

Excerpt from

# Introduction to Automotive Detailing

# Preview

The following is a sample excerpt from a study unit converted into the Adobe Acrobat format. A sample online exam is available for this excerpt.

The sample text, which is from the Auto Detailer program, provides basic information about automotive detailing. You'll learn what detailing really is and who does it. Also, you'll examine why a clean automobile lasts longer than a dirty one. You'll learn the importance of properly removing dirt from all the surfaces of a vehicle—painted, vinyl, plastic, leather, rubber, and cloth.

Be aware that this excerpt is just a sample of the larger study unit. In the study unit on which this excerpt is based, you go on to learn the essentials of working safely. Part of being a professional in any career is being able to work safely and efficiently. In the study unit, you find out how to arrange your work area so you can always work safely and professionally.

The unit ends with an overview of the various career opportunities available to a professional detailer. It describes the advantages and disadvantages in the most common career avenues. You also learn the best ways to market yourself to prospective employers and customers.

After reading through the excerpt, feel free to take the [sample exam](#) based on this introductory material.

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# Introduction to Automotive Detailing

## INTRODUCTION TO AUTOMOTIVE DETAILING

This program is about auto detailing, a profession that has grown tremendously in the past few years and one that will continue to grow in the future. There are many reasons for the growth of this industry. The most significant reasons are

- People are keeping their cars longer.
- Newer cars are lasting longer.
- New car prices have risen year after year, as have used car prices.

In the past, the style and looks of cars changed each model year. It was easy to tell a new car by the way it looked. One- or two-year-old cars looked old simply because of their style. New styles were what sold new cars. Just seeing what the new cars would look like brought on some excitement. Normally, the car manufacturers just changed the style of the car. They may have added some new features now and then, but they often changed nothing but the car's outward appearance.

As time went on, automobile manufacturers were forced to focus on things other than style. Laws were passed that made car manufacturers focus their attention on improving fuel consumption, decreasing pollution, increasing durability, and enhancing safety. All of these concerns translated into higher manufacturing costs. Because changing body styles each year was also very costly, the car makers decided to spend their money meeting the government mandates and to keep the same basic style of the cars year after year. Eventually, unless there was a major restyling effort, only an automotive enthusiast would spot the subtle differences in style between a brand new car and one that was a couple years old.

What does this have to with detailing? Quite a bit, actually. Because body styles haven't been changing very much from one year to the next, an older car may still look like a new car if the paint, upholstery, and trim are properly cared for (Figure 1). Detailing can help make older cars look new. With the high price of today's new cars, which run well for long periods of time, why buy a new one before you have to? Keep an older car looking new, and most people won't even notice what year it really is!

Maintaining the new, high-tech cars of today requires professionals to be knowledgeable in the new technology. It's true not only for the technicians who maintain the mechanical and electrical systems of the cars, but also for the trained professionals who take care of the cars' appearance. Detailing isn't just cleaning and waxing a car. A professional detailer has the equipment, knowledge, and dedication to completely clean and treat all parts of the car so that it can last and look good for a long time.

**FIGURE 1**—Detailing can make even a very old car look new.



As you learn more about detailing, you'll discover many reasons why detailing is more than just cleaning and waxing a car. Anyone can clean and wax cars, but most are doing it wrong. You'll learn how to do it correctly and with the correct materials. You'll also learn how to clean and treat everything you see when you look at a car. Using the information in this program, you'll be able to start a rewarding career as a professional detailer.

## DEFINITION OF DETAILING

As the name implies, *detailing* involves details. Nearly all cars have blemishes or defects that prevent them from looking their best. Detailing is a process in which an automobile is made to look its best. A car looks best when every inch of it is clean and has the right shine.

To the average consumer, detailing is just a good cleaning and waxing. This is far from true. Detailing is a total cleaning of the entire car, inside and outside and top to bottom. The entire car is treated so that it looks good and lasts longer. Detailing involves the little things, the little details. If neglected, these little things can turn into major eyesores.

To better understand what detailing is, look carefully at clean cars. Look at the details. Notice everything that looks good and looks bad on the car. Look for wax buildup around the trim, antenna, doors, and windows (Figure 2). Think of how much better the car would look if the buildup wasn't there. Look at the paint. Is it smooth and glossy, or does it have fine scratches or swirls in it (Figure 3)? How much better would the car appear if the paint looked like a deep mirror? What about the tires and wheels? Are they clean and shiny? Are the fender wells clean? Do they give depth to the tires and wheels? Think of the improvement to the car's overall appearance if the tires were evenly shadowed into the body of the car (Figure 4).

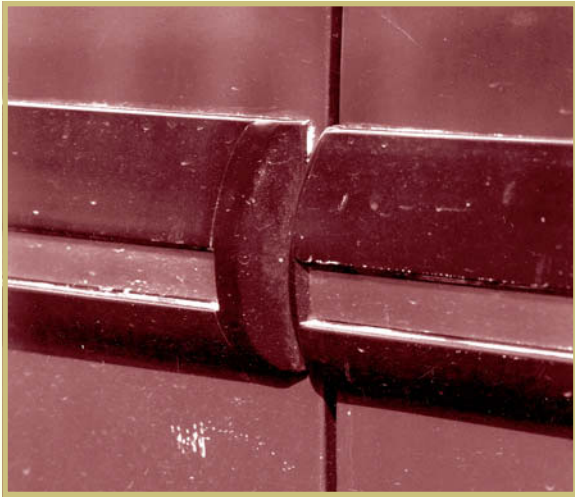


FIGURE 2—Buildup of Wax around Some Body Trim

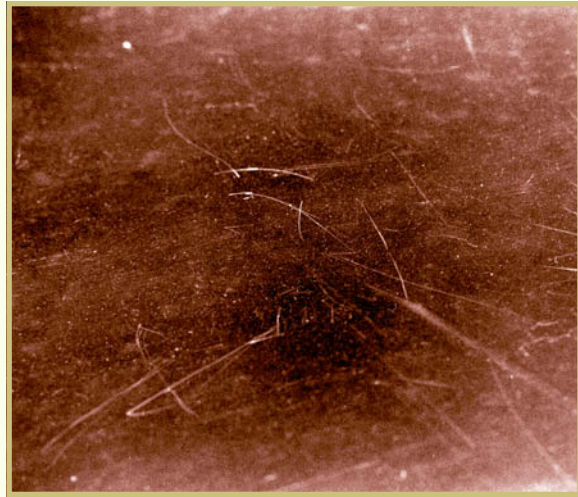


FIGURE 3—Swirls and Scratches in the Paint



FIGURE 4—A Clean Tire, Wheel, and Fenderwell



FIGURE 5—Soiled Carpet



FIGURE 6—Worn Cloth Seats



FIGURE 7—Damaged Headliner

Now look at the interior. What's the first thing that catches your eye? The cleanliness of the interior or the soiled carpet (Figure 5)? Does the interior smell like something died in there? How badly are the carpets and seats worn (Figure 6)? Are there tears or other damage? What about the headliner? Is it one solid color or is it soiled and faded or drooping (Figure 7)?

To better appreciate the career opportunities for a trained detailer, look at any car, clean or dirty. How much better would it look if it were completely cleaned and detailed? There are a lot of cars on the road; nearly all of them need at least some detailing work.

## Detailing versus Restoration

Detailing isn't the same thing as restoration. Restoration is a process in which the car is restored to original condition. This involves many steps not included in detailing. To properly restore a car, the car is torn apart. Each part is examined, then reworked or replaced. The car is then re-assembled with extreme care. Restoration is very time consuming and costly. Most cars don't need (or warrant) restoration. Leave restoration for collectible and antique cars! Even then, restoration isn't always required to turn a collectible into a show winner. If the car is in basically good shape, a complete detailing job may do the trick. But even the most perfectly restored cars are detailed before a show. Why? Simply because detailing makes a car look its best.

## Reasons for Detailing a Car

There are many practical reasons for detailing a car. There are also many personal reasons, especially if you own the car. A totally clean car has a bit of magic to it. It feels better. Somehow, it seems to run and ride better. More importantly, you feel better driving it. It doesn't matter if you're driving a Porsche or a little Honda; a well-detailed car will feel and look better.

## Practical Reasons for Detailing

From the practical side, it's a fact that a well-maintained car will last longer than a neglected one. This is true for the engine, transmission, and other mechanical parts, as well as the interior and exterior of the car. Dirt is the enemy, whether it's in the engine oil, on the painted surfaces of the car, or on the interior fabrics. Every part of a car can be ruined by dirt. Removing the dirt and protecting all of the exterior and interior of a car is what detailing is all about (Figure 8).

Detailing protects a car owner's investment. Although very few cars, after years of use, are ever worth the same or more than what they cost new, the value of any car can be increased by proper maintenance. Most investments are made to make money. Buying a new car is an investment in which you try to minimize your losses. By ensuring a high resale value, less money is lost. The time and money spent keeping a car clean and well maintained pays off when the car enters the used car market.



*FIGURE 8—Because of a lack of detailing, a car can end up getting worn down before its time.*

A car that looks good also will sell faster and for more money than one that's dirty. Do you ever see a dirty car on the lot of a car dealership? No; they try to make the cars look good so someone will buy them (Figure 9). Therefore, another practical reason for detailing is resale value. A car that's clean (really clean) looks like it has been well maintained. Whether it's true or not, the common assumption is that since the owner bothered to keep the car clean, he or she probably maintained it mechanically as well.



*FIGURE 9—Sharp, Clean Cars on a Used Car Lot*



According to the Car Care Council, auto appraisers pay premium prices for well-kept cars, with emphasis on interior condition. The amounts in the following table are based on auto auction reports on typical four- to seven-year-old cars. These show that an extra-clean vehicle may be worth 30% to almost 50% more than an identical model in average condition.

Type of Car	Condition			
	Extra-Clean	Clean	Average	Poor
Subcompact	\$3458	\$3221	\$2351	\$1293
Compact	\$4271	\$3868	\$2893	\$1713
Full-size	\$6237	\$6030	\$4833	\$3625
Luxury	\$9286	\$8791	\$7231	\$5771

## COMMERCIAL DETAILING

### Used Car Preparation

There are many individuals and companies that specialize in preparing cars and trucks for resale. Most of these do minor detailing, just enough to make the car look good. Most used cars at a dealership or used car lot have been detailed. They have shiny black tires, clean wheels, glossy paint, clean windows, fresh upholstery, and a glossy engine compartment. These cars have been made to look their best in the least amount of time necessary. Knowing what to do and when to do it saves time and still makes the car look great.

### Detailing Shops

Other detailing shops offer services to the public. These services range from waxing the exterior to a complete detailing job. Complete detailing involves cleaning and treating the entire car and removing any unsightly spots. Minor dings or dents in the finish are removed. All paint chips, scrapes, and other blemishes are touched up. The car's glass is thoroughly cleaned. In some cases, defects in the glass are repaired. The car's interior is thoroughly cleaned. Dirt is extracted, not just vacuumed, from the upholstery and carpets. All of the trim inside and outside of the car is cleaned and treated. The underside of the car is cleaned, painted, and treated. The tires and wheels are also thoroughly cleaned and treated. A variety of equipment is needed to do a complete detailing job. As different parts of the detailing process are discussed throughout this program, the required equipment will be introduced.

You may have noticed that during complete detailing, the surfaces are treated. Treating the surfaces means using the correct chemical, wax, and/or sealer for each type of surface. This is one of the more important things you'll learn in this program. The correct treatment will not only make something look good, but it will also protect the surface it's applied to. The correct treatments will also help to maintain the clean appearance of the surfaces.

There are many substances and processes that can be used and done to make a car look good. Many of these cause more harm than good. Some detailers offering quick services use variations of these harmful procedures. For immediate results, they use clear lacquer to make the engine compartments, trunks, door jambs, and vents look new and shiny. The interiors are cleaned and covered with dressing. The paint is buffed with a high-speed tool, then hand waxed with a liquid that quickly gives a high gloss.

Although this type of detailing can be a very profitable business, it's only part of the complete process of detailing. The clear lacquer is a cover-up that traps dirt. The dirt lies between the original painted surface and the lacquer. Each time something rubs against the surface, the dirt can move. Rubbing dirt on a painted surface is the same as rubbing sandpaper across it. A complete detailing would include a careful cleaning and waxing of those parts.

Using a high-speed machine to buff the finish of a car will make the finish smoother and allow the wax to give the paint a good shine (Figure 10). This method gives quick results, but not necessarily the best results. Buffing by hand or with a low-speed buffer and polishing the finish before waxing gives the detailer more control (Figure 11). There's less chance of removing paint and a greater a chance that the finish will last longer.



FIGURE 10—High-speed, 90-degree Electric Buffer



**FIGURE 11—Buffing a Finish by Hand**

The paint on today's cars isn't very thick. The metal portions of the car are covered with a thin layer of colored paint, followed by a thin layer of clear. The clear-coat adds depth and shine to the color. Excessive friction by high-speed buffing can easily remove the clear-coat, leaving the colored paint only protected by the wax. As the wax gets washed away by rain, snow, car washes, and other wet environments, the colored paint becomes exposed to the elements. They can cause the paint to fade and/or oxidize. Both result in a duller finish. Frequent waxing can prevent this from happening. Better yet, proper cleaning, polishing, and waxing will offer more paint protection. High-speed buffing can also burn the clear-coat and/or paint off a car. If the buffing pad is held at one spot for too long, the finish will become hot. Those using a high-speed buffer know this and move quickly around the car.

## Detailing for Show

Those preparing their car for a show normally do the most complete detailing work. This type of detailing really gets down to the details. Every part is cleaned, polished, waxed, or dressed. The car is hand polished and waxed. The rest of the car is cleaned with mild soaps, toothbrushes, and cotton swabs. Anything that might be unsightly is corrected. Some show cars have been detailed to the extreme: the slots of every exposed screw face the same direction. Anything that can be seen is completely cleaned and looking its best. This includes everything that can be seen looking under, on top of, and inside the car. These cars look like they've never been used; they truly look like the owners spend their life cleaning them.

Detailing a car for show is the extreme of detailing. Although there's nothing wrong with that much attention to detail, the focus of this program isn't that extreme. However, the techniques used for this type of detailing will be covered. Show detailing is very time consuming and offers fewer career opportunities. Except to the sharpest of eyes, there's little visual difference between complete detailing and show detailing.

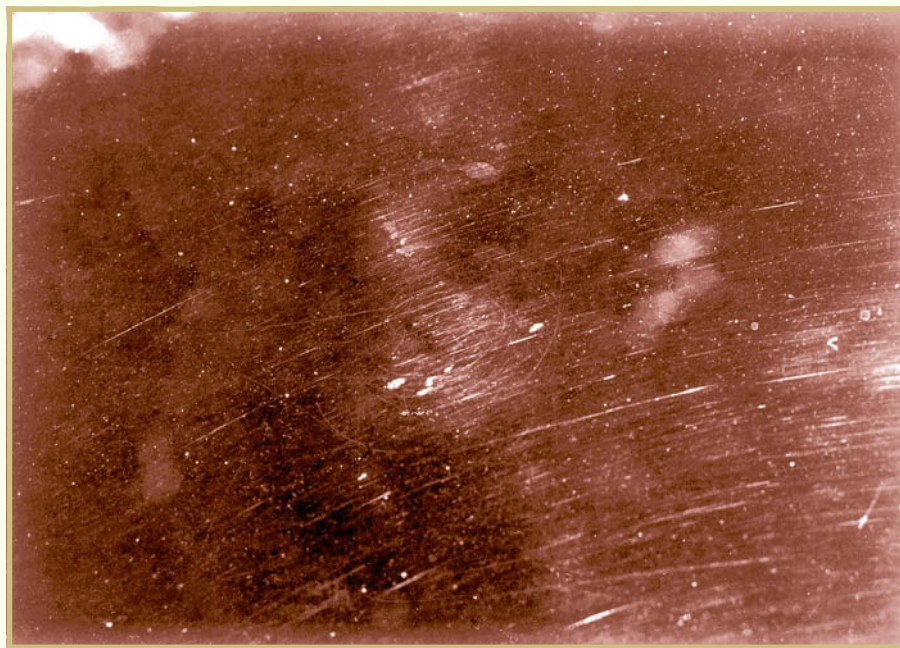
# PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

## General Car Care

Proper maintenance of a car includes keeping it clean. By itself, cleaning does offer increased car life. Cleaning is only the starting point of detailing. To maintain a car's appearance, a complete detailing job offers more benefits. The proper treatment of the surfaces protects the car, allowing it to look good and last longer. If car owners had their cars detailed from the moment they bought them and maintained that condition throughout their ownership, the car will look new all the while they own it.

## Benefits of Detailing

Proper detailing prevents premature wear of the carpets and upholstery. Again, dirt is like sandpaper. As people get in and out of the car, the dirt wears away the fabric. Detailing also protects the car's finish from environmental elements, such as acid rain and bird droppings (Figure 12). These can destroy the finish. Dirt buildup in the fender wells or under the car can hold in moisture. The moisture can and will give rust a chance to eat away the metal.



**FIGURE 12**—Paint Damaged by Acid Rain and Bird Droppings

## Maintaining That Appearance

Complete detailing takes time. Many hours can be spent paying attention to all of the details. Once a car is completely detailed, periodic cleaning and treating will maintain the appearance. Knowing the proper treatments and being able to recognize the early signs of trouble, you can maintain the appearance on an ongoing basis. As part of a preventative maintenance program, detailing should never take much time after the initial session.