

**Right:** A steamer can be used to clean between seats, consoles, dashes, cup holders, vents, door pockets, doorjamb, seat tracks, and more.



**Left:** With a steamer, chemicals are rarely needed, which keeps the interior drier, saves you money, and leaves the inside smelling fresh.

# Dry-Vapor Steamers

## Hype or a Huge Help? Part II

By Kevin Farrell

In last month's issue of *Auto Laundry News*, I recounted how — after an initial disappointing experience — I became a fan of dry-vapor steamers. We examined the way these machines work, and how the steam accomplishes its task of cleaning away dirt. This month we'll take a look at the pros and cons of using steam.

### WHAT SCHOOL DO YOU GO TO?

With interior cleaning, there are still various ways a detailer goes about completing the task.

**1.** The “very old school” bucket, brush, wet-vac method. This is the least effective, most time-consuming, and a near-primitive way to clean an interior. Most detailers have long ago abandoned this method for the next, and most common method.

**2.** The “old school” carpet extractor method. Most detail shops have a carpet extractor. Some still have a cold water unit, but most have a heated unit that does a fine job in cleaning floor mats, carpeting, and fabric seats. However, the carpet extractors are limited to mostly those tasks. The hard-trim panels such as console areas, seat tracks, trim panels, dash areas, etc. need to be cleaned with sprayed-on cleaners, brushed, and wiped

clean. This is a bit more time consuming to do effectively.

**3.** The “new school” method is using the steamer on everything. It's safe, quick, more effective, and easier. In most cases, it's almost a no-brainer.

It's true that in most cases a steamer works better than a carpet extractor, but I would not put your carpet extractors away just yet. They will always have their place. An auto interior that is absolutely trashed will benefit more from extraction than just steam. Sometimes dirt has to be flushed out, and a carpet extractor will be able to do this better than steam alone. However, for cars that are not trashed, you will be able to get carpets and seats just as clean with steam — or better, in most cases.

### STEAMER ADVANTAGES

There are so many more advantages to using a steamer over brushing, or cleaning with carpet extractors. Let's examine them:

- A steamer will get into areas a carpet extractor only wishes it can. A steamer can be used to clean between seats, consoles, dashes, cup holders, vents, door pockets, doorjamb, seat tracks, and more.
- A steamer *will not* leave an interior soaking wet the way a carpet extractor will. Over-wetting with an extractor is a major reason for

mold, mildew, and odors within an interior of a vehicle. Steam dries within minutes.

- A steamer will clean hard surfaces that an extractor cannot.
- A steamer will clean leather seats better than using harsh chemicals and a brush. It will leave leather soft and supple and still require less time and effort.
- With a steamer, you are using super-heated vapor. Chemicals are rarely needed which keeps the interior drier, saves you money, and leaves the inside smelling fresh, not harsh.
- A steamer can be used to clean windows to perfection, without the streaking often seen from the use of window cleaners.
- A steamer does a tremendous job in removing window tint and decals safely and more quickly than any other method.
- A steamer will save you time. The cleaning process is made quicker with the use of its attachments along with the steam itself. You will reap all these benefits of using a steamer — the time savings being an added bonus.

### DISADVANTAGES

There are so many advantages, you may ask if there are any disadvantages to using a steamer. Fortunately, there are very few. In some instances, if carpets or seats

are extremely soiled, a carpet extractor may be the choice to use because of its flushing ability with hot water. However, the steamer I chose incorporates hot water injection when needed, which acts like a carpet extractor (but with much hotter water) and also has a built-in vacuum.

One other slight disadvantage to using a steamer is that if you trigger the steam nonstop for minutes at a time, it will lose pressure at some point. The pressure drop with continual use is normal. However, in most cases you will stop to wipe down areas that you clean, giving the steamer the chance to recover and build up pressure again.

Another minor disadvantage is the extreme heat the steamer produces when using it during the summer months. On a hot, humid day, the steamer can make you even hotter. On the flip side though, the extreme heat it produces on a cold *winter* day has it acting like a little heater!

The only thing that will definitely be a disadvantage is if you purchase a cheap steamer. The home-use or TV-advertised units are a waste of money and will never work for detail purposes. You need a commercial unit to tackle the tough jobs and have it work effectively.

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#### RIGHT SIZE

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Steamers have come a long way in the past few years. When purchasing a steamer, you will need to carefully look at specifications to make sure the unit will handle detail use. Obviously, you do not want a small unit or one that has a low capacity. Also be aware that some units will be too big for detail use — gas-powered units, for example, that are designed to clean huge areas such as restaurant grills and kitchens. Be willing to spend between \$700

and \$1,500 for a machine that will enhance your cleaning capabilities and stand up to daily use. Once you have used a steamer, you'll be amazed at the results — and you'll wonder how you ever lived without one for so long. 📷

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