

Spring Get Ready – 20 Funny but Not-So-Funny Spring Cleaning Tips

Despite the renewed driving excitement of good weather and having the best of intentions, many car owners actually damage their vehicles with every Spring cleaning. Over time, armed with just an old bucket, a bottle of dish detergent, a towel and a can of randomly selected car polish, motorists who really care can achieve results that would make a group of vandals gasp with envy.

In most cases, we manage to do more damage in Spring using our old cleaning techniques than we were dealt by Old Man Winter.

In an effort to help car and truck owners protect, preserve or even restore their vehicles' finishes now that it's time for the annual spring cleaning, Chuck Bennett of Zymöl has developed a list of 20 common errors that can ultimately destroy the paint.

Avoiding these pitfalls can actually make a car or truck thousands of dollars more valuable at trade-in time. And today, cars and trucks are often a family's biggest, or second-biggest, investment. Proper care of the paint has never made more sense.

Here are some of the errors of commission and omission:

1. Do nothing, the rain will wash the car.

For any number of reasons, this has become an increasingly popular option. Many owners think that the presence of a clear coat finish on their car or truck means that they do not have to do anything more than give the vehicle an occasional wash, if that. Actually, the clear coat process does not protect the paint. It is used to add depth and brilliance to the finish. "A clear coat is nothing but paint without pigment," said Bennett. That means it not only should be treated with the same care you would give a color coat of paint, it actually must be treated more carefully as residual salt, salt acids from the road and sand scratches on its surface will dull the apparent brilliance and depth of the color coat underneath. So even with a clear coat finish, a car owner should frequently wash his or her car and properly care for the finish with quality non-abrasive cleaners and natural waxes.

2. Use a one-step polish that claims to eliminate the need to wash the car first.

Failure to wash the car first means that all the salt, surface dirt, salt acid deposits, road tar, mud and silt on the car will be ground right into the paint. That can have a devastating effect on the finish.

3. Bake the car in the Spring sun before washing and waxing it.

By doing this the car owner will not only guarantee having to cope with hard-to-remove water spots, but the hot surface will also give the solvents used in many commercial waxes an opportunity to attack and dissolve the top layer of paint.

4. Let the wax harden onto the paint before removing it.

Some motorists actually drive around waiting for the wax to become really dry (they think hard) before removing it. This delayed removal only gives products that rely on solvents more time to etch the paint. In addition, driving the car before removing the wax means that road grit will be present to scratch the surface when the owner finally does get around to finishing the job.

5. Compound the car before you apply wax, Dad did!

Using any abrasive compounding paste on today's paints will result in costly damage. The compounding material can quickly remove not only oxidized paint, but also enough good paint to expose the primer. At this point, the only solution is to repaint. Clear coats should never be compounded at all with old-style abrasives. If you see a stain or blemish you feel you cannot remove, take your car to a professional who can.

6. Apply as much pressure (elbow grease) as possible while washing and waxing winter off the car.

Fortunately, you do not have to be a champion body builder to get superb results when cleaning a car with good car care products. Using excessive force will only ensure damaged paint and dimpled body panels. A soft touch is all that is required to do the job properly.

7. Wax everything, including chrome, rubber and vinyl surfaces.

Chrome needs oxygen to preserve its shine, so covering it with wax helps to assure pitting and bluing of the surface. As for rubber and vinyl trim, the wax will turn them an ugly white when it bleaches out. And it will bleach out. Just take the time to find the right products and never use abrasive polish on Chrome.

8. Use incorrect products.

Caring for today's new paints requires special products. While polishes that might have been acceptable in the past may appear to be the same as the newer products, they are not. Unfortunately, many older formulations are still available and are often sold at bargain-basement prices. Cheap out on your Spring cleaning products and you may have to pay later in the form of expensive repairs.

9. Ignore paint chips and scratches accumulated in winter.

These gaps in the painted surface are ugly and encourage surface rusting that is not covered by any manufacturer's rust protection warranty. Using the proper touch-up paint promptly and properly will maintain the appearance of the vehicle for years to come.

10. Wash and wax only Spring and Fall.

The resulting appearance will significantly reduce the need for theft protection devices. While not as effective as driving your new car or truck off a cliff, these approaches to Spring car finish care can still cause a great deal of damage. They can make your car look much older than it really is and cost you hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars at trade-in time.

11. Wear Plenty of Jewelry.

Rings, bracelets and watches can all leave scratches during the washing, cleaning and waxing process. Of course, those scratches can be the stuff of which memories are made. The deep gouges jewelry leaves in the finish will be there forever, or until the car is repainted. That scratch on the hood could always remind you of your class ring. Then again, simply wearing the class ring should be able to do that for you, too, without reducing the value of your vehicle.

12. Wear clothing with sharp buttons and a belt with a big buckle.

The scratches these leave will be deep and lasting. However, for car owners who prefer not to cause this type of damage to the paint, avoiding metal buttons and either remove your belt or cover the belt buckle with a small towel to eliminate this source of scratches and gouges.

13. Use poorly constructed towels or cheap microwipes.

Towels with low tufting count can leave literally thousands of fine scratches in the paint. They may not be immediately apparent, but they will be there, and as the gloss of the wax recedes with time, they will become more and more visible. Even new cotton towels can present problems. To make them look new at the end of the manufacturing process towel makers often treat the terry cloth with chemicals that can leave streaks or even damage the paint. When choosing microwipes do not use harsh, cheap brands. Pick out soft, thick microwipes and never rub hard.

14. Bunch-up the towel or microwipe used for cleaning, waxing or buffing.

Instead of making sure the cloth is folded flat, roll it up in a crumpled ball. This will ensure plenty of edges, some of which can actually scratch the finish. This can be particularly effective if the towel binding is made of synthetic fibers or has been chemically treated.

15. Use a power buffer.

Ah... Spring power tool sales! There are few tools that can do more damage in the hands of the unskilled. And sometimes, even skilled operators can damage paint when they are armed with a power buffer. The most common problems occur where the design of the car results in sharp creases in the painted panel. These can quickly be "burned" by an enthusiastic buffer operator. Buffers, even orbital buffers, can also leave swirl marks. These ugly swirls will show onlookers that the car owner is doing very well, economically. Either he can afford to buy a buffer or he can hire someone inexperienced to care for his car who has one. Spring power tool sales should be reduced to lawnmowers and sprinklers.

16. Use circular motions when applying cleaners and waxes by hand.

This can be almost as good as giving a power buffer to an unskilled user. The circular motions will leave their marks in the finish. Using straight, back and forth motions, on the other hand, will leave no trace in the paint. Instead these straight motions will give the finish a clear, glass-like appearance and help restore a new-car look.

17. Ignore problem areas.

Every car has them. A stone chip there, bird droppings here, water spots there and perhaps salt acid etchings everywhere. In addition, acids from the catalytic converter, part of the exhaust and emission control systems of the vehicle in front of you, can leave their marks on the fenders and hood of your car. These require additional attention to remove, and taking the time to do it is well worth it, in the opinion of many owners. But why bother? Doing the job right could add 10 or even 20 minutes to the job. Work smart and slowly while you enjoy the Spring weather.

18. Don't read instructions.

Hey, what could the people who made the product possibly know about its application and use? Right?

19. Clean, then don't wax.

Using a cleaner properly really gets the car clean and shiny. So, why bother to wax? It only takes more time and within a few months (Fall), the wax will have to be reapplied. Besides, the high level of protection quality wax affords the paint is overblown. Isn't it?

20. Don't care, the weather is warm and the days are long.

Why bother. After all, the average new car only costs \$29,900. And the average truck or sport utility vehicle is only \$10,000-\$12,000 more than that. And, failing to keep up the appearance of the car will usually cost no more than a few thousand in lower resale values over two or three years. Who needs that kind of money? And just think of the joy of driving an almost-new car that looks far older than it really is!

Spring means it's time to Clean Your Car!

For more information about Zymöl and Zymöl products contact your Zymöl Licensed Detailer or Authorised Reseller today!