

It's time to get that grit and grime off your car

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There's a lot of confusion about the best way to get a car looking good after a winter of infrequent car washing, so it should be no surprise that even the professionals don't agree.

Or, as Al DeLaGarza, the service manager at Kuettner Olds-GMC Truck-Mitsubishi in Waukesha put it, "ask five different people and you'll get five different answers."

Only one consistent theme emerged in a survey of several area detailers and auto supply retailers. Unless you have inherited your father's car, don't use your father's car wax. Most cars today come from the manufacturer with a clear coat finish, which traditional waxes will damage.

When buying a wax or any other product that will be applied to the finish of the car, look for products that advertise themselves as safe for clear coat finishes. To be doubly sure, says Dennis Kudronowicz, the general manager at Falls Auto Parts and Supplies in Menomonee Falls, make sure the wax has no silicone in it. It's the silicone in old-fashioned waxes that cause scratches in late model finishes and even magnifies old scratches.

After that, there are a wide range of tips on cleaning your car. One retailer said to use hot water and soaps made especially for cars. Dish soap might have chemicals that damage the wax job and paint. Another detailer said that dish soap works fine and that cold water from the hose should be used because it hardens the wax.

Still, the survey did turn up lots of sensible advice, some of which might be obvious and some of which might be new to car owners.

Gary Mortag, a service manager at Sommer's Buick-Pontiac in Mequon, reminds do-it-yourselfers to wash the car well before waxing and to use a clean mitt. Waxing a dirty car will grind the dirt in and damage the finish and paint. Kudronowicz says to avoid mitts made from acrylic, because they will scratch the fin-

ish. Instead use a soft mop-head type of mitt.

To avoid scratches, DeLaGarza says it's important not to be stingy with the wash rags, but to constantly turn them over and to use many clean rags. Once the rag has been wiped across a dirty car, he said, "from that point on, it becomes sandpaper."

He also advises car owners not to be stingy with the water. Rinse the rags a lot, even if it means making up a clean bucket of water, and let the garden hose do the work of cleaning the car. "You want to carry the water as much as possible with water action rather than scrubbing action," he said.

For windows, use a glass cleaner and a lint free rag, says Kudronowicz. Mortag also says to avoid getting wax on the glass, and, if you do, to get it off right away with a strong soap that will cut through the wax. He says that some people use steel wool or razor blades to remove wax from glass, but he strongly advises against it. It may not seem like the glass is being damaged, but, he says, very severe scratching will become apparent the next time the driver is inside the car and sees the sun coming through the window.

On the interior, Mortag advises caution about any kind of chemicals. "You never know what they're going to do to the fabrics or the leather," he said. The best way he knows to clean the interior is by steam cleaning it, which might be beyond the capacities of many do-it-yourselfers (see sidebar.)

DeLaGarza says that window cleaner works well on vinyl followed by a commercial vinyl dressing, though some people don't like the shiny appearance. He also said that "the most important thing is vacuuming." Even though the ceiling of the interior may not be dirty, it carries lots of dust and odors, so be sure to vacuum it also.

Finally, Kudronowicz reminds car owners not to put a protectant on the interior surfaces unless those surfaces are clean. That just seals dirt in and makes it more difficult to clean later.