

My Favorite Tools

Scott Langley – “2WINDY”

...Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens; Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens. Oh wait, that's a different list entirely! Last Saturday, THAT list would've included a rain poncho and umbrella since we were standing in the rain at the Arthritis Foundation Car Show. It was a really fun day, in spite of the rain. If you haven't been out to it, you HAVE to come next year, as the Miata will be the featured marque! More details to follow...

OK, back to the other list. Some time ago I wrote an article describing the basic tools you need to work on the Miata. There's not a lot of hand tools needed to disassemble or replace most anything on the car. But let's suppose you already have all the stuff on that list. What's next?

So I thought I'd let you in on some of the tools and things that I find handy around the garage, beyond the basic tools. I could go on and on forever with a complete list, so I'll try to limit this discussion to the cool stuff, or a few things that can really get you out of a jam.

First up is my favorite ratchet. Got one of those, do you? Probably not like this. It's a 3/8 ratchet made by Stanley tools and can be found at Wal-Mart. The cool thing is you can swing it like a regular ratchet, but if you don't have the space, you simply twist the handle and it turns the socket for you. That can really make things easy in a tight space.

Next on the list is a good set of picks. I actually mentioned them in my original list, but they are SO handy that they earned a spot here as well. Get a set with different lengths and differently shaped ends and you'll be amazed at how much you use them.

Not to be left out is a couple of "retrievers". I drop tools and fasteners more than I care to admit. Invariably, they land in dark inaccessible spots or underneath the middle of the car. Start with a magnet on a long flexible shaft. Next, grab one that you push on the end and has little spring fingers that can grab things. Another nice one is the L.E.D. flashlight that has a magnet on a shaft that pulls out from the front of the light. All these can be found at most places where tools are sold.

Speaking of lights; you can never have too many. The newer fluorescent and L.E.D. drop lights put out plenty of light and are cool to the touch. Get one on a cord-reel and hang it from the ceiling. I can't tell you how many times I've burned myself on a regular incandescent drop light! Not to mention you don't want to be using an incandescent bulb around fuel or other flammables...

Another "go to" tool is the torque wrench. Actually, it's usually a ratchet. Stop snapping off valve cover bolts (huh, Brian?) and put the correct torque on your nuts and bolts, especially wheel nuts (75ft-lbs or so). A cheap clicker-type torque wrench from Harbor Freight is close enough for most folks and can be had for less than \$20.

Another ratcheting item that's pretty handy is a set of ratcheting wrenches. Gearwrench used to be the only brand available, but Craftsman and others now offer sets. It's another one of those things that can get you out of a tight spot when nothing else will do.

Last, but not least, is specialized Vice-Grips. Using Vice-Grips to loosen a bolt is a quick way to round off the head. But they certainly have their place in the tool box. They are available with a variety of jaw shapes (needle-nosed, duck-billed, etc) that can be real

handy. The best one of all, in my opinion, is made by Irwin Tools and has an upside-down V on top and a flat jaw across the bottom. When clamped over a bolt or line fitting, it grabs on 3 sides and squeezes, making it impossible to round off the bolt! It'll grab rounded off bolts like nothing else. It's perfect for stuck line fittings like brake and clutch lines where a line wrench has already rounded off the fitting. I found mine at Edco Tools on Phillippi Rd. It can be seen online at: <http://www.irwin.com/irwin/consumer/jhtml/detail.jhtml?prodId=IrwinProd190006&search=false> . If you ever get to use one of these, you'll thank me!

Like I said earlier, I could go on and on, but these things can sure make life easier under the hood. Many of you probably have some great suggestions as well. Let me know what kinds of things you have in the garage that you can't live without! I'll be glad to share them here and give you the credit...

The Small Print: *Keep hands away from saw blade. Wear eye protection at all times. Caution: fans may start at any time. Handle with care, unfinished edges can be sharp! Keep away from open flame.*