

Getting rid of Swirls and Spots

Elbow Grease Not Required

by Matt Richter

As cars get older, the paint will take some hits. The two most common problems are swirl marks and water spots, but you can make them go away...more or less.

The swirl marks are from wiping the car while it's dirty, or using bad cleaning techniques when the car is washed. Water spots are pretty much unavoidable on cars that live outside, so learning how to remove these two features is something every car owner should do. The end result is a finish that will look much, much better than when you started.

While I used a dual action compound polisher for this work, you can do it by hand, but I wouldn't recommend it if you have a lot of area to cover. It's a lot of work, and the machine never gets tired. That said, being too aggressive with power tools can ruin paint quickly, so go slowly until you have more experience. Get an instructional DVD and spend time on-line (Griot's Garage has a detailing manual on their web site and there are many detailing forums as well) so that you know what you're going to do before you do it. Richard Lin (OctaneGuy on NAM) is a professional detailer that has been a wealth of information and help whenever I've needed it.

Since my Mini is in pretty good shape, I volunteered my wife's rather neglected '01 Acura MDX to show what a little work can do. I used Griot's Garage Machine Polish #1, #2 and #3 to improve the finish, and it took out almost all the swirl, all but the worst scratches,



Tools

and some of the ruined clear coat on the hood that can only be saved by a visit to the paint shop. With a little practice, you'll be able to polish paint and keep all your cars looking brand new.

Tools – The Porter Cable 7424 dual action compound polisher is the heart of my detailing kit. You'll frequently hear cautions against using a machine polisher on a car finish, because of the risk of burning the paint or rubbing it off the edges, but that refers to the large rotary machines used by professional detailers.

In contrast, the dual-action, or "orbital" polisher is designed for amateur use. The pad rotates as it spins so that it is almost impossible to get too much pressure on any one area. Anyone can use it, and – trust me – it takes nearly all the hard work out of getting a good polish and wax job, as well as speeding it up significantly.

The same orbital polisher is sold through Griot's, with their trademark red trim. The advantage of buying it through Griot's is that



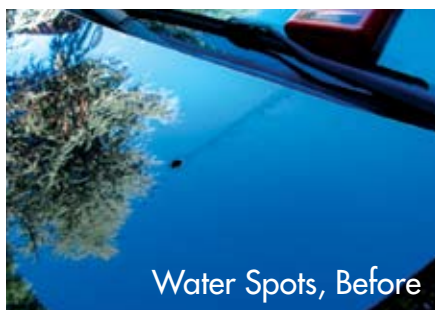
Swirl Marks



Detailing Clay



Before and After



Water Spots, Before



Water Spots, After

you can buy it as part of a complete kit that includes all the pads, bonnets, and detailing products that are designed to work best with a machine polisher.

The polisher uses pads and bonnets designed for use with it, and polishes designed specifically for the higher speed of a machine. I use Machine Polish #1, #2 and #3 from Griot's Garage. Before I start, I use detailing clay and then I finish with a good wax. About the only other things you need to restore your paint are lots of microfiber towels.

My full kit includes a lot more stuff, of course, like products for chrome, plastic and upholstery. All in all, a complete set of detailing supplies can take a bit of cabinet space.

Detailing Clay – My newest best friend! This stuff just takes tons of stuff off the paint. Use a fast detail product like Speed Shine as a lubricant. Do about a square foot at a time, and wipe the area dry after you finish each section to prevent spotting. The dirt in the picture is from about a square foot of the paint, after washing! When you've done one area, you simply fold it over – think Silly Putty – and form it back into a ball, then flatten it to do a new area. When the whole ball starts to look dingy, then replace it, but a ball will do many complete cars before it needs to be replaced.

Swirl Marks – Swirl is the most common type of paint problem, and it's easy to get. It's usually caused by wiping the car when dusty, or cleaning a car with dirty rags or wash water. Watch out for places that give a "free" wash, as they often don't cycle their rags and leave this as a "free" gift!

Before and After – I taped over a 4 in. x 6 in. square on the hood before polishing to get a "before and after" look. While I didn't get every swirl out, I got most of them but the damaged clear coat is beyond polish and needs a paint shop!

Hard Water Spots – Hard water spots are pretty much unavoidable. Whether it's from the washer, the rain,

a sprinkler or whatever, drops will get on the car and leave deposits when they dry. They are common at the washer jets, as the detergents can attach the wax.

Water Spots, After – This is the hood after polishing and wax. No hint of the water spot remains. Note that before I began to work on the area, I removed the window washer nozzles. If it's easy to remove something rather than tape it, I remove it.

Mirror Finish – After cleaning, polishing and waxing, the paint looks like a mirror. For the sides of the car, I used Machine Polish #2 (medium) then #3 (fine) followed with some carnuba wax. The hood was worse, and needed Machine Polish #1 (coarse) to start, as it was in worse shape. *MC²*

A Few Tips to Remember

- Start with knowledge. Get an instructional DVD, read on-line tips and read all your product directions carefully.
- Wash the car carefully. Any dirt left behind will act like sandpaper.
- Use detailing clay to remove bonded contaminants from the paint surface.
- Until you've had some practice with your products and tools, start with less aggressive polishes. It's safer to under-polish than over-polish.
- Use a good paint protectant after polishing (there are so many products, you can no longer just say wax) to protect the surface.



A Mirror Finish

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