

A Detail With All

In an exterior detail, we focus on a couple of key elements: the “prep” work — which entails washing the car, bug and tar removal, wheel cleaning, etc.; and buffing and polishing the paint surface to restore the paint back to showroom new condition. However, there is more to the exterior of the vehicle than just paint. Depending on how you treat these areas, it may mean the difference between an average-looking vehicle and a spectacular-looking one.

ALL THE “TRIMMINGS”

Almost every vehicle has moldings and trim that will pose certain challenges and/or problems when you are detailing

Below:
A door molding that cannot be compounded is taped up.



the exterior. These moldings and trim are constructed differently than painted body panels, and must be examined carefully to determine how to make them look their best. Examples of exterior trim are the front and back windshield trim, the borders of the side windows, the

cowl area, door moldings, and mirrors. In addition to these items, there are emblems, decals and pinstripes, lenses, glass, door handles, and generally anything else that may need special attention or care when buffing the exterior of a vehicle.

WHAT IS IT MADE OF?

Detailers have always had problems with certain types of exterior trim or moldings because of their makeup. Soft black rubber or anything that is grainy is especially problematic. This has led to “burning” of the soft rubber or getting compound or polish embedded into the trim and giving it that dreaded chalky look.

You need to know what the trim piece is made of before attempting to buff it. If you choose to buff it, you need to know what type of pad will work best, at what speed the buffer should operate, and the type of polish to use to make that piece of trim look its best. Is it plastic, hard rubber, soft rubber, or glass? Does it have a grainy appearance with pores in it, or is it smooth with no visible pores?

Taking a long hard look at each piece of trim will go a long way in determining how that piece will be treated as part of the exterior detail. Your goal is to restore the look it once had, not to damage it or make it look worse. Many detailers do not know what the makeup of the trim piece is before attempting to restore it, and the result is a poor appearance or damage.

WHAT TO DO WITH IT

If you are not sure how a piece of trim may respond to a buffer, don't touch it! Try to hand polish it in an inconspicuous area. If it shines and looks revitalized, you may then think about putting the buffer to it.

Moldings are the trickiest to figure out. Some soft moldings that you would think could never be buffed actually can, while some hard moldings won't take kindly to being buffed. We have all seen the frightening sight of a car whose owner, or a detailer, has tried to wax the moldings along with the paint. It is a horrible mess that is extremely difficult and time-consuming to repair.

Some moldings that are candidates to be polished are often buffed incorrectly. The wrong choice of buffing pad, speed of the buffer, or polish is often made. You never, ever, want to compound moldings because they don't need compounding, and compounding usually will burn the molding or embed the compound deep into its pores. If a molding can be polished, only buff it at a very slow speed, and use only a soft foam polishing-pad with a light polish. Put very light pressure on the buffer and examine the result after one or two passes. Sometimes the results can be astounding. However, if you buff it incorrectly, you will burn the molding and the result will be an unhappy customer.

the “Trimmings”

By Kevin Farrell



IF YOU CAN'T BUFF IT, TAPE IT!

I hate messes, and I hate clean ups. It's a waste of time. I treat buffing a car the same as if it were in the body shop. If I am painting something, I tape up what does not get painted. I do the same when buffing. If something does not get buffed, it is easier to mask it off with tape so as not to make a mistake.

This is where some detailers may disagree. I have had detailers in my training classes give me their opinion on how to handle items that do not get buffed. Here are some of their plans of action:

1) Dress the molding first, before you buff it. This will reduce the chance of wax or compound getting into the molding.

2) Clean it later, or re-wash the car when the buffing is complete.

3) Just be careful and don't buff so close to the molding.

My response is this:

1) While pre-dressing the mold-

ing may help, as soon as you run over the molding with the buffer, it will usually wipe off the dressing on the first pass. On any additional passes, you will consequently be either burning the molding or embedding it with compound or polish.

2) By cleaning it later or re-washing the car, you will be wasting a huge amount of time, and you may still not be able to clean it correctly to restore its original appearance.

3) Being careful and not buffing too close to the molding is wishful thinking. You need to be very skilled with the buffer to run it close to the molding and not touch it at all. If a detailer stays too far away from the moldings, then the paint will not have a uniform appearance. The area of paint that was not buffed will not have the gloss that the rest of the panel will have.

Some detailers tell me it takes too long to tape up everything that they do not want to buff. While it will take a few minutes

to tape things up, you will more than make up that time by not having to re-wash the car or clean compound out of the moldings — and you will be able to uniformly buff the entire vehicle. Once you become skilled at tape work, it takes less than 5 minutes to tape what you don't want to buff. Once everything is taped up or covered, you will work faster knowing that you don't have to worry about hitting the moldings. It is far easier to tape and cover items you don't want to buff, than to try and fix mistakes later on.

EMBLEMS AND PINSTRIPES

This also holds true for emblems. I have seen many detailers rip off emblems by striking them with the buffer, or jamming compound into the scripted writing or logo. By taping these emblems, it will protect them from damage, and the mess of compound buildup.

Above left and right: These pictures show some of the difficult and sensitive moldings that cannot be compounded and are therefore taped-up: cowl area, windshield moldings, door moldings, and sunroof gasket.

Pinstripes can be delicately polished over. However you must be careful not to destroy the stripe itself. A painted stripe can be compounded off completely, or a taped stripe can be burned off, if you are not careful. It is better to buff along a stripe than to buff across it. This will aid in preventing the removal or burning of the stripe, and will also help to reduce the chance of jamming compound between the lines on a taped stripe. The 3M Company makes a roll of thin tape that can be used to tape up a pinstripe if you are apprehensive about buffing it.

HERE IS A TRICK

As I said, there may be moldings that can be buffed or polished, but can't be

compounded. In this instance, I will still tape the moldings if I am compounding the car in any way or using an aggressive buffing pad. After that process is completed, and I am proceeding to my polishing step, I will remove the tape and buff everything with a very soft foam polishing-pad. This should bring the life back to the moldings and give it enough gloss so that I do not have to dress the moldings at all.

This saves time. There is virtually no extra time required to lightly buff the moldings. However, if you were to dress these moldings after the job was complete, it would take a considerable amount of time and they may not look as good. When applying dressing to moldings, it is difficult to get a

uniform appearance. Therefore, you need to spend more time to get the look you desire, and it's inevitable that you will smear dressing on the paint, glass, or something else you don't want to dress. Consequently, you will have to clean up the dressing, and that takes even more time. Also, what happens to the molding the first time it rains? Most of the dressing will wear off and the dressing may run all over the paint or glass and smear everything. This gives the car an unsightly appearance. The quality of the detail is diminished, and the look wears off like makeup.

MORE TRIM TO TAKE CARE OF

Other areas of the car that will benefit from buffing — and show a marked improvement in appearance — are glass, headlight covers, tail lenses, windshield wiper arms, and some mirrors and door handles. Usually these items don't need to be compounded. Their appearance will improve just by polishing.

Taillights, bug deflectors, and most other plastic items will also greatly benefit from polishing. The clarity and color returns to the piece and adds to the quality of the overall detail. Customers will notice. They sometimes think that a special treatment has been applied on these items. Inform the customer that they have been buffed and polished, and that these items will look great over an extended period of time because of this.

TIME VS. QUALITY

Every detailer wants to do as good of a job as possible in the least amount of time possible. A skilled and knowledgeable technician can accomplish this on almost every car. If you are committed to making every piece of the car look its absolute best, you must know the correct way to achieve this. You want to make the appearance last as long as possible, without spending an eternity on the car to make it happen.

Right: This vehicle is 13 years old, but the taillight looks brand new after being polished.

Below: This is how great a headlight cover can look when it is properly polished.



Some detailers ignore these trim items. This takes away from what otherwise may be a great detail, because dull and faded trim will give the car a somewhat lackluster appearance. Some detailers will hastily dress the trim items, either missing some spots, or forgetting that excess dressing may be smeared on the glass or the paint, giving the car a sloppy and poor look.

Some detailers will incorrectly buff sensitive trim items, either burning them or getting compound embedded in them. Cleanup is time consuming. Sometimes the mess is dressed over as a temporary fix. When the dressing wears off, the residue returns, giving the car an overall poor appearance.

Dressing is like makeup. It is appropriate in some cases, but you (as well as the customer) must understand that it is not permanent. This is why I try to buff and polish as much as possible. In the long run it saves time because these same items do not have to be dressed and consequently there is no excess dressing to be removed. Usually, a more-uniform and longer-lasting appearance is the result of buffing. This adds to the quality of the job.

As in any business, detail center operators sometimes have to “think outside the box.” By performing tasks that may appear to take longer, you actually *save* time and improve the quality of the job. Buff what you can, cover what you can’t, and use the “makeup” sparingly.



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