

## Side Terminal Batteries? Really?

*Text and Photos By Ron Panzer*

Top: Here's a multi-post battery some manufacturers sell to cut their inventory in half. They make for easier jump starting.

**Y**ou've got to read this because it actually happened to me, but before I start let me tell you that GM's side terminal battery was one of the dumbest things they've ever done, though selling out

to Obama is giving that a good race. And they've still got the side terminal going strong.

I get this call to come jump start a '69 or '70 Corvette; it's like about -8° and I'd been out in the tow truck for hours. The side post battery on a 'Vette is mounted in the floor behind the driver's seat. The quarters are tight with no room for your average jumper cable jaws to clamp on to the tiny head of the battery bolt. They hadn't as yet invented the long brass clips made just for the 'Vettes, so I had to force the jumpers in there and hold them in place for contact. And this was a stick Vette, which meant someone had to sit in the bucket and depress the clutch pedal because of the new cutout switch GM brought out on stick cars. Oh, and someone had to crank the key now on the column and work the gas



If the corrosion isn't bad enough to remove the tray, clean it up with hot water and air dry. Later, use several coats of Rustoleum primer, then gloss black, to prevent further rusting.

pedal, should it crank and fire.

We looked liked a pair of idiots all twisted about and trying to perform numerous functions while half-frozen to death. Those of us out in the field were sold a bill of goods about the side-location eliminating corrosion buildup and lower hood lines and less chance of shorts- none of which has come true. We finally got the car started, though the owner was ready to abandon it with the keys in it and dare someone to swipe it. The side terminals were just as corroded as any old top terminal battery. It's a known fact that any kind of metal that touches a battery case will in fact begin forming corrosion in time. Corroded cables and connections have always been one of the more common causes of cars not starting and that didn't slow down one second with the release of the side-terminal battery. In time, it only made matters worse- one still had a corroded connection, but no wrench available to remove the 5/16-inch cable nut. You had to use a 6-point socket or box-end wrench or risk rounding off the nut. Your average motorist owned a pair of pliers and I usually got the call to come tow it in. That bolt was often so badly corroded in place, it tore the threaded nut right out of the battery. Replacement bolts quickly became available, as did new cables.

The area around the battery location is typically the worst to clean up and restore. Years of leaking batteries and rust have taken their toll. A good third of the cars coming to my shop are missing the hold down hardware and plenty need a lower tray replacement, correct battery and better cables. Most guys don't realize this area needs thorough checking at least yearly (rust never sleeps). This mean removing the cables- top or sidepost- and cleaning



**A number of battery parts are still out there, even from GM, but full-size cars suffer the most. Universal pieces can do the trick with a bit of tweaking until you can get your hands on NOS or reproduction parts.**



**A perfect example of forcing the cable too far down on the post- anything that touches the battery case will corrode. These disconnects are great for cars that spend most of their lives sitting.**



**As a rule of thumb, the corrosion begins on the positive post- but not always, as you see here. It loves dirt and moisture.**



Here's a tray from a '59 Bonneville that looked just fine until I pulled the battery for another repair. Some of these trays are assembled like a bomb shelter.



I cut these rubber pads from rolls of tool box drawer liner to set the battery on. With the battery in place, not even Rick Gonser could see it and deduct points!

the connections thoroughly, then coating with grease before assembly. Then again, walking for help is good exercise and the tow bill keeps the economy rolling!

Keeping the car battery completely clean is the only solution for preventing the formation of corrosion. Also, don't force the cable ends down until they touch the top battery case- leave them up 1/8-inch. Make a thin pad to place under the battery

and keep it from touching the metal tray. Leaving a battery unsecured to jump around on the tray can cut its life by a half. Universal parts are available to secure any battery while you chase factory originals, so that excuse won't fly here. The top post battery is still the better and far easier to spot beginning corrosion. The side post must be taken apart to verify its condition.

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