

Last month I warned you that this month's Tech Tactics would cover paint care, so here goes. Washing is the most common thing we do to care for our paint. Done right, you'll preserve the factory finish, keeping it looking new for decades. Done wrong, you'll quickly have a dull car covered in swirl marks. Rule #1: wash your car by hand with a large bucket, soap made for automotive washing, and a soft cotton or microfiber towel. Avoid the lure of the automatic car washes. The high pressure water batters the seals around the windows and doors, and the detergents are so strong they'll wash the wax right off your car. Similarly, washing at home with dish soap will also strip your wax. A proper car wash soap won't get as sudsy as dish soap, but don't worry, it's working just fine. Rule #2: Spray off any visible dirt, then wash with the cloth from the cleanest areas to the dirtiest. When you wash, don't scrub in circles. Move the cloth gently in straight lines, parallel with the longest lines of the car. Rinse the cloth frequently in your bucket. Swirl marks often come from washes where the cloth is not rinsed enough, and the dirt is scrubbed into the paint in a circular pattern. By moving in straight lines, surfaces are touched once, and dirt is taken straight off the panel. As well, any fine lines created are only visible from certain angles, whereas circular swirls have some visibility from any angle.

Once your car is clean and dry, you're ready for the real fun to begin. For a car that sees any significant mileage, you'll need to do some deep care for the paint at least once, if not twice (or more)

per year. After washing and drying, the first thing I like to do is go over the car with a clay bar. It's unbelievable what a difference this step makes. The clay, without any abrasives or solvents, removes stubborn bugs, tar, and road debris, and also lifts fine contaminants out of the paint or the clearcoat. The result is a finish that's super smooth. Most of the clay kits come with a bottle of mist-and-wipe detailing spray to be used as a lubricant with the clay. Use plenty of this, don't overdo the pressure on the clay, and wipe up the excess detailing mist as you go. The results amazed me so much that after claying my car, I asked my wife to run her hand over the fender. "It's smoother than my skin," was her reply...I almost ended up sleeping in the garage following that mistake!

Now that the car is clean and free of all foreign debris, it's time for wax. The variety of products available is mind boggling, and of course, each one claims superiority over the others in their advertisements. Fortunately, the quality of any wax product these days is high enough that nothing will leave you with a paint disaster. If you make the wrong pick, the results simply won't be as high as you expected. To get it right, first consider what you want, and keep in mind that any choice will have its compromises. Here are some questions to ask: Is your car a daily driver or a show piece? How long do you expect a wax job to last? What's the condition of the paint right now? What are the worst conditions that the wax needs to endure?

Different waxes offer different benefits.

To begin, waxes fall into two main groups: natural carnauba waxes and synthetics. The advantage of synthetics is durability. They are engineered to bond with your paint, making them harder to remove from the paint, extending the duration of their



protection. The natural products, on the other hand, offer an unmatched depth and shine but won't last as long and can't handle much in terms of harsh weather. Either type can be found in one-step cleaner waxes or multi stage polish and wax combinations. Cleaner waxes offer polishing and waxing in one quick step. They're great for daily drivers that you want looking good, but that don't have to be perfect. These products will remove most light scratches, but they won't get it all. For a perfect, better-than-new finish, a multi-step product with a paint polish/cleaner followed by a pure wax designed to complement the polish is necessary. P21S and Zymol both offer fine products if you are going this route. Along with greater gloss and depth of shine, these products are also less likely to leave a white residue on any plastic surfaces if you accidentally go onto the plastic trim. No matter what you choose, allow yourself plenty of time and follow the manufacturer's directions. Wax one section of your car at a time, and have plenty of clean, dry towels on hand for the removal. When the final rub-down is finished, it's inevitable that some excess wax has made it into the seams here and there. I like to use a flat wooden toothpick to get these last little bits. For the finest and softest point, break the toothpick off at the end and soften it a bit against your finger. This should do the trick around the locks, door handles, and weather strips. Next month, I'll get into the dirty stuff: wheels and engines.

Happy driving and wrenching!



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