

# AUTOMOTIVE

## How to keep a car showroom new

Regular washings are the key to maintaining appearance and value

By Thomas Hogan

Keeping your car clean and shiny is more than just cosmetics. It's an important part of maintaining your car's value and performance.

The paint, for instance, is the only barrier between its steel panels and a car's worst enemy — rust. Aside from

good except for really dirty front wheels. And it's hard to get off once it's built up."

Freeland advises using a wheel cleaner (get the kind designed for all types of wheels at an auto parts store) to remove buildup grime and grit. If that doesn't work, he says, try a slightly stronger product. Use a fine mist spray and work from the top of the wheel down. Repeat the process if the first application left any dirt or residue.

For cleaning tires, a household cleanser and scrub brush works well. But don't scrub the alloy wheels or wheel covers (hubcaps) while you're

at it or you may remove the finish. Be sure to rinse off all traces of the cleanser.

A commercial car wash detergent is the best product for washing your car, according to Freeland. He says a mild liquid dish washing soap can be used in a pinch but automotive experts do not recommend it for the safest, most effective cleaning.

To make car washing easy, first assemble all the tools you'll need: a hose with an adjustable nozzle, a bucket of sudsy water (use hot water in cold weather for extra cleaning power), a cleaning mitt (available in

auto supply stores) or a soft cloth, a small fluffy towel for drying, wheel cleaner, glass cleaner, scrub brush, paper towels, a small bristle brush, vacuum cleaner and a vinyl or leather cleaner. Sometimes an old toothbrush is handy to get in tight places. And a commercial quality tar remover can be helpful, too.

"Spend a little extra and get a pistol-type garden nozzle for your hose," Freeland advises. "They usually have vinyl or rubber insulation and better misting spray."

Now you're ready to start washing. Here's the Ron Freeland way:

Fill the bucket half full of warm water, add two or three tablespoons of detergent (the directions usually tell you to use too much, he says) and take the bucket outside to the washing area. With the hose set on mist, spray water into the bucket until it's full of



obvious safety problems, a rusty automobile is difficult if not impossible to sell for a good price.

A dirty car is more prone to damage from rust because the oxidation process can continue undetected under muddy areas until irreversible harm is done.

Similarly, if a car's upholstery or carpeting gets dirty, tattered or stained, its resale value drops accordingly.

So what are the best ways of maintaining your car's appearance and value?

I posed this question to Ron Freeland, a friend in suburban Baltimore whose cars always look showroom new, even after years of commuting to work each day.

"The whole process is called detailing," Freeland explained. "The things that make a car really beautiful is the details. Today's cars have great paint and you don't have to wax or polish them too much."

"The biggest thing is washing your car on a regular basis," he said, adding that clean wheels are very important. "A lot of people don't wash their tires and wheels. They don't necessarily need to be scrubbed but they should be thoroughly washed each week."

Dust and dirt from disc brakes, especially on front wheels where the brakes provide about 70 percent of the stopping power, can be a real problem, Freeland said.

"You'll see lots of expensive cars like BMW's and Mercedes that look results in a clean but less shiny appearance."

He suggests removing and cleaning the floor mats and then vacuuming all carpeting and seats. "A small brush can be used to loosen embedded dirt so it can be picked up easily by the vacuum," he said.

Freeland says he spends about 30 or 40 minutes each week washing his car, which he considers a modest amount of time to protect his investment.

"It all comes down to resale value," he said. "A clean car in excellent condition is always worth more."

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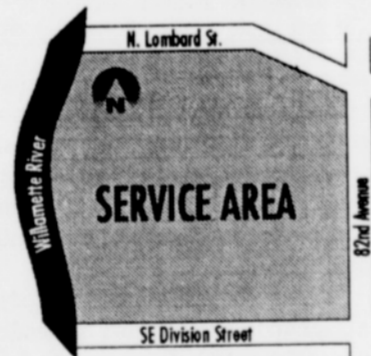
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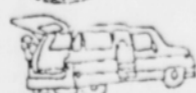
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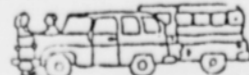
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