

CAR CLEANING: WEEKLY, MONTHLY, YEARLY

Regular washing and care can add hundreds of dollars to your car's value at sale time. Here's how to do it right

Cars should always be cleaned thoroughly, with regular professional attention to keep them looking and feeling their best."

Okay, take it from us; keeping your car clean can pay big dividends. And not just at resale time.

THE WEEKLY WASH

A good clean every week is essential. Road muck, kiddie grime and bird bombs are just some of the insidious spoilers of paintwork, carpets, seats and precious cabin plastics.

THE EXTERIOR

You'll need a bucket of lukewarm water soaped with suitable car wash detergent, a clean sponge and a soft touch. Don't use dishwashing detergents, which can eat away at your car's protective clear coat, not to mention the paint underneath.

Wash your vehicle on grass if possible. That way it gets a good watering and it stops soaps and detergents from going down the drains and entering our waterways.

Start from the roof down

Do a section of the car at a time, wetting, washing, rinsing and drying before moving on. This reduces the risk of spotting and streaking

Press gently. You're trying to remove the dirt, not pound it in to your paintwork, risking potential scratching or etching

Dip the sponge in the water bucket regularly to remove all dirt, grit and muck. That way you won't reapply it with the next wipe.

And don't try to make one bucket last the entire car wash. Clean bucket water is crucial

Use different sponges for different sections (like the wheels) to avoid cross-contamination of dirt

Try to dry with a chamois or pure cotton towels in wide, sweeping motions

THE INTERIOR

Remove all maps, CDs, clothes, food, rubbish, mats, glasses, bottles, pens, Minties and seat covers

Using a fresh bucket of lukewarm water containing specialised car cabin detergent, or very mild soap and a clean lint-free cloth, wipe down all surfaces gently

Get the vacuum cleaner out and prod and poke every corner like a hungry bloodhound. Cotton buds are great for getting into hard-to-reach corners.

Do the same with the boot, hatch or wagon area of the car

For windows, avoid using ammonia-containing products. It can damage the tint

Danger! Also avoid ammonia on seatbelts, as it weakens the webbing, causing it to stretch to a life-threatening degree

FOUR TIMES A YEAR -- WAX ON, WAX OFF

If you're a regular daily driver who covers around 20,000km a year, your car can use all the help it can get in our tough climate.

The car-clean professionals charge around \$90 to take the pain and the strain out of all the wax-goes-on, wax-goes-off hard work.

But getting up-close and personal with your vehicle can really help strengthen the automotive bonds too, so don't be too put off by a bit of hard yakka and elbow grease.

WAX WORKS

Make sure you use genuine automotive wax or polish

Divide the car in five manageable sections -- roof, left-side, right-side, front and back, since wax that dries is hard to remove

Add a small, light coat of wax or polish on a folded cloth

Apply in a small, even and circular motion until the area is fully covered

After a few minutes, use another clean cloth to wipe away wax or polish residue in the same motion as it was applied

Always apply and wipe in the same direction for consistency's sake

Make sure neither the car nor the sun's rays are too hot, as it could result in stubborn to remove wax or unsightly streaks and splotches

Not only does general waxing help keep the paint in as good a condition as possible, using a premium wax can actually stop paint deteriorating.

EVERY TWO YEARS -- FULL BODY JOB

Here are the details of 'detailing', detailed below:

Cut and Polish: Cars have many layers of paint. A 'cut' strips one back that should reveal a gloss or lustre akin to when it was new

Carpets are steam cleaned and washed

Seat facings steam cleaned or, if leather or vinyl, treated with special gentle cleansing agents

Final coat of protective hard polish applied

Charges should be around \$230, depending on the size and condition of the vehicle.

The benefits of detailing are compelling. It dramatically improves the appearance of older vehicles inside and out.

The resale value can improve, and small but unsightly surface marks or scratches can often be smoothed out.

As an added bonus, you get that 'new car feeling' which can mean more enjoyment from your vehicle.

Detailing can extend the life of some of the your car's more venerable trim -- like plastic bumpers, dash mouldings and carpets

"Owners should remember that a detailing does remove a layer of paint each time. Now that's okay because most cars have layers upon layers, but doing it too regularly might start stripping away too much paint. That's why a minimum return time of 18 months is recommended."

CLEANING DOS AND DON'TS

When cleaning your pride and joy, make sure you:

- Rinse the car down, allowing the water to soak for a few minutes
- Clean tyres with a soft soapy brush, then the wheels with a dedicated wheel cleaner using a paint brush be sparing with soap.
- The 'less is more' philosophy means less rinsing, less mess and less waste. It's better for your paint finish, too
- fill the bucket with lukewarm, not scalding hot water, as it may burn the paintwork
- use a cleaning mitt over a sponge if you can, as the former has deep fibres that trap dirt away deep inside and away from the paintwork

And whatever you do, don't:

- Use powder cleaners as they may not dissolve fully, and can scratch the paint surface
- Use feather dusters to remove dust, as they trap surface-scratching dirt and soil grains

- Press down too hard, as it may scratch or dissolve the paintwork
- Resort to household cleaners and detergents, as their grease-removing properties can also strip off polish, wax and then paint layer by layer
- Fire high-powered car wash spray hoses directly on your paintwork and chrome trim, as it can flake the finish away in seconds
- Be tempted by automatic car washes, as they can transport the muck from the car before onto your precious bodywork.
- The soap some places use might not be the gentlest on your vehicle either

TOP 10 CLOTH AND CLEANING TIPS

Cloth, velour, corduroy and carpet in cars can be tough to keep clean. Here's how the cleverer car cleaners do it.

1. Coffee/chocolate spills: use cool tap water and a paper towel or clean rag to blot out. A five-minute soak with glass cleaner works on older or more stubborn stains
2. Grease: a paint thinner used with salt applied sparingly and then vacuumed when dried should do it, but test a small area first
3. Ink: hairspray or salt should absorb ink; then brush off
4. Vomit: we don't care how it got there, dilute with soda water or baking soda
5. Blood: treat immediately with laundry starch and cold water; allow it to dry before brushing or vacuuming away
6. Alcohol: dilute with cold water immediately if possible
7. Faeces: a mixture of hot water, dishwashing liquid and a cup of white vinegar; work in with a hard bristle brush, let it sit for half an hour and then blot with thick cloth or rags
8. Faded with age and grime: half a cup of ammonia in 600ml of water should brighten old carpet, but test first in an out-of-the-way corner and don't use on pure wool carpet
9. Frayed carpet: liquid resin helps to keep strands and fibres in place
10. Carpet indentations: place a damp cloth over affected area and then place a low-heat iron on it for only a moment

OLD SOL'S NO FRIEND OF CAR CLEANERS

Always seek shade. The elements are out to get you, so here's what you should do:

- Make sure your car's bodywork is cool. Scorched paintwork may rub off as you wipe. If the car is cool to the touch, it's fine to clean
- Clean away from the direct sun. Its rays may magnify water beads that can harm the paint finish, dry the car too quickly leaving unsightly spots and streaks
- Avoid windy conditions, as dust and sand grains will stick to the wet body surface and scratch as you wipe
- Avoid wet days, as dust and dirt will invariably fall with the rain on your freshly cleaned paintwork. Wet roads also mean muddy streaks and water spray from the car in front

WHEN BIRDS ATTACK

Bird droppings on your car are about as welcome as your in-laws dropping in.

Their extremely acidic discharges (the birds, that is) also contain digestion-aiding gravel that can actually corrode a car's lustrous paintwork in no time.

Whatever you do, attend to it pronto and never scrub or scrape it off. You'll be sure to mark the duco. Instead, get a bottle of soda water, shake it vigorously and spray it onto the bird poo. Allow it to soak in and then hose the mess off.

So having absorbed all this, get out on the weekend and give it a go, if nothing else it is good exercise..