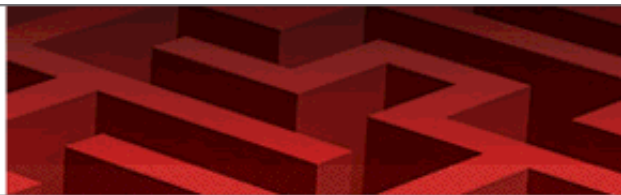


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GEAR

5 Tools to Go Beyond a Basic Car Wash

The ritual of the car wash, once a simple way to splash away a spring day, has become a science involving pressurized air, nifty power buffers and more



SUPPORT HOSE | This clean-cut couple in the 1950s relied on little more than the car-washing basics: gushing water and a pail. *PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES*

By **ERIK SOFGE**

March 25, 2015 2:47 p.m. ET

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE between car washing and car care. The former is what you do begrudgingly and in a hurry. After you finally get around to picking up the ketchup-smearred napkin on your floor mat and clearing out the Snickers wrapper tucked into your cupholder, you take the dutiful drive through your local carwash. The whole thing is just another chore.

Car care, however, is something more. Yes, it entails basic cleaning (vacuuming the interior, slathering the exterior in soap), but it goes further. It's all about lavishing attention on a prized possession. The devout practitioner commits to finding just the right chemical compounds for the job, not to mention the softest sponges, polishing pads and drying towels.

RUMBLE SEAT

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Enthusiasts might seem like preening worrywarts, insisting that car-owners should take multiple passes to remove different kinds of buildup, and carefully towel-dry the car instead of relying on evaporation. But paint jobs are more fragile than they seem. Those innocuous-looking water spots from air-drying can be a sign of corrosion from the minerals and chemicals found in tap water, and scrubbing too hard at a piece of dirt lodged in the clear coat can permanently scratch the color coat beneath.

Not surprisingly, such zealots believe in using the right tools for the job. You don't, for instance, want to wipe down your seats with a general-purpose household cleaner (it could degrade the upholstery). Similarly, rubbing the exterior down with a rough sponge or ratty towel is a no-no that can scratch the paint. Car-care aficionados favor a microfiber towel, for example, that's all about softness (our favorite, the Cobra Supreme Guzzler, could double as a baby blanket). Or a dual-action polisher whose

motor revs high enough to do your clear coat a world of good.

All this pampering does have a practical benefit: It increases the lifespan and resale value of your vehicle. And although it's certainly reasonable to outsource all of this to a professional, there's real satisfaction in beautifying your own ride. For those who want to take car care into their own hands, here are a few key tools.

Black & Decker 20V Max Lithium Flex



Black & Decker 20V Max Lithium Flex PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

With a car-vac, the key is versatility. You want something portable and cordless, not plugged into your car's DC port or hooked into a daisy chain of extension cords. And you need a vac that's sufficiently powerful and fits everywhere, particularly between and under the seats. This model satisfies all of these criteria and more. Its clever compact design nests a 4-foot hose in the handle. And it comes with a range of attachments, including a nub-covered head for lifting pet hair from cloth seats and carpet. We wouldn't recommend trying to clean an entire house or apartment with it—the suction, while impressive, diminishes somewhat when you mount the extensions and stick head—but this vacuum is capable enough to fill the role of a traditional Dustbuster-style hand-held when it's not busy making your car more livable. *\$130, blackanddecker.com*

A car's crevices can be treacherous. Dust and dirt inevitably collect in air vents, the grooves and seams of your infotainment center and other places no vacuum can reach. The tried-and-true way to dislodge such offending particles (for subsequent vacuuming) is with a concentrated blast of air. A simple way to do this is the Industrial

Industrial O2 Hurricane Canless Air System



Industrial O2 Hurricane Canless Air System *PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS*

O2 Hurricane, a battery-powered gadget that expels air at up to 220 mph. Think of it as a chemical-free and more cost-effective alternative to the cans of compressed air that are often used to clean computer gear. The Industrial version of the O2 has enough power to tackle car interiors, and comes with a flexible extension and brush head that are perfect for clearing vents and getting into tight spaces. A 12-minute battery life gives you enough bursts per charge to handle an entire car. *\$110, canlessair.com*

Invisible Glass Reach & Clean Tool



Invisible Glass Reach & Clean Tool *PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS*

Consider the way most people clean the inside of a windshield: Cram a sponge or paper towel into the narrow, hard-to-reach expanse where the glass meets the dashboard. This invariably misses spots and leaves streaks. A better solution? The Invisible Glass Reach & Clean Tool. Humble as it might seem, this is what innovation in car care looks like. Because its hinged surface bends as you clean, conforming to the angle of the windshield, the experience is more comfortable and thorough. And you can quickly swap out a dirty microfiber cleaning cloth for a fresh one (two are included). But the smartest feature of this unassuming tool is its arrow-like shape. That sharp leading edge lets you dig into corners and work at stubborn buildup. Scrubbing might not be recommended when it comes to paint, but windows are fair game. \$15, invisibleglass.com

Meguiar's DA Power System



Meguiar's DA Power System PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

After soaping, rinsing and drying the exterior, most people just walk away from their cars and hope for the best. A better approach? Taking the time to safeguard your automobile's paint job for months at a stretch. This is not difficult. At minimum, you want to polish the clear coat to remove debris, then apply a coat of protective wax. Done by hand, the task is laborious and slow. But the Meguiar's DA Power System makes the undertaking fast and fun. This rotating buffer pad attaches to a standard drill. (Meguiar's recommends using a corded one, but a lithium-ion-battery-powered model, shown here, works, too). There are lots of timesaving polishers out there, including the company's more powerful, pro-level MT300, but the Power System makes the most sense for beginners, since it won't strip away paint, no matter how much pressure you apply. \$60, meguiars.com

Philips GoPure Compact 200 Air Purifier



Philips GoPure Compact 200 Air Purifier PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

Smell is no small part of a car's cleanliness equation. Since odors have a tendency to cling to upholstery, they can make even the shiniest vehicle seem like a tired old beater. Philips's GoPure Compact 200 Air Purifier filters the interior air with a two-speed fan and a multistage filtration process, which includes a HEPA filter for catching dust and bacteria and three HESA filters that absorb odors. The GoPure is powered by the vehicle's 12V DC port and can be set to turn on and off automatically. Although it's larger than most automotive air purifiers, it's designed to work even when tucked under a seat. You can also mount the GoPure to a seat back or dashboard, where the indicator light will keep passengers abreast of the current air quality, with red serving as a not-so-subtle reminder to start cleaning. *\$180, usa.philips.com*

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