

# Interior Cleaning, Absorbant Surface Treatment

By IRENE BERNARDO  
MCA Member Number 22426

With the information you have accumulated from Parts One and Two of this detailing series, you can finish the exterior of your automobile by paying some additional attention to the trim.

Exterior rubber and vinyl deteriorates rapidly, losing all surface moisture and eventually becoming very dull or even white.

The sun isn't the only villain. Extreme temperature variations place stress on these flexible materials. Sometimes, the well-meaning enthusiast accelerates the process by simply cleaning or treating.

Detergents and sodium in the wash solution, and formaldehyde (found in today's vinyl preparations), play havoc with these delicate surfaces. These popular products do more damage than all of the sunny days put together.

With the addition of our old enemy, "petro-chemical solvents," the spray bottle becomes a "loaded gun" and you become a "killer" with every shot!

The moisture and chemical balance in the vinyl and rubber has to be maintained if they are to remain flexible and retain their black satin luster. With the use of a fine natural oil solution the moisture is restored through absorption.

## INTERIOR CLEANING/TREATMENT

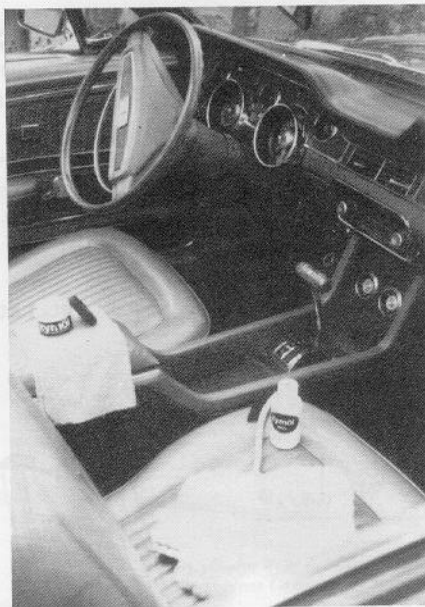
Let's face it, this is the area most enthusiasts treat as an afterthought. Even seasoned concours competitors make the same common mistakes as the automobile owner and the detailer.

The key word is "clean." The dictionary defines it as "free from dirt or irrelevant substances," or the verb form, "to remove foreign or superfluous material from." A beautiful, healthy, pleasant smelling interior is your goal, and there are simple rules you follow to become an expert in this form of housekeeping. Yes, men, this is housekeeping! I'm very good at it, so pay close attention!

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Step one is mental attitude. The interior is a major part of your automobile. It is equal in importance to the exterior and deteriorates much more rapidly. When restoring an antique or classic car, what parts are the most difficult and expensive to replace? Armed with this knowledge, it immediately becomes a priority to "maintain that headliner," and to "protect that dash."

Step two is the actual washing. I use the word "wash" not only because it is synonymous with "clean," but I mean it



literally. You must remove the dirt and impurities. Now I will divulge the secret arsenal of the "prepared automobile housekeeper."

In order of use:

1. A good vacuum (not cordless) with attachments and a small detail brush.
2. An industrial strength carpet cleaner (not to be used on re-dyed carpet), several large terry bath towels, and a plastic bristle brush with a long handle.
3. A non-ammonia window cleaner and several old diapers.
4. A bowl of warm water containing a non-detergent, tallow soap/oil-based wash mixture and a wash cloth; a second bowl of clean rinse water and wash cloth, and a terry towel for drying.
5. Q-tips.
6. Peanut oil.
7. A non-solvent based vinyl treatment.
8. A non-solvent based leather treatment.
9. A non-solvent based, non-abrasive detail wax.

Before you panic, remember that I am writing about detailing, not maintenance.

## CARPET

Modern carpets are mostly plastic fiber, making them wear and water resistant, and color-fast.

Cleaning your mats may be as simple as taking them to a car wash and using the high-pressure gun to clean and rinse them. Be sure to take a garbage bag, unless you carry around a portable water vacuum, or plan to spend the afternoon watching the mats dry.

You will *have* to use a commercial cleaner on soiled carpet. I know, you're thinking, "Did I read that correctly?" I hate to admit that I haven't found a substitute for harsh chemical solvents to completely remove stains from automobile carpets. Even though I admit this, I still remember not to use these chemicals on re-dyed carpet and I always use appropriate cleaners for a particular fiber.

After vigorously vacuuming the carpet (this means moving the seats full forward and backward), use the slender, high-suction attachment to reach up behind the pedal extensions, under the loose carpet, and between the seats and console. You may also use this attachment in your glove box, ash trays, and other hard-to-reach areas.

The detail brush will loosen and expose dirt particles that the attachment will not reach. This procedure works especially well on the upholstery seams and under the welts. You will be amazed at the "crud" under your welts! (What an obscure thought).

When the vacuuming is done, wash your carpet with the cleaner and stiff brush. You will be glad of the long handle. Place the bath towels over your carpet to aid in drying and to protect it during the remaining procedures.

## WINDOWS

Everyone hates the window cleaning ritual because it is the most difficult part of the car to reach and the area most likely to remain imperfect, no matter how many times you redo ... and redo ... and redo. You should clean the inside of the windows *before* working on the vinyl and upholstery, to avoid re-treatment if you accidentally drip some cleaner. There is a glass cleaner (now available) without ammonia, that is superior to vinegar.

## VINYL AND PLASTIC

Do you want to create a miracle with simple wash water? Wring out the wash cloth from the natural tallow soap/oil-based wash solution, and clean all of the vinyl, plastic and wood trim.

Use the Q-tips to "wash" the air vents and push buttons. Remember, we want to remove dirt and grease, not rub it into the surface.

If those surfaces are clogged with layers of previously applied vinyl treatment, and they are not coming clean with your wash solution, grab the peanut oil. It will soften the "build-up" and enable you to remove it with a terry towel.

After washing, use the damp rinse cloth

The Mustang Times/May, 1991

for a "once over" and towel dry. Unless it seems brittle, a noticeably damaged surface may not be permanent. It will just take a little more effort to restore the depleted moisture.

Vinyl, unlike leather, has very small pores, making the application of common treatment solutions useless. They simply will not penetrate the surface. (This includes heavy oils, such as baby oil). These treatments soon evaporate, stealing the vinyl's valuable moisture. Even worse are the products containing the dreaded petro-chemicals. They actually change the chemical balance of the vinyl and accelerate deterioration. Use only a non-solvent, non-formaldehyde oil-based feeding product.

This "milk like" solution will penetrate the surface, restoring original moisture. A completely "moisture starved" surface may need 10 to 15 coats to completely restore the satin sheen. Allow the solution to penetrate for 10 minutes between applications and lightly buff each time. The absorption rate will be your guide to the number of applications required.

Be fastidious when working with oil-based solutions. Use a Q-tip when working next to glass. It only takes a "touch" of misplaced oil to cause smears all over the window the next time you clean it. Don't make the common, disastrous error of applying the treatment on the flat plastic surfaces, air vents, or knobs. Plastic does not absorb oil and will only smear and become a dust collector. When a concours judge runs a white glove over your plastic or sticks a Q-tip into your air vent, you quickly learn this rule.

#### CLOTH AND LEATHER

Let us turn our attention to the other materials making up the interior of an automobile.

Cloth upholstery and canvas tops can be cleaned with a solvent-based cleaner (at the cost of a shorter life-span), but an organic alternative is now available. It will greatly reduce fiber and thread deterioration and eliminates the toxic fumes emitted by solvent cleaners.

A good rule with cloth upholstery — never eat or drink in the car!

Leather is the only "once living" part of your automobile (aside from the wood trim) and is unquestionably the most delicate. The denaturing process of tanning permanently removes precious moisture it so abundantly contained. If you do not restore that moisture with fine oils, the life expectancy of your "brand new" leather will be measured in months, not years.

The skins also, originally contained collagen (the main element of tissue) and it

should be replaced to maintain strength. Finally, a sun block should be applied for protection. This formula for healthy skin has been around for years in fine cosmetics, and is now available for your automobile.

The most unbelievable use of a petro-chemical solvent in a car care product has to be in leather cleaners and treatments. It is literally the equivalent of washing and soaking your hands in gasoline!

If that wasn't enough, some products contain turpentine and alcohol. So-called commercial "leather cleaners" do not make sense to me. Where is the logic in grinding dirt particles, body oils, and environmental contaminants into the soft surface and seams? I believe it makes more sense to remove these impurities before you treat the leather.

The most gentle method I know is to wash the surface with a soft damp cloth, using the tallow soap/oil-based wash solution, then damp-rinse and dry. If this is done regularly, the leather will never reach the stage where it is so soiled you might be tempted to by a solvent cleaner.

Apply the natural oil-based, collagen treatment on warm, flexible leather. Because the pores need to be "open" for proper penetration, you may use a hair dryer to warm the surface during cool weather.

This rich mixture may be applied as often as you wish without fear of damaging the leather, and being a natural product, it will enhance the heavenly aroma. When the applications are sufficient to make an improvement in the texture of the surface, buff with a terry towel, being careful not to rub across any crazed areas. All of this careful attention will not go unrewarded. Your leather will be able to withstand everyday use and will meet constant temperature changes without a hitch.

#### WOOD TRIM

Our final treatment, or protection procedure, deals with the wood trim.

If you own an antique or classic car, the wood will most likely be presented in a natural finish. Today's "experts" have decided that heavily clear-coated wood is an improvement on nature, so we now have a high gloss finish to maintain and protect from scratching.

The logical answer is a non-solvent based, high percentage Carnauba wax. It contains natural oils for feeding and provides excellent protection with the super-hard Carnauba wax.

#### FINAL TOUCH-UP

Give the floors a quick "once over" with the vacuum (after removing the towels) and if it's a concours car, use the sticky tape to pick up virtually every speck of left-over lint.

including often missed places, such as the tiny brushes on the door window compartment.

#### A FINAL WORD

Writing this series has literally been a labor of love. The joy of working with so many fine automobiles and developing wonderful new friends, has made my job so rewarding and often more interesting than most.

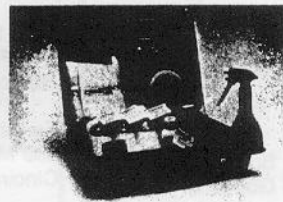
I hope you will experience some of this satisfaction as you experiment with my detailing techniques. If you already consider yourself an expert, let me leave you with this thought:

I was once penalized by an "expert" concours judge for not removing the manufacturer's lubrication from my seat tracks. When I questioned the judge, the reply was: "After the competition you can put it back!"

*(In addition to their Zymol distributorship, Irene Bernardo and her husband, John, participate in shows, driving events and conduct car enhancement clinics, with more than 20 car clubs each year. They also professionally prepare privately owned automobiles for concours competition. In 1990 they became involved with the American classic car circuit by adding the substantial Mustang and Corvette markets. The Bernadors feel they share the common goal of a long and fruitful relationship with their fellow enthusiasts.)*

**(Editor's Note: The Mustang Times would like to thank Irene Bernardo for the effort she put forth in writing this three-part series on detailing. We appreciate her interest in providing this valuable information to our readers.)**

## zymöl



Zymöl's luscious collagen based leather conditioner and delicate oil based vinyl/rubber conditioner are 100% natural penetrating lotions that restore original moisture and protect against sunlight exposure and surface abrasion. Most competitive products contain petro-chemicals, sodium, turpentine or formaldehyde!

**CORCO WEST, INC.**  
Authorized Distributor  
**1-800-533-5743**