

For last year's Holiday issue, I offered up some auto-related gift ideas for the Do-It-Yourselfer. This year I'm going to continue in that vein, but with a bit of a twist.

With RennZenn starting up this past year, I've had the opportunity to work on many cars other than my own, and it's given me the opportunity to use a variety of new products on a range of "problem areas". So for this year, I'd like to present the 2008 Products That Worked.

By far, my best purchase this year has been a Griot's Garage 6" orbital buffer and the assorted polishes and pads designed to be used with it. For cars with a clear coat, using the polisher and Griot's Machine Polish #3, I was easily able to remove swirl marks and minor scratching, leaving the paint surface smooth, visually deep, and uninterrupted. For more substantial blemishes (but not those that went completely through the clear coat), the more aggressive grades of polish were very effective. As a bonus, I found that the most aggressive polish, #1, when used by hand was able to erase any scratching on the inside of door pulls left by fingernails and jewelry. On older cars without a clear coat, the polisher also proved its worth. It was as effective for removing swirls and light scratching, without biting too deeply into the paint itself. The polisher also did a marvelous job reviving paint that was "dirty". Without a clear coat, older paint that is not treated can absorb dirt, making it lose that "pop" or brightness that new paint has. It was quite impressive how well the Griot's system brought older paint back to life.

The polisher's benefits weren't limited to paint. I had a vehicle with stubborn water spotting throughout most of the glass that plenty of elbow grease, glass cleaner, vinegar, and assorted ancient Chinese secrets just couldn't handle. Using the orbital with glass polish and appropriate glass polishing pads, the water spotting lifted as easily as swirls on the paint. The fun didn't stop there, either. Many of our

Porsches have exposed stainless steel bits, such as the muffler, and the polisher proved equally effective in this area.

Last year, one of the products I mentioned was Goof-off. This year, browsing around Lowe's, I stumbled on a new product from the same company, Goof-Off 2. Goof-Off 2 is similar to the original product, but it is water based and milder, making it safer for plastics and painted surfaces. I found Goof-Off 2 particularly effective for removing the road crud that accumulates along the lower areas of the bumpers, side skirting, and inside of the wheel wells. It was also effective on tough spots in the interior, such as the floor mats and carpet.

Speaking of carpets and floor mats, my favorite tool for clean-up here has been a portable deep cleaner that my wife and I originally bought for puppy "accidents". It's not actually a steam cleaner, as it doesn't heat the water itself. You provide the heat by adding the hottest water you can get from the sink along with the cleansing agent. The unit itself is small, about half the size of a 5-gallon bucket, making it easy to move around. The spray/vacuum head is 4 inches wide and on the end of a 4 foot hose, making it easy to move around and get into tight places, such as between the accelerator pedal and floorboard. I was amazed at how well this sucker renewed well-used floor mats.

OK, enough with the dirty work. Hands down, the product that I've had the most fun with this year has been a set of "R" compound tires. For autocrossing this year I got a set of aftermarket wheels and mounted Michelin's Pilot Sport Cup tires. Holy cow, do these tires make a difference! Switching from my all-season tires to these, I notice



a difference every time just driving out of the driveway. The car is unbelievably more responsive – just a slight twitch of the steering wheel and the car begins to cut into a turn. On the AX course, once they got a bit of heat in them, the Pilot Sport Cups allowed me to toss the car around way harder than I should have (making lots of novice mistakes), and the car just stuck, stuck, stuck to the line, no worries. I've improved my driving a little over the last year, but these tires have made it look like an awful lot more.

I hope that helps with a couple of holiday ideas. There are lots of great products out there for caring for our cars, but there are also plenty of others that aren't quite up to snuff. Fortunately, there's tons of information detailing peoples experiences in both directions. Do your homework, and you'll find products you'll fall in love with. I hope everyone's holidays are joyous and safe.

Happy driving and wrenching!

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