

Tires Exterior Rubber and Vinyl Protection

Why use an exterior rubber/vinyl protectant? The two main reasons are to improve the appearance and protect the tire or trim against long term damage. Use a rubber or vinyl protectant on only unpainted rubber or vinyl. Rule # 1: Choose a product compatible with the top surface. A classic example would be the bumper of your car. If you have hard or soft rubber/vinyl, uncoated bumpers or small bumperettes use an exterior rubber/vinyl protectant. In this case the top surface is uncoated rubber or vinyl. If, on the other hand, you have painted flexible bumpers, then use a wax. In this case, the paint is the top surface and does not care what material it is adorning. It is still paint and you must treat it as such.

Appearance: The appearance provided by exterior rubber/vinyl protectants varies from matt to gloss, with lots of stops in between. Some people like a matt or more natural appearance, while others, consider a high gloss shiny look attractive. The choice is according to your personal taste, so when we use terms like matt or gloss they are very subjective. Most high gloss products are based upon raw silicone oil.

Protection: There are two main degrading agents that attack tires and rubber trim. They are UV light waves and ozone. Both of these attack the long hydrocarbon chains of the rubber and, by breaking these bonds, shorten the molecules with resulting loss of elasticity and other problems. Tire manufacturers add two primary sacrificial protectants to the rubber. To protect against UV, they add carbon black. This is why tires dont come in designer colors to match your paint. The carbon black will turn white/gray as it absorbs the UV and dissipates the energy as heat. This is the basis of rubber parts turning gray as they age. To protect against ozone, tire manufacturers add a wax based, sacrificial protectant. The ozone attacks the wax and depletes it. As the tire rolls, additional wax is forced to the surface of the tire. This is referred to as blooming. This blooming refreshes the surface wax protectant. A tire that has not been flexed will have the wax depleted by the ozone and thus begin to degrade and suffer dry rot. The raw silicone oil that is the main ingredient in most of the nationally advertised, auto parts store, high gloss products may actually dissolve the wax and be the cause of premature tire sidewall cracking/failure. The quality tire/rubber dressings should contain a strong UV protectant to bolster the efforts of the carbon black and not contain any raw silicone oil. Many of the nationally advertised rubber and vinyl products also contain formaldehyde. If you plan on having a funeral for your vinyl/rubber, then you may wish to use one of these products.

My personal favorite tire and exterior rubber/vinyl trim protectants are One Grand Exterior Rubber & Vinyl Dressing and 3M Rubber Treatment & Tire Dressing. These are, in my humble opinion, the best non-silicone oil based products available. (We are working closely with a company to help them develop a product that will restore the jet-black patina to tires and exterior rubber/vinyl.) If raw silicone oil based products have been previously applied to the rubber/vinyl, the raw silicone oil has saturated the material. One Grand E.R.V. or 3M Rubber Treatment will help dissolve out the silicone oil (this is good) but do not seem to be able to do so evenly (this is bad). The finish may be slightly splotchy after the first couple of applications. The only solution is to apply several coats about a week apart and the finish will eventually even out.

Application of protectants: Spray or pour a small amount onto a clean, soft, 100% cotton cloth. Wipe on a thin, even coating, allow it to penetrate for a 10-15 minutes and then buff off the excess with another clean, soft 100% cotton cloth. Never spray directly onto the surface as the overspray will land on the paint or wheel or whatever. Applying with a cloth will help avoid uneven coats and splotches. Rubber/vinyl protectants will not usually damage the paint or wheel, but you have to spend a lot of time to remove the overspray. It is easier to avoid the problem by simply using a cloth.

Cleaning: Most rubber/vinyl protectants will gently clean the trim or tires as they protect. If you have dirt or grime that car wash or your favorite rubber/vinyl protectant will not remove, you may want to try a stronger cleaner. (If you have wax residue stains, see the below section on cleaning white wax residue.) Spray or pour a small amount of the cleaner on a clean, soft, 100% cotton terry cloth and gently rub the dirty areas with the saturated section of the cloth. It may take a couple of applications to remove the dirt and grime. Once you have removed all traces of the dirt, wash the trim and surrounding areas thoroughly with car wash. Rinse the area completely with water to remove any traces of solvent and then dry. Finally, apply a protective coating of your favorite rubber protectant and you are done.

One Grand All Purpose Cleaner & Shampoo: A strong, water based heavy duty cleaner.

Meguiar # 39 Heavy Duty Vinyl Cleaner: Deep cleans heavily soiled vinyl and rubber.

P21S Total Auto Wash: Ignore the name, think Citrus Degreaser. A citrus based, biodegradable cleaner for almost anything. My personal favorite.

Cleaning White Wax Residue Stains on Trim: One of the more common problems is white wax residue stains on your exterior rubber or vinyl trim. To remove these stains, simply dampen a small spot of a clean, soft cloth with a wax solvent such as One Grand Tar, Gum & Wax Remover or undiluted Wurth Citrus Degreaser. I use a piece of 100% cotton terry cloth because the texture of the cloth helps remove the wax residue from the millions of tiny depressions in the pebble surface. Either spray a small amount on the cloth or place the cloth over the top of the bottle, hold it in place with your index finger and momentarily invert the bottle to dampen a small spot on the cloth. Rub the white stained area carefully with the solvent saturated section of the cloth to dissolve the wax residue. Repeat as necessary, as it may take several applications of solvent to remove significant amounts of wax residue. If the cloth does not get down into the bottom of these tiny depressions, then you may have to resort to a soft brush. Dampen the stained area with the solvent and gently brush the residue with a soft brush to dig out the remaining residue. Use the brush carefully, as it may scratch your paint. Once you have removed all traces of the residue, wash the trim and surrounding areas thoroughly with car wash. Rinse the area completely with water to remove any traces of solvent and then dry. Finally, apply a protective coating of your favorite rubber protectant and you are done.

To help minimize wax residue stains on your rubber trim, apply a coating of rubber protectant before you wax. This coating will help prevent the wax from adhering to the rubber or vinyl trim and any that does sneak onto the trim may usually be removed with the application of a little more rubber protectant.

One Grand Exterior Rubber & Vinyl Dressing: A matt, low-gloss, finish product for all exterior rubber and vinyl that does not chalk or turn brown. My co-favorite product.

3M Rubber Treatment & Tire Dressing: A rich, emollient oil based conditioner that cleans and restores exterior rubber and vinyl. 3M has a slightly more glossy finish than One Grand, but is better choice to help restore slightly faded rubber trim. My co-favorite product.

Harly Tire Nu: A pump spray product with a medium to high gloss finish. If you like a higher gloss, then this might be your choice.

Lexol Vinylex: A fantastic product for the exterior rubber and vinyl but does not stand up to rain. One rain and it is history. If you have a garage queen then this may be your choice.

Meguiars #40 Vinyl & Rubber Conditioner: A vinyl/rubber cleaner and conditioner. I feel it works better on vinyl than it does on rubber. It leaves a medium-gloss finish.

Sonax Trim Protectant: Cleans and protects exterior vinyl and rubber and leaves a high-gloss finish.

Wurth Rubber Care: An aerosol product designed for the live rubber door gaskets. Will also help clean minor wax residue and restore the black patina to rubber parts, bumper casings and body side moldings.

Zymol Seal: A thick, glycerin rich product designed specifically for live rubber gaskets and seals.

Zymol Tyre Preserve: A waterless, natural cleaner and conditioner that leaves a medium-gloss and helps restore some of the black patina to rubber.

If you have any questions or if you need any further information, please feel free to contact us.

© 1999 - 2003 Car Care Specialties, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Article Viewed: 36847 times

[Close Window](#)

[You must have Adobe Acrobat Reader in order to view the PDF versions of our How-To articles. Get it here. It's FREE.](#)