

Detailing your
Vehicle

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How to Detail Your Car

Some say that Guido da Vigevano built the first car in 1335 that used a windmill type assembly to drive a set of gears to turn the wheels. I would say that if that is the case, that he probably was also the first one to clean a car. Now the carwash/detailing industry has become a multi-billion dollar industry. Although why would you want to spend you hard earned money on having some one else detail your car? When you could do it yourself, and make sure it is completed correctly and the way you want. Besides I know a lot of car enthusiast out there who would really prefer to detail their cars themselves.

After years of experience and talking with some of the best product/technical representatives around today, I have compiled a how to guide for car owners that want to do there own work. This guide is intended for all car enthusiasts on all levels. Maybe you are new to car detailing or you are just looking for some new “tricks” to give you the advantage at your next car show. Either way I hope that this guide helps you on your journey.

First off detailing is handwork and time consuming. No matter what your reason for wanting to detail your car from wanting to attend a car show to selling your vehicle detailing will be well worth your time and effort. Now there are products out there that say that it will cut your time in half, and that you only need to do it once a year. However, several professional detailers I talked with said that many of the new cheaper products are indeed too good to be true and can damage paint jobs. This is why I suggest staying away from low quality products and sticking with the known products. There is nothing that works as well as hard work and some elbow grease. I will make some

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suggestions as I continue through the guide, but if you have a product you really like, go ahead and use it.

Before you get started you will need:

- Paper towels, rags, chamois. Old t-shirts work well, and if you can find any old “clean” cloth diaper use them because they make excellent rags for polishing the finish and are great for windows.
- Brushes. You'll need a few different varieties and sizes to get into the hard to reach areas. An old toothbrush works well, and several cotton swabs.
- Wash bucket. Make sure it is clean, and you may want to keep it as your car washing bucket only. This may help prevent getting unwanted dirt and chemicals in a bucket you use to clean your car with.
- Wash mitts and or a good quality sponge.
- Bug removal sponge
- Power Washer or a good hose nozzle with different head types. Power Washers are getting pretty reasonably priced now and you can pick them up at any hardware store.
- Shop Vacuum or equivalent.
- Orbital Buffer. Again these are getting pretty reasonably priced.

Now where to begin? Most professionals I talk to suggest starting on the interior first, so the dust and dirt you brush out won't settle on a cleaned exterior. Remove any floor

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mats and give the carpeting and upholstery a good vacuuming. Move the seats forward and backward to get all the dirt including in the tracks, and door jams. You should also use one of your harder bristled brushes to get any dirt out from the cracks; it is also good for stirring up the carpet matt so you can get most of the junk out of the carpet.

Now if you have any stubborn stains in the upholstery or carpet this is the time to deal with them. Use an all purpose cleaner to get the stubborn stains out. Saturate the stain with cleaner, working it in with a damp sponge. Let it sit awhile and then blot it out with a dry towel. Make sure to read the direction on the cleaner for specific precautions. You can also use a window cleaner sprayed on a rag to get the headliner clean. Don't forget the trunk/hatchback areas as well.

You can repair burns and holes in your carpet by cutting out the area with a razor blade. Then cut a similar size piece from a hidden spot, such as underneath the seat, and cement it in place using a water resistant adhesive. Blend in the repair by brushing the repaired piece with the old. You can also go to a carpet outlet and can buy a carpet sample for pretty reasonable price that could match the carpet of the car.

If your carpet is still looking bad you can shampoo it to get any remaining dirt and grease out. You can usually rent these machines at a carpet store or even you local grocery/retail chain. Start with the carpets on the driver's side then the seats; this keeps the water to a minimum. Move around the whole car until you're done. Again make sure you read any precautions from the manufacturer.

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Now move on to the interiors hard surfaces, clean them with a damp cloth and a mild all-purpose cleaner. If you have leather upholstery, dress the surfaces with a leather conditioner; spray it on a rag for tight areas. Never use a vinyl product on leather. Worn or torn areas of vinyl can be repaired using kits made for this purpose. Repairs are made with a patch that lets you match the color and grain of your upholstery. Worn areas of leather can be touched up with dyes or a high grade shoe polish.

Now for one of the harder parts the dash. First you can blast any dust away with a can of compressed air. Clean air vent grilles with cotton swabs and brighten them up by misting on some spray on rubber dressing. Spray any dress up cleaner on a soft towel and then apply it to the rest of the dash, be careful around the instrument panel.

Then move on to the windows. If you are like me, then you hate cleaning windows for the fear of streaks. Some pointers in this area are to don't spray directly on the window, but onto a rag. Have a dry cloth ready to wipe it dry. You can even use newspaper to wipe it dry, the abrasiveness acts like a polish and it won't leave any streaks. Also make sure you rinse your hands off before cleaning your windows, this will help remove any unwanted dressing. If you have aftermarket window tint film, it may be degraded by cleaners that contain ammonia or vinegar. Factory tinting is in the glass and is not affected by these cleaners.

Now it's time to move to the exterior of your car, well kind of, detailing your engine. First you will need to cover any sensitive equipment such as electrical components. Try using a heavy duty aluminum foil for this step. If you use a home pressure washer for this, be careful, you can blow water in areas that weren't meant to get wet. I prefer using

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a regular garden hose for this step. After you have sealed everything off, spray a heavy duty degreaser on to the cool temperature engine. Again read any warnings or precautions on the degreaser. Use a pointy brush to get any stubborn deposits. Then spray down with your hose, making sure you get all of the degreaser off. Once you're satisfied, start up the motor and let it run for a while with the hood down. Then remove the foil and use a rag sprayed with the degreaser and wipe down any parts covered. Now you can wipe everything down with a rubber dressing or shining product. However, do not spray or wipe down your belts, and make sure you read any precautions on the product.

Were finally on to the part about actually washing your car. Make sure that you are using a clean wash mitt or sponge, and that your bucket is free of dirt and contaminants. Work in the shade and make sure the surface is cool. Make sure that you are using a good carwash, and don't use dishwashing detergents. The dishwashing detergent damages the finish, stripping it of vital oils causing it to dry out.

Presoak the car first making sure you get rid of any of the big dirt. Also remove any bug and tar items time using tar & bug remover with a sponge. Move on to the rims, since rims collect brake dust and road debris. Use a wheel cleaner that is made for your type of rims such as being clear coated or not. Don't overlook the under side of the vehicle, and the gas cap lid as well. Now start at the top of your vehicle and move your way down. Make sure that you get all areas, and rinse often. To do a final rinse, remove the spray head from the hose and flood the finish. The water will tend to run off in sheets, minimizing spotting. When drying the vehicle off, you can use a chamois to get the bulk of the water, but finish it off with soft towels.

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When you're done washing and the car is mostly dry, apply your rubber dressings to the tires, bumpers and any plastic parts you want to shine. This gives the car to finish drying and you can then look for missed areas or water runs.

Most people stop here and say they are done, if they even get to this point. They overlook one of the most important steps in detailing and preserving a vehicle, and that is waxing. Now the market is full of different types of waxing products, but how many of them actually work? Most of the average cheap waxes contain a very small portion of wax in them, and use petroleum instead. Products that are like this do very little in preserving and waxing the paint, if anything they just waste your time and money. Also be aware of the spray on wax with water. These waxes might give some protection for a day or two, but nothing like the protection of a carnauba wax.

Before you wax you need to get rid of any oxidation you may have. Typically, you will not have to do this every time. Oxidation depends on how much you wax, when you wax, how much sun the car is exposed to, and other weather conditions. Oxidation can usually be removed with a clear coat compound. For standard finishes you can step up to polishing compound, which is mild but still too harsh for clear coats. If you do use these products, you must seal the paint after.

If you decided to use a compound for oxidation, then you must seal the paint. You can buy a glaze/sealer to do this. Most sealers or glazers you apply by wiping on. Then use soft towels to remove it after it has hazed over.

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Now you are ready to wax. Make sure you are using a good wax, preferably one with high amounts of carnauba wax in it. Again, start at the top of your vehicle and do small sections as you work your way down. Don't let it sit more than 5-8 minutes before removing, and two thin coats of this is much better than one thick coat. Also apply it with a side to side motion instead of circular to prevent swirls. Be sure to include doorjambs, and the areas beneath door hinges and behind bumpers. Minor blemishes may be neutralized by wrapping a cotton cloth around your index finger and burnishing the polish into the finish.

If you machine-buff the polish/wax to a high luster, go with an orbital rather than a rotary model, which would be more likely to burn the paint. The rotary buffer is much faster than orbital but in the wrong hands can easily damage paint. Treat the plastic chrome as if it were a painted surface and protect it with a light coat of wax. Try and not get any on the black rubberized parts. If you do, spray it with a mist and wipe product and wipe it down with a terry cloth towel. If that doesn't work a professional detailer gave this as a suggestion: Microwave some peanut butter and apply it to the stain with a soft toothbrush. Peanut butter's oils dissolve the wax and its abrasive enough to lift the stain. If you get a polish/wax residue around emblems or in crevices, break out the cotton swabs and toothbrushes. After removing it all go around and remove any excess from the cracks and emblems using a brush and towel. Cloth diapers are excellent for buffing up a shine.

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Here's a tip: break the car down into equal sections. Apply the prep/sealer/wax to one section at a time before moving on to the next. This lets you concentrate your efforts on small areas at a time.

Also keep a good car duster around for getting the dust that some products leave behind.

Plus remember to protect your car's finish from the elements as much as possible. This means storing the car in a garage, covered area, or with a good quality car cover. A car that is constantly exposed to sunlight and other environmental hazards will deteriorate quicker and require significantly more cosmetic maintenance.

We hope that you found the information helpful.

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