



# Brush-on bed liner

**Save hundreds of dollars by doing it yourself**

by Bob Lacivita and David Radtke

**W**hether you have a factory-perfect pickup bed you're anxious to protect or a scratched and dented bed you're dying to hide, you have several options for bed liners. Molded drop-in types are sized for your truck and cost \$200 to \$5,000. Other options are a professionally installed spray-on liner, which costs \$500 to \$600, or a do-it-yourself roll-on bed liner for only \$130 (including tape and cleaners), which is what we'll focus on here.

All liners have their obvious pros and cons. Molded liners are good at absorbing shocks and hauling gravel or sand but can be

slippery. They can also get punctured, which can lead to bed corrosion if water and debris become trapped underneath. On the other hand, spray or roll/brush-on bed liners are a heavy-duty polyurethane mixture that hardens and thoroughly coats the inside of your truck bed. Roll/brush-on liners are skid resistant, but on the downside, they can't be removed and aren't as thick as drop-ins, so they're subject to denting.

The three critical steps for a solid, long-lasting coating are preparation, preparation, preparation. No shortcuts allowed, or you'll end up with a worthless chipping or peeling surface.



## What you'll need

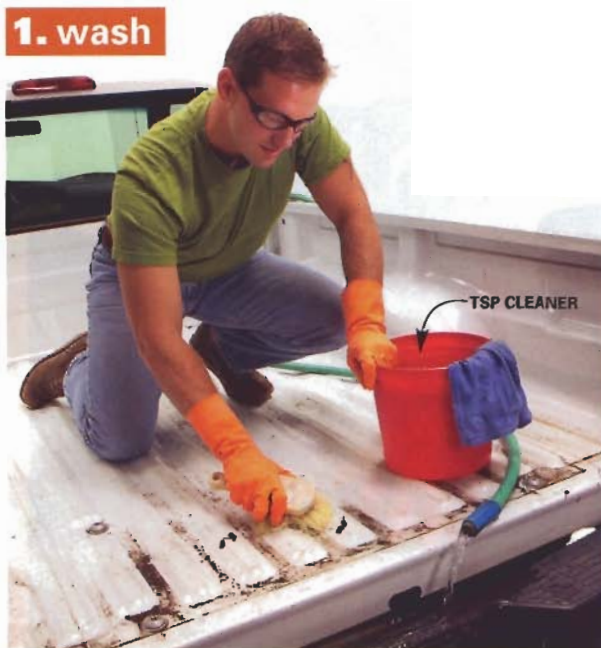
- Herculiner kit (about \$120; see p. 96). The kit includes 1 gal. of the coating, enough for a 6-ft. bed. Order an additional quart for full-size pickups.
- Roll of 2-in. masking tape (3M Scotch-Blue painter's tape, \$7, works well)
- Two disposable paint roller pans (\$3)
- Rubber-coated (PVC) gloves (\$4)
- Roll of lint-free blue paper shop towels (\$2)
- 1 qt. acetone (\$6)
- 1 qt. xylene (\$6)
- Box of TSP (trisodium phosphate, or TSP substitute, \$4)
- Household sprayer (\$3)
- Paint mixer for power drill (\$2)
- Bucket and stiff brush
- Two additional Scotch-Brite pads (\$4)

## Preparation

**Step 1.** Remove the tailgate and set it on sawhorses. Sweep or vacuum dirt and debris from the bed and tailgate. Make sure any drain holes are clear. Scrub both the bed and the tailgate with a strong solution of TSP and water to remove oil, petroleum or wax-based residue. Rinse with plenty of clear water and wipe with a clean rag. Allow to dry thoroughly.

**Step 2.** Using painter's tape, carefully mask off all areas that aren't going to be covered, especially at the back of the bed near the tailgate. Press the tape down firmly to form a good protective seal. Neatly cover the drain holes with tape or foam rubber weatherstripping to seal them.

**Step 3.** Thoroughly scuff all painted surfaces, including any surface rust, to ensure a good bond. Take your time and leave no glossy areas. Sand deep rust or corrosion to the bare metal with 150-grit sandpaper. Blow out or wipe down the bed to remove all



### Cleaning products and respirator





## 4. wipe



## 5. brush



## 6. roll



sanding dust. Apply a coat of primer (a good choice is Mar-Hyde primer No. 3510, 4 oz., available at body shop suppliers) and let dry. Don't use lacquer-based primer.

**Step 4.** Wipe the bed area with acetone. Wear chemical-resistant gloves and a respirator. Start at the front of the bed using the spray bottle. Let the acetone sit for a few seconds and wipe it off with clean shop towels, never using the same side of the towel twice. Wipe the entire surface of the bed where the material is to be applied. Let dry about 10 minutes. (Never use lacquer or alcohol-based solvents.)

## Application

**Step 5.** Remove the lid and thoroughly mix the material using a paint mixer and power drill (make sure the temperature is between 32 and 95 degrees F). The material can be thinned up to 10 percent with xylene if it's too thick to brush or roll. Occasionally stir the mixture while applying. Begin with the seams and corners, dabbing rather than stroking the material into them.

**Step 6.** Once the seams and corners are covered, use the supplied textured roller cover and handle to gently apply the material to the front and side panels first, then roll the material onto the tailgate and the floor of the trunk bed. Apply a second coat of material along the taped edges before the first coat dries so the tape won't tear when you remove it. Touch up any missed areas with a small brush. When you're finished, discard the roller cover and wrap the brush in a plastic bag to keep it from drying out. Use xylene to remove any excess material while it's still wet. Once the first coat has set up (usually in six hours) or isn't tacky to the touch, apply the second.

Let the rags and application materials air dry, then throw them into the trash. Recycle any leftover materials or solvents as you would oil paint.

Art Direction • DAVID SIMPSON  
Photography • BILL ZUEHLKE

### Bed liner kit



Herculiner kits are available from J.C. Whitney (800-603-4383, [www.jcwhitney.com](http://www.jcwhitney.com)) and Auto Barn (888-484-9560, [www.autobarn.com](http://www.autobarn.com)).