



PREPARE YOUR VEHICLE FOR SALE

A properly detailed vehicle can add thousands of dollars to its sale price. Professional detailers have developed their own tricks of the trade for everything from vehicle washing to cleaning windows, we hope these suggestions will help you to prepare your vehicle for its auction sale.

Where to Start

The interior is a good starting point, so the dust and dirt you brush out won't settle on a pristine exterior. Remove any floor mats and give the carpeting and upholstery a good vacuuming. Also vacuum the dash and rear parcel shelf. Move the front seats full fore and aft to get to all the accumulated dirt and loose change. If the carpets are clean except for a minor stain or two, use a foaming cleaner to get them out. Saturate the stain with cleaner, working it in with a damp sponge. Let it sit awhile and then blot it out with paper towels or a dry cotton cloth. Repeat if necessary, and then go over the area with a damp sponge before final blotting. Don't oversaturate the carpet and risk getting mildew. You can repair burns and holes in your carpet by cutting out the offending area with a razor blade or scissors. Then cut a similar-size piece from a hidden spot, such as underneath the seat, and cement it in place using a water-resistant adhesive. Blend in the repair by brushing the nap.

Wash the floor mats, if they're rubber, and apply a dressing that does not leave a slippery finish, for obvious reasons. Clean interior hard surfaces with a damp cloth and a mild all-purpose cleaner such as Simple Green, diluted about 10:1. If you have vinyl-covered seats, use a conditioner made for that material. Avoid products that give a high-gloss, slippery surface, so passengers won't feel like they're on a roller coaster. If you have leather upholstery, dress the surfaces with a leather conditioner. Never use a vinyl product on leather. Worn or torn areas of vinyl can be repaired using kits made for this purpose that are available at auto supply stores. Repairs are made with a patch that lets you match the color and grain of your upholstery. Worn areas of leather can be touched up with dyes or a high-grade shoe polish. Just make sure you match the color as closely as possible.

The dash presents a special challenge, with buttons, crevices and bezels that you can't get to with a cleaning rag. You can blast dust and dirt from these areas by using small cans of compressed air made for cleaning camera and computer equipment. Cotton swabs also work well here. Pay attention to the cleaning products you use on your dash. If your dash has a flat finish, don't use a product on it that will leave you facing a shiny gloss. Clean air vent grilles with cotton swabs and brighten them up by misting on some spray-on vinyl/rubber dressing or accent spray—just a touch. You can also use these products to cover up light scuff marks on wood trim. Spray the stuff on a soft towel and then apply it to the wood.

Clean glass or plastic gauge lenses with a glass or plastic cleaner, not wax. Pull off any removable knobs to clean the bezels underneath. Ever wonder where the haze on the inside of your windshield comes from since you don't smoke? It consists of plastisols given off as the



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plastics used in many new cars slowly cure. Not to worry—a good glass cleaner should remove it. If your windows are really cruddy, you may have to resort to stronger measures, such as scrubbing with 4-ought steel wool.

If you have aftermarket window tint film, it may be degraded by cleaners that contain ammonia or vinegar. Factory tinting is in the glass and is not affected by these cleaners. One trick used by some detailers for the final touch on window glass is to rinse it down with seltzer and do a final wipe with a ball of crumpled newspaper.

When it comes to first impressions, nothing makes a hit like a jewel finish. But this is possible only after any paint problems are corrected. Just about all finishes today are a 2-step (color) basecoat and a protective clearcoat. The top clearcoat is only about 2-3 mils thick, and when it gets scratched or abraded it refracts light and the color coat underneath doesn't shine through clearly. It's like looking through a scratched or foggy lens.

To evaluate your paint, first wash your vehicle. Work in the shade and make sure the surface is cool. Use a carwash soap, not a household detergent, and work in sections, from the top down. The lower panels tend to accumulate more abrasive dirt. To do a final rinse, remove the spray head from the hose and flood the finish. The water will tend to run off in sheets, minimizing spotting. Dry with a good-quality chamois or a soft thick-nap terry cloth towel.

Don't forget the wheel wells. Get the crud out with an all-purpose cleaner and a good high-pressure dousing. After you've finished washing your car, apply a vinyl dressing to add some snap to the wells. Wash the wheels (make sure they're cool) with a brush made for this purpose, but do not use acid-based cleaners on polished alloy wheels or wheels that are clear-coated. You can use these cleaners on rough-textured alloy wheels. Chrome wheels can be gleamed up with metal polish or glass cleaner.

After washing the car, inspect the paint. Stains and scratches can be attacked with a good clearcoat-safe cleaner. The worse the problem, the more aggressive the cleaner needed. Start off with the least abrasive product and gradually move to coarser cleaners as required. Then machine buff.

Polishing and/or waxing is next. Be sure to include doorjambs, and the areas beneath door hinges and behind bumpers. Minor blemishes may be neutralized by wrapping a cotton cloth around your index finger and burnishing the polish into the finish. Polish not only gives the finish its gloss, but it feeds the paint with oils to prevent it from drying out. Polymers in the polish fill in minute scratches in the clearcoat layer, restoring its clarity. If you machine-buff the polish/wax to a high luster, go with an orbital rather than a rotary model, which would be more likely to burn the paint. Treat the plastic chrome on today's cars as if it were a painted surface and protect it with a light coat of wax.



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Avoid getting wax or polish on rubber and flat black plastic areas (clean them with a nongloss product), door handles and emblems. If you do get a wax stain on rubber trim, spray it with a mist-and-wipe product and wipe it down with a terry cloth towel. If that doesn't do the trick, this usually works: Microwave some peanut butter and apply it to the stain with a soft toothbrush. Peanut butter's oils dissolve the wax and it's abrasive enough to lift the stain (but it can stick to the roof of your car). If you get a polish/wax residue around emblems or in crevices, break out the cotton swabs and toothbrushes.

It's important that you first wet the area with a mist-and-wipe product such as Meguiar's Quick Detailer. Never brush on a dry surface.

Moving under-hood, protect electronic components by wrapping them in plastic. Then spray on a diluted all-purpose cleaner, hosing it off with light water pressure. Vinyl/rubber protectant will dress up non-metal areas. Let it soak in if you like the glossy look, or wipe it on and off for a more matte finish.

All that's left now are the tires. Clean them first—whitewall tire cleaner works even on black-walls – and then apply tire dressing. Here again, to get a gloss finish let the product soak in, or for a matte look wipe it on and off with a cotton cloth. Be sure the tires are dry before driving off, or you'll spatter your nice shiny finish. And maybe even your neighbor.

We hope these suggestions will help you prepare your vehicle for a successful sale.