

Detailing Tips and Tricks

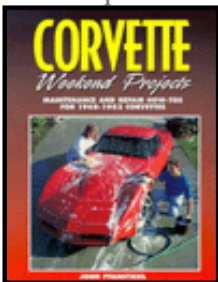
Detailing Tips and Tricks

by Prentice St. Clair

The article below is the property of "Detail in Progress", which is owned by Prentice St. Clair. Mr. St. Clair provides consulting and training in automotive reconditioning. He can be reached directly at pstc875437@aol.com or (619) 701-1100. Please also visit Rightlook.com for more information on training and products for automotive interior care. Mr. St. Clair strongly recommends RaggTop Cleaner and RaggTop Protectant for cloth and vinyl top care on all vehicles. This excellent product is available at Rightlook.com. The Corvette Action Center would like to thank Mr. St. Clair for allowing us to include his work on our site. This article was written with professional automotive detailers in mind.

The professional detailer understands that detailing is both "art and science." The "science" of detailing includes such concrete elements as chemicals, equipment, knowledge of vehicle surfaces, industry standards, and customer requirements. The "art" of detailing is the activity of combining these elements into procedures that work for each specific situation. Success in doing so yields quality service and, ultimately, a delighted customer. This should be one of our primary goals as professionals.

In our quest to achieve quality service, we educate ourselves in the "science" aspects of



detailing by attending seminars, workshops, and conventions; maintaining memberships in professional detailing organizations, and scouring through industry trade magazines. And, of course, we constantly experiment with new products and equipment in an effort to fine-tune our procedures in such a way as to optimize efficiency and effectiveness. "Efficiency" is a measure of the quickness of the procedure whereas "effectiveness" is a measure of how well the procedure actually works. Obviously, anything that increases either of these measures is of great benefit to us and our customers.

Surprisingly, however, I have found that some of the best tips and ideas have come from informal chats with other detailers, both at seminars and during visits to their shops. The remainder of this article is dedicated to some of the tips and time-saving ideas that have worked well for me over the years. Some of this stuff may be standard procedure for you. Some of it may seem silly or

impractical at first glance. However, I urge you to try the new ideas and tips--you may just find that, after you have gone beyond the "newness" of the procedure, you save yourself some time or yield superior results in the same amount of time. Either way, your bottom line will increase!

Interior

When cleaning carpets and upholstery, start with the driver's area first. It is then more likely that this area will be dry when the customer takes possession of the vehicle.

Clean windows after cleaning everything else inside, thus preventing soiling of the windows while doing the dirty work of cleaning door panels and headliners, et cetera. Do your interior dressing and conditioning after window cleaning so as to avoid tracking dressing onto the windows while wiping them.

When cleaning windows, first lower the windows slightly and clean the top edge of the window pane. Then fully close and clean the remainder of the window.

Be careful not to get any of your favorite interior cleaner on the clear plastic panel that cover the instrument panels. These cleaners can spot or fog the plastic.

In heavy carpet soiling situations or if there has been a spill between the seats, it is often easier to remove the seat completely from the vehicle, allowing excellent access to the soiled area for more thorough cleaning. I have found that, especially in neglected interiors, the time it takes to remove the driver and passenger seats is easily made up by the ease of access to the interior of the vehicle during the heavy cleaning that is necessary in these situations.

Be careful to check for wire harnesses under the seat. These usually come out of the carpeting directly under the seat and simply unplug.

Of course, be sure to re-plug the harnesses and securely re-tighten the seat upon re-installation.

Always rinse mats, carpeting, and upholstery after cleaning them to remove any cleaner residue. This residue will simply attract more dirt if left in the material. That is, the material will stay cleaner longer if rinsed.

Engine Bay

Clean the engine bay before washing the vehicle so that any grease and dirt that lands on the vehicle during engine bay cleaning will simply be washed off during the wash step.

Drape wet towels over the front fenders to protect the paint from the spotting and streaking that can occur when using strong cleaners and degreasers. This also protects against scratching while you lean over the fenders to work the engine bay.

Wear safety goggles and an apron to keep yourself clean and protected.

Especially in foreign cars, the computer and electronic modules are often located in a separate compartment in the upper left- or right- hand corners of the engine bay. Keep water out of this area to reduce the possibility of damage to these components. Instead, wipe them with a damp towel to clean off any dirt or dust.

A dressed engine of course looks incredible, but also attracts dust quickly. To reduce this, wipe off the excess dressing with a clean towel.

Exterior

Wash the lower areas first--wheels, wheel wells, kick panels, et cetera--before washing the rest of the car.

In regular washing situations, especially with darker colored cars, this has been extremely helpful: lightly spray your favorite "quick" liquid wax directly onto the dripping wet painted surfaces after the final rinse. Then dry as normal with a chamois. Finish by lightly buffing the painted surfaces with your finest "wax-off" towel. This will remove any remaining water spots, add some depth to the paint, and leave a great shine.

Always clay at least the horizontal panels (hood, roof, trunk) before waxing or sealing, even in express detailing situations. The impact of this activity is huge--have the customer feel the resulting smoothness--and it only takes a few extra minutes.

Some clay bars can be used during the wash step, using the car wash solution as the lubricant. This is especially effective for vehicles that are detailed frequently because the build-up of fallout between waxings is minimal. However, for heavy fallout or over spray removal, it is best to wash and dry the vehicle and then use the clay bar with the recommended lubricant (usually a "quick" liquid spray wax); this allows you to check your work more carefully.

Dress the trim (all rubber, plastic, or vinyl pieces that are adjacent to painted surfaces) and tires before waxing or sealing. This has two benefits:

- It is much less likely that these surfaces will absorb the wax product, thus greatly reducing the amount of final wax removal in these areas
- It takes much less time to apply the dressing to these areas because there is less worry about getting dressing on the paint--any sloppiness will simply be taken up during the waxing process.

Don't forget to dress the wheel wells by spraying inexpensive or diluted dressing into them. Most wheel wells are lined with black plastic panels or black anti-rust coatings. Both of these materials respond well to even the most inexpensive dressings. Does this seem silly? Next time you are driving at night and your headlights hit a clean car, look at the wheel wells; are they clean and dark black or dirty and light tan? Which one looks better?

There are many ways to distinguish between clearcoat and conventional paint systems. An especially easy way is to take a small amount of your favorite polishing compound on a white rag and rub a small and inconspicuous painted area of the vehicle. If the color of the vehicle comes off on the rag, the paint is conventional. If not, it is most likely clearcoat.

I hope you find these tips helpful. If even one of them saves you some time or helps you achieve superior results, this article will have been a success. Most importantly, share your tips with other detailers and ask them about theirs. If we foster a spirit of "friendly" competition, we will all profit; and certainly, there are plenty of vehicles out there that need the attention of the relatively few truly professional detailers that exist.

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