

# **Car Cleaning Tips from a Pro**

Car Talk Visits Professional Detailer Greg Yoke

## **Tips for a Spotless Exterior**

1. Wash your vehicle in a shaded area. Your vehicle's surface should be cool. If the car's hot, the soap suds will dry too quickly, staining the surface and requiring another wash.
2. Pre-soak your vehicle to remove heavy contaminants like boulders and squirrel remains.
3. Use mild liquid soap and a car-wash mitt or sponge-- and don't skimp on the water.
4. Wash one section at a time, and then rinse it off. Start with the roof of the car, then proceed to the hood and the rear. Next, clean the upper sections of the sides, and then, finally, clean the lower areas, including the rocker panels, which invariably have the most dirt. Why this sequence? If you clean the lower sections first, you'll wash the dirt from the top of the car back down onto the lower parts. But, more importantly, you run the risk of having small pieces of debris adhere to the mitt or sponge, and could scratch the vehicle.
5. Always hose off your mitt or sponge before putting it back in the wash bucket to re-soap. In other words, start with a bucket of clean soap-- and end with a bucket of clean soap.
6. Rinse your vehicle thoroughly. When you think you're done rinsing—that's when you give it a final rinse!
7. Use a different mitt to clean the tires and rims. Using a separate mitt for the wheels will reduce the chance that you'll scratch the car's paint with brake dust and dirt you pick up from the rims.
8. Be very cautious when cleaning wheels, especially if you're using a spray-on wheel cleaner. This is not just for your car's health, but for your's as well. Wheels can be extremely hot if the car has just been driven. This is especially likely with wheels that use high-performance brakes. When you spray wheel-cleaning chemicals on hot metal, the chemicals will vaporize—and you'll inhale them, which can't possibly be good for you. (See also: Tommy).
9. Forget the pricey automotive cleaners. Instead, use a mild, liquid soap that's well diluted. That'll do everything you need, such as removing dirt, grease, and films without damaging plastics or other materials. Plus, it's a lot cheaper than the aggressively marketed, fancy products.

10. Dry your vehicle immediately, to prevent water spots. Chamois work well. One commercial product I like is, "The Absorber."

11. Skip the expensive chemicals. The only products I use are:

**Black Magic Wax:** This is an exterior wax, which protects the surface of the vehicle. In my experience, it provides great gloss and protection. It was rated "very good" by a leading consumer magazine in 2006. Plus, it's less expensive than other major brands.

**Meguiars Polish:** Meguiars Polish is easy to use, and gives the paint a vibrant look. It really brings out the color.

**Meguiars Quick Detailer:** This product provides the "just waxed" look in between car washes, and it's very easy to use.

## **Tips for a Tidy Interior**

1. Refer to the owner's manual before attempting to clean the interior of your vehicle. I've found that many of today's auto components are very sensitive to cleaners. Before you start, test each of the interior materials in small, out-of-the-way locations, where consequences won't be too terrible if it doesn't work out. It's better to be safe than sorry. Do you want to look at the spray pattern from a can of Super Duper Quikkie-Kleen for the rest of the life of your car?

2. Don't vacuum hard to reach places—instead, blow it out by connecting your vacuum hose to the vacuum outlet. It is most effective to rapidly toggle the power switch on your vacuum between "on" and "off." Here's why. If you blow the debris out at full speed, it's going to fly all over the vehicle. Doing it at a reduced power, however, will move the debris just far enough so you can access it, then easily vacuum it up.

3. Get a paint brush and a toothbrush. These are the two best tools for accessing hard-to-reach cracks, crevices and corners. The paint brush is great for reaching into deep locations. Vacuum with one hand as you brush those hard-to-reach locations, and you'll quickly clean up tricky spots. Leave both brushes in your glove compartment, so you'll have them when you stop by your local car wash and vacuum emporium.

4. To thoroughly remove debris from carpets and mats, use a sturdy brush and run a vacuum right behind it. Don't get too aggressive with the brush. Mats and carpets are (sadly) poorly made these days, even on high-end vehicles. You can easily cause fraying or other damage by using too much force.

5. For gum, wax and other materials use chewing gum remover. It actually freezes the gum, so that it can easily be scraped off. Use a dull paint scraper to remove the gum once

it's frozen. If you can't find chewing gum remover, you can also use dry ice. Get the gum cold enough so it will crack when you apply light pressure with the scraper.

Chewing gum remover may not be available at your local automotive parts and accessories store. You may have to purchase it through an auto-detailing company or a janitorial supply company.

6. Skip the ArmorAll on the interior. I find it actually attracts dust. If you do use it, buff it in with a moist rag.

7. Be very cautious cleaning the transparent plastic on your vehicle's instrument cluster. A lot of these plastics are extremely soft, and will scratch easily. I use Plexus plastic cleaner.

8. The dirtiest spots in a car's interior are the locations you touch, meaning the steering wheel, seat belt, the shifting knob and the driver's side door panel. The "V" between your legs, where your Egg McMuffin and coffee winds up, can also be very dirty. Locate these components and plan to spend a few extra minutes cleaning them.

9. When you're cleaning seat belts, only use a diluted, mild laundry soap. This will protect the integrity of the belt fabric.

10. Windows should be cleaned inside and out with glass cleaner and paper towels. Then, lightly buff the windows with a 100% cotton towel.

11. The dashboard and vehicle panels should be wiped with a dampened cloth with water. To remove grime, use an all-purpose cleaner, diluted with water. As always, use the mildest soap possible.

12. Need to get rid of smells? Vinegar works very well, and it's a whole lot cheaper than commercial products. Start with a 20:1 water-to-vinegar concentration, and scrub thoroughly. If that doesn't work, slowly increase the ratio until you have success.

13. No matter what you're doing to your car, be gentle. Because of manufacturers' interest in saving a buck, and the desire to increase the EPA fuel economy, a lot of manufacturers are using less durable materials. So, whether you're working on the inside or the outside, be gentle, or you may permanently mar or damage your vehicle.

## **What to Look for in a Detailer**

1. Ask if he has a carpet extractor machine. This is standard issue for a good detailer, and a sign that they're really, truly cleaning your carpets. Less scrupulous detailers will simply spray on some harsh chemicals, and brush your carpet to make it appear as though it's been cleaned.
2. He should be using a wet vac of at least 5 horsepower. Anything less powerful won't do the trick.
3. Check the wheels on a car that he's recently detailed. There shouldn't be a dry spot on the sidewall. If there is, it means the detailer didn't roll the car after applying ArmorAll or a similar product to the sidewall.
4. Here's why. When the vehicle is parked, the bottom of the tire is compressed against the road surface. So when you apply tire dressing, this portion of the tire doesn't get thoroughly cleaned. The detailer needs to take the time to start the vehicle and move it forward until this tire section is unweighted and can be fully shined. It's just a sign that the guy cares, and is conscientious.
5. Check the windows. If the car has a frame around the window, roll the window down. That small section of glass that sits in the frame should also have been cleaned. If it hasn't been, it means that your prospective detailer is lazy.
6. Look for uniform cleaning in completed cars. Detailers who rush through a high volume of cars will only clean the dirtiest spots. Look instead for a consistent, thorough cleanliness.