

Exterior detailing

Get your car showroom-clean

by David Radtke and Bob Lacivita



Attention to detail when you're cleaning your vehicle's exterior can keep it looking new and prevent premature rust and a dull finish. In most cases, you can do a complete cleaning and detailing job in less than three hours. You'll not

only enjoy driving a good-looking car but also find that a well-detailed car can bring as much as \$400 to \$500 over book value when you decide to sell. Along with describing washing and waxing basics, we'll show you techniques that pros use to revive cars for resale.



1 Tired of your bumper stickers? Soak the sticker in warm soapy water for at least 10 minutes, then take a plastic putty knife and get under a corner and start working it loose. Never use a metal scraper or razor blade because they can scratch the finish. If the sticker still won't budge, wipe off the soap solution and give the sticker a spray of WD-40, let it absorb and start scraping again. The WD-40 will loosen the adhesive and act as a lubricant for the putty knife without harming your car's finish. Keep spraying as needed if you run into stubborn spots. Once the sticker is removed, you may have adhesive still stuck to the bumper. Dab rubbing alcohol onto a clean rag and scrub until it's gone. Wash and dry the area, then put on a coat of wax.

2 Wash the entire car one section at a time.

Soak the entire car with your hose to get rid of loose dirt and dust, and use a heavy jet spray under the wheel wells where road dirt accumulates. Then fill a bucket with warm water and add car-washing soap. Dish soap is generally too harsh. Avoiding the direct sun, wash a section at a time and then rinse it immediately. Start from the top down: first the roof, then the hood, the trunk and finally the sides. Use a special wash mitt or a heavy terry cloth towel. Work the soapy water in a circular motion and get into corners and detail lines. Use a soft-bristled washing brush to get at areas where a rag or mitt can get caught (racks and license plate brackets, door handles, trim, etc.). Open the hood and trunk and wash the crevices where dirt gets trapped. When you've finished washing the last section, rinse the whole car again and then dry it with a chamois, starting from the top down. Wring out the chamois often to keep it absorbent. The idea is to avoid water spots and streaks.



3 Use a spray-on solution to clean doorjamb and weatherstripping.

You can use a hose and bucket, but it's often tough to keep water from spraying into the interior. A spray-on wash such as Bucket-Free Car Wash is great for this because you'll have a lot more control and won't be flooding delicate door mechanisms with water. Get into all the nooks and crannies around the weatherstrip and hinges to make your car look showroom perfect.



4 Scrub the wheels and tires with a brush.

Ordinary soap and water often aren't enough to get rid of caked-on brake dust and road grime, so buy a specialty cleaner for your type of wheels (painted, chrome, alloy or clear coat). Spray the wheel and let the solution work for about 30 seconds, then scrub with a soft-bristled brush to work the cleaner into all the small recesses. Flush with water and repeat the process if necessary. After you've dressed the tires to make them look showroom new (see next step), put a coat of wax on the wheels. Spray-on wax works best.



5 Wash the tires with soap and water, then rinse and dry.

Next spray on a tire dressing like Tire Foam & Shine and let it dry. The tires will look new and be protected for up to 30 washings.



6 Revive a dull paint finish.

Contamination from brake dust and air pollution dulls painted finishes and eventually leads to surface rust. The best way to revive the finish is with a clay bar that actually absorbs these contaminants as you rub it back and forth across the paint. Professional detailers have been using this product for years. Now you can find it at auto supply stores or www.claymagic.net for \$16 to \$20. Spray the surface with either the lubricant that comes with your clay bar or liquid wax. Never use plain water. Rub the clay bar back and forth on the freshly lubricated section, overlapping each stroke and using light pressure. It will sound harsh at first, but as the clay bar absorbs contaminants, it will get quieter and smoother. Rework as needed until the finish feels as smooth as glass. Remove any residue by spraying on more lubricant and then buff with a clean terry cloth towel.



7 Wax your car at least twice a year.

Very lightly mist a 2 x 2-ft. section with clean water then apply a good-quality wax. Do a panel at a time, such as the hood or the roof, just as you do when you wash. We used a new product called Nano Wax, which has super-fine particulates that hide surface scratches much better than ordinary car waxes, resulting in a deep shine. Apply the wax with the applicator, rubbing in a circular motion. Let the wax dry to a haze and remove it with a lint-free, soft terry towel. Open the the doors, the hood and the trunk to remove haze from the edges. Never wax in direct sun.



8 Give your weatherstripping renewed life.

Dress door, trunk and hood weatherstripping with a silicone spray like Armor All. Wash the weatherstrip first, then apply Armor All to a rag (prepackaged wipes are available) and work it into the weatherstrip until it shines. You'll restore its suppleness, protect it from aging and keep it from freezing to the door in icy winter weather.



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