatment, a water-like petroleum product designed to clean off the gum deposits, among other benefits. I bought a 16 ounce can (available at most auto supply stores), poured 8 ounces down the carburetor throat of Salle with the engine running at about 1200 rpm, quickly shut off the engine, and waited a half hour as directed, then took the car for a drive. Large clouds of exhaust smoke followed the car as the Seafoam® was burned off. The next day, with a cold engine, there was no more clatter, the valve stem deposits were gone... not quite...it took a second application to cure a slight recurrence some days later.

If your car has fuel injection, or a side draft or updraft carburetor, Seafoam® is also sold in aerosol cans for those jobs where pouring liquid won't work.

A good practice to prevent gum deposits from forming is to drive your car frequently and use up its gas supply, so that it always has reasonably fresh gas in the tank.

Or, before you have a sticky valve problem on your hands, you could also use a product such as Sta-Bil® Fuel Stabilizer if your Classic will be sitting for a period of time.