

# Final Details

By Kevin Farrell

It Does Make a Difference

**Y**ou have completed the toughest part of the detail. You have cleaned the wheels to perfection, got the filthy interior spotless, buffed the paint to a mirror finish, and applied

your best wax. Now, it's time to trim out the vehicle and let it be on its way. *Not so fast!* You do not want to get sloppy here. Trimming the car out, and taking care of "final details" is very important for a professional looking job. You need to be sure nothing gets overlooked. I have seen many cars that looked very good, but not perfect, and it's usually because the final details were rushed or not performed correctly.

finish. You may have many hours invested in that vehicle. It may have taken a bit longer than you thought. You may be under pressure from your boss or the customer to complete the job. Or, you simply just may want to go to lunch or go home. It can be many reasons, but mistakes here will detract from a perfect job and it's not necessary.

We have all seen details that have wax still left in cracks and crevices, streaky windows, or tire dressing dots all over the car. I have seen cars released with polish or compound dust still in the jambs, tape from covering up moldings left behind, and even license plates not put back on the

## WHY AND WHAT

For many detailers, when they reach this point, they just want to wipe the wax off the car, dress the tires, and get rid of the car. It's easy to understand why — to



**Above:** With a spray gun, you can "paint" dressing on the tires without getting it on the wheel or the painted surfaces.



**Right:** Open everything — doors, trunk, hood, gas door, even the sunroof.

car! These are all simple things to fix, but many detailers miss these items and the customer is left with an imperfect car and a bad taste in their mouth.

### THE WOW FACTOR

In my detail classes I often see what I call the “WOW” factor. What I’m talk-

ing about are detailers who buff a car to perfection or wax it to a final glass-like finish — they can’t wait to stand back, look at it, and say “wow!” They want to hurry and wipe off the wax to expose the gorgeous paint finish they have produced. It creates a tunnel vision effect where they forget about everything else. They even use the same dirty

towel they’ve been using to wipe off compound and polish residue. They need to slow down and perform the final details in some simple steps, following a game plan. Once you logically think about what needs to be done in the final steps, it will slow you down. In the haste to wipe off the wax, many important things are forgotten or done out of sequence.

I always know exactly where I am in a detail and I know what needs to be done to make the car as perfect as possible. I try not to overlap my operations or do things twice. For example, many detailers like to clean the outside glass immediately after cleaning the inside glass while they are performing the interior part of the detail. This is counterproductive. While it’s nice to see sparkling clean glass in and out, it’s a waste of time at this point to clean the outside glass. Don’t forget you still need to buff the vehicle and there is a possibility you will get splatter or a little dust on portions of some of the glass. This means the outside glass will need to be cleaned again and therefore it was a waste of time if the outside glass has been previously cleaned. Don’t get caught up in the WOW factor!

### THE LITTLE THINGS

You should assume that you will have a bit of dusting in all the jambs no matter how careful you are. You may also have some excess product in the door, hood, or trunk seams. There is also a possibility that the glass will not be completely clean and that some areas of the vehicle may need some “sprucing up” such as tires, wheels, rocker panels, etc. You should assume that no matter how careful of a buffer you are, you might have some excess product in moldings or cracks and crevices. You will need to address these issues well before you ever wipe the wax off the car. Let’s look at some of the many little things we need to take care of.

### **Dress the Tires First**

Yes, I dress the tires first in the “final details.” For many detailers dressing the tires is the absolute last thing they do. How many times have you sprayed tire dressing on tires and had the mist fall all over the car? The droplets of tire dressing land all over the glass you

have just cleaned and the paint you have just wiped down. If you don't catch this mistake, the customer will see it as dots all over the car and blurriness in the glass. Worse, the next time he turns on the wipers it will smear dressing all over the windshield. Even if you do catch this mistake, it's wast-

ing time to clean the glass and/or wipe the paint down again.

Another disadvantage of dressing the tires dead last is the splatter that is flung down the sides of the vehicle if it's driven away shortly thereafter.

I will dress my tires just before I wax the car. I want the dressing to set and dry for a while before the vehicle is driven. In the time it takes to wax the car and perform the other “final detail” items, the tire dressing will set and not sling down the side of the vehicle when it's driven off. I use a gel-type dressing that is applied with a spray gun. Dressing tires in this manner allows me to apply a thin, even coat of dressing, allowing it to set and even out. If after a few minutes, I need more shine, I can give it a second coat. If not, it's dry in about 10 minutes and the car can be driven without fear of slinging. The spray gun need not be expensive, and you only need about 30 psi of air pressure to operate the gun. If compressed air is not available, you can purchase CO2 cartridges and adapters for the spray gun. I can “paint” the dressing on the tires without getting it on the wheel or the painted surfaces. You can also dress wheel wells in this manner and large plastic trim pieces. This method is extremely fast. I can dress all four tires perfectly, with no puddle of dressing on the floor in about one minute. After this step is completed, I wax the vehicle.

### **No Wipe Down Yet! Open All the Doors**

After the vehicle is waxed, again resist the urge to wipe off the wax. It's not time yet! This is where we want to make sure all the dust and any remaining dirt is wiped from the jambs. You can now remove the masking tape you used to cover any moldings that should not have been buffed. Open the doors, trunk, hood, gas door, sunroof, etc. Lift up the wiper arms to clean them as well. I use the slightly dirty towel that I was using to wipe compound

or polish off the car in the previous buffing steps. It's okay to use these towels because you want to get any remaining residue of product from these areas "before" you get a clean towel and wipe the wax off the car. Wipe the jambs, the door edges, the edge of the hood and trunk, etc. Excess product *will* show up later and take away from an otherwise perfect job if you miss this very important step. Once you know a section is done, simply close it as a form of a check off. When all the openings are closed, you are done with that step.

### **Now the Seams**

We are still not ready to wipe the wax off the car, or even clean the windows yet. We need to check to see if there is any excess product embedded in the seams, moldings, or emblems on the body of the car. I will fold a corner of a microfiber towel and jamb it in the seams of a molding or body crevice and "scrub" the excess product out from in there. Also check all the emblems for excess product or dusting, and wipe them as well. It is very important to perform these operations now because the excess product will generally get whiter in color as it dries. It may not appear so bad right now, but if you forget, it will get worse later on, after the customer has taken possession of the vehicle.

### **Tough-to-See Areas**

No, we are still not ready to wipe the wax off the car — and certainly not with the towel we have been using to wipe down jambs and seams. There are still some more small items to take care of. Now you want to check the lips of the fenders and wheel openings for any dirt or tar that has not been cleaned and give it a final wipe. Also, look for any small remaining bits of brake dust in the wheels and take care of that. Wipe any excess dressing from the tires and wheels. Grill areas are easy to miss as well as directly around

a license plate and the lower part of the bumper cover. Get very low and check the rocker area for dirt or tar left over and wipe it clean. Do the same in the rear of the car. Check the exhaust tips and give them a "towel buff" if needed. We are almost there, and tak-

ing care of these finer points will make for a spectacular detail.

### **One Last Thing**

No, don't wipe the wax off just yet. Here's one more little thing: I like to give the glass a quick wipe down

before finally wiping the wax off the car. If there was considerable product that splattered on the glass, I want to remove it before I do my final window cleaning. Now is the time to find the window cleaning towels that were used to clean the inside glass. Give the outside glass a quick wipe down to remove any buffer splatter or product dusting. This small step will ensure that the out-

side glass will be perfect when we wipe that down in just a few moments.

### THE FINAL WIPE DOWN

We are now ready to finally wipe the wax residue off the vehicle. However, we *will not* be using the towel that has been used to wipe down the jambs and seams. Discard that towel and grab a

fresh microfiber towel for the final wipe down. I like to lightly mist the towel with water before I use it to wipe off anything. A slightly dampened microfiber towel will be more absorbent, and will allow the wax or sealant residue to be wiped off completely without any streaking. You can even mist a little water on the panels and wipe the paint down for complete product removal. You can also now grab a fresh window towel and give the outside glass a final wipe down.

Now you are completely done. You have covered all the points of the “final details.” Take a quick, final walk around the vehicle looking for anything that you possibly could have missed. This should just be a formality at this point because of the steps that were taken as the detail drew to a close. The final result should be as close to perfection as possible, and you should be extremely confident that all the bases were covered and nothing has been missed.

By not being in a huge hurry to wipe the car down and get done prematurely, you actually have done a better job and “saved time.” How many times has tire dressing overspray had to be wiped off glass and paint *after* you thought the car was completely done? How many times have you found caked-in residue in cracks, crevices, and seams *after* you proclaimed the car completed? These little nuisance problems add to the overall time spent and take away from the overall appearance. Many times the “final details” are as important as perfectly buffing the paint, or expertly cleaning the interior. A detail is not perfect until all these little items have been done to perfection. Employ these techniques and you will do a better job and probably save some time as well. 📷

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