

# Take Care of the Exterior of Your Car

By Curt Donnelley

The fit and finish of cars today is the best it's ever been, and it's designed to take a lot of punishment and come back shining, but there are still things you need to do to make sure your new car looks new for the life of the vehicle – not only for cosmetic reasons, but to maximize the car's resale value and preserve the protection to the underlying sheet metal that the car's finish provides. Fortunately, there are a lot of great new products on the market that can help make this process as painless as possible, as well as services that can help you reach the same goal without lifting a finger.

- 1) No matter how rugged your vehicle may be, its finish deserves to be treated with the respect that you would give china. Though carwashes are usually not recommended (and never take a brand new car through a carwash) if you must (and it happens) find one that is “brushless,” in other words, does not use those huge rotating bristle brushes that cause millions of tiny scratches which will dull your car's exterior faster than anything else.
- 2) Start with clean. Though a soft sponge, chamois and some mild dish soap are more than adequate for regular washing, there are a great many new products to help you when you want to do a more thorough cleaning. First and foremost, rinse your car thoroughly before even touching it with a sponge or rag, if you start washing a dry car, every bit of grit on the surface will cause scratching and dulling. Your auto store also sells a variety of car-wash systems – wands, rotating wipes, etc. which can help you reach every nook and cranny, some even work with cleaning solutions that provide a certain amount of shine or protection, dry without spotting and so on, just like a carwash.
- 3) Invest in quality. Eventually, after maybe a year or so depending upon where you live, you're going to want to wax your car to add that little bit of extra protection and shine. Though your local auto, home or discount store has a variety of product, always buy the best you can afford – good non-abrasive car waxes like Meguiars and the venerable Turtle Wax products, cleaners for wheels and tires like Armor-All that have stood the test of time. There is also now a whole new range of liquid waxes that remove the most tedious step of car waxing, the letting the wax dry and wiping off the residue – and also eliminate the problem of getting those tiny unsightly bits of dried wax off the trim and out of the creases in the vehicles finish – those things that you used to have to remove with a soft toothbrush and a lot of patience while someone stood behind you saying “missed a spot.” These new liquid waxes are applied and then simply buffed to a glossy shine, like furniture wax, and have solved one of the major car care problems of the last hundred years.
- 4) Cover it up. If you don't have a garage, it's a good idea to invest in a car cover. No matter how silly it may seem, both the air and precipitation contain chemicals that can accelerate the deterioration of your cars finish, not to mention other things that may fall on it from tree sap to pollen to bird droppings. A car cover can extend the life of your finish and reduce maintenance many times over, more than worth your car looking like you've tucked it into a tea-cozy at night.

- 5) Hire a detailer. As your car gets older, there are simply things, inside and out, that you don't have the time, equipment, patience or skill to accomplish to keep it looking new. This is where a whole new industry of car "detailing" has arisen – both at dealers and independent shops. A good detailer can get your vehicle as close to looking showroom fresh as possible. If you've begun to despair of your car's appearance – or if you're planning on trading it in or selling it – the few hundred dollars you'll spend at a professional detailer are an excellent investment.

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