

Under Pressure, Part II

Develop a Feel for Getting it Right

By Kevin Farrell

In last month's issue of *Auto Laundry News*, we established the importance of applying the correct amount of buffer pressure to bring the paint surface of a vehicle to perfection. We considered the results of using too little pressure and also the results of using too much pressure — not satisfactory in either case.

While knowing how to exert the correct pressure and when and where you need more or less pressure is intuitive — a *feel* that will develop with experience — there are several indicators that will help guide you to the right amount of pressure. Here are some pointers to help you gauge — and adjust — your pressure.

GAUGING YOUR PRESSURE

We don't want to be too light on the buffer, nor do we want to be

too heavy. Here are some things to look for while you are buffing to try and get it just right.

- Don't move around the panel too quickly. Some detailers try to be lightning fast. This just amounts to a faster way of hand polishing or compounding. By being too fast, you are generally not using enough pressure and not accomplishing what needs to get done with the paint.

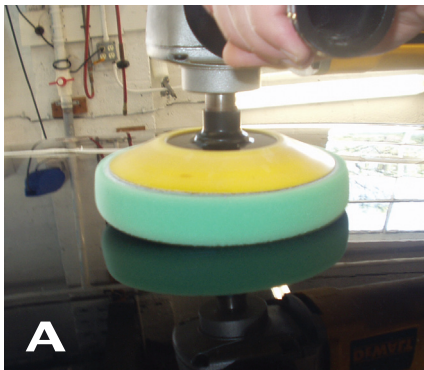
- Feel the heat you are creating. A certain amount of heat needs to be generated while buffing both for paint correction and gloss. If you stop buffing and immediately feel the paint, it should be fairly warm — but not so hot that it almost burns your hand. If the panel is too cool, you are not using enough pressure. If it's red hot, you are using too much pressure.

- Listen to the buffer as you buff. The buffer has a certain sound

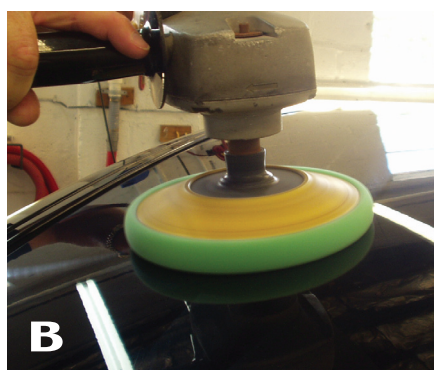
when it's free-wheeling and not being used on the vehicle. The pitch or sound of the motor will change as you exert pressure. However, if you really lean on the buffer, the buffer will struggle to keep up speed and it will groan and whine if too much pressure is being used. You want to hear it change pitch from the free-wheeling sound, but you don't want it to groan or whine.

- Look at the "crush" of the buffing pad. When using a foam pad, you will be able to see how much you are crushing the pad into the backing plate. If there is no change in the thickness of the pad while you are buffing, you are not using enough pressure. If you turn the pad into a pancake, and can actually feel the backing plate as you are buffing, you are using too much pressure. You generally want to crush the pad

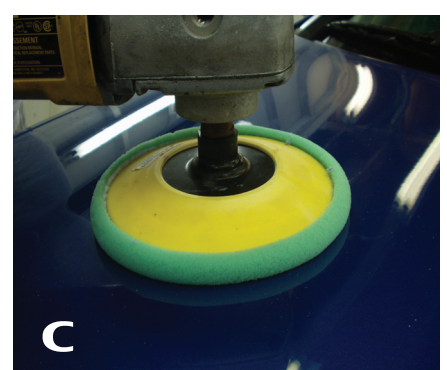
BUFFER PRESSURE



A There is simply not enough pressure being applied to the buffer. You can see that the buffing pad is standing tall on the paint with no "crush" to the pad. By buffing this way, you are not really doing too much to the paint except smearing the product all over the car.



B This picture shows a good way to buff. There is moderate and equal pressure on the buffer and pad so that the pad is slightly "crushed" to make both the pad and the buffing product work more quickly and effectively.



C Excessive pressure is being applied in this picture. Here the pad is severely "crushed" and the backing plate is caving in the pad, creating too much heat and friction. This will cause other problems such as swirl marks.

about halfway down to create enough pressure to properly buff the paint surface.

- If the pad has too much “grip” on the panel, that could be a sign of too much pressure. You need to be able to slide the buffer back and forth easily without the pad excessively grabbing and gripping the paint.

- Finally, constantly look at the results! If you are going back and forth, time after time, and nothing is really happening, chances are you are not using enough pressure. On the flip side, if all it takes is a couple of passes to correct the finish, but you are left with excessive hazing, cloudiness, and deep swirl marks, you are probably using too much pressure. You want to be able to correct the paint finish in just a few passes, while at the same time creating a nice gloss with limited swirls and hazing.

I see pressure issues all the time in my training classes. I will always do a demonstration on the vehicle to show the correct way to buff and correct the paint surface. I ask the students to try and duplicate the example I have just shown them. Many times the results are not the same — even if it looks like they are doing everything correctly. The student will then wonder why he is not only taking a much a longer time to buff the panel, but also not getting all the imperfections out. This is usually a result of not exerting enough pressure on the buffer.

LEAN INTO IT, THEN BACK AWAY!

There will always be areas on every car where you won't need

too much pressure while buffing. Unless the paint is exceedingly harsh, you should be able to use moderate pressure throughout the buffing process to get the job done. However, there are always areas on the vehicle that have deeper imperfections, scratches, and blemishes than the rest of the vehicle. For detailers who are a bit nervous about exerting too much pressure — and in turn creating too much heat, and possibly burning the paint — here is a trick.

If you have an area that is severely marked up, buff that area and work it hard for a short time, then back the buffer away and see what you have accomplished. By putting more pressure on the buffer, you should be able to eliminate or lighten most of the damaged area. This method will also create more heat, so this is why you need to back away and let that part of the panel cool a little. While continuing to buff near the damaged area, don't go back into the problem area until the heat has dissipated and the panel is cool enough. Then, if needed, go back and buff the area again with slightly less pressure to get more gloss and clarity.

LESSEN THE LOAD AND CLEAN UP!

Believe it or not, you can actually start the swirl mark removal process, get a super shine, and quite possibly eliminate an entire buffing step simply by pressure regulation! If you are compounding or performing any buffing step that would be considered paint correction, try this:

Use enough pressure to eliminate the paint imperfections.

Use as many passes as you need to *correct* the finish. When you know you have corrected the problem, go over the same area again with very light pressure. With just the lessening of the pressure on the buffer, you will start to clean up any hazing, cloudiness, and swirl marks that have been put into the panel by your initial, higher-pressure passes. This preliminary clean up can be accomplished without changing the buffing pad or product! This *will* work and it *will* save time in the overall buffing process.

Buffing does have many variables and there are many things that have to be known and performed correctly to achieve a perfect finish. However, pressure is often overlooked as a major reason for imperfect results. The buffing process itself, no matter how well executed, produces a common unwanted result — swirl marks.

In next month's issue, we will look at swirl marks in depth. We need to know that sometimes they are just a byproduct of doing the job correctly. We will look at how and why they get there — and how to correctly remove or prevent them. 📷

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