

Interior Cleaning

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We spend all these hours working on our cars as a present to ourselves. That is why many enthusiasts feel that detailing the interior is more important than the body, because that is where we spend most of our time. It would therefore make sense that we take special care that the inside of a car is not neglected.

Interior surfaces can be divided into two basic categories. There is the hard vinyl surfaces (such as the dashboard) and breathable surfaces such as cloth seats.

Vacuuming should be the first step. Use a strong shop or home vacuum. The small ones that plug into a cigar lighter or operate on rechargeable batteries just don't have the power to do the job. Remove the floor mats and do them separately. Vacuum all areas, including those that you will soon be cleaning with a liquid cleaner. Use a brush attachment for areas that could be marred with an impact from a hard edged attachment.

The hard vinyl surfaces are easy. We use Simple Green, commonly available at department stores, etc. Dilute the with one part concentrate to eight parts water; go heavier (up to one part concentrate to two parts water) for stubborn stains. Drench a cloth in the mixture and then apply liberally to a section about 1' x 2' or less. Quickly follow up by wiping down with a microfiber towel. Note: Do not use Simple Green on metal surfaces.

If you can do it, remove the seats of the car whenever you do a thorough interior detail. You'll have excellent access when it comes to vacuuming and cleaning the seats and the rest of the interior. Unfortunately, it isn't practical to remove the seats in some cars, so you'll have to work around it.

Floor mats are easy. Just remove them and whale away at them with the hose as part of the exterior wash job. In most cases you'll get all of the dirt out. If not, apply carpet cleaner and work it with a brush. Clean the vinyl part of the drivers mat with Simple Green or your chosen equivalent. Do not treat that area with a dressing! It could be picked up by the driver's shoes and cause slipping problems when they work the pedals.

Next apply a good grade foam carpet cleaner to the cloth and carpet areas. Vacuuming first is necessary as that will pick up the loose dirt, which is probably most of the job. Next work in the foam with a brush, using being careful not to be so aggressive as to ruin the surface. Pick up the foam residue with a wet/dry vacuum (best) or a cloth.

Serious stains and other problems can be treated with a household carpet cleaner such as Resolve. First try the

procedure on a hidden area to be sure that the color is not affected.

Leather conditioner and cleaner is recommended for leather interiors. Keep in mind that most cars with "Leather" are really only "Leather seating surfaces", which means that there is little real leather. Most of the interior, especially consoles, arm rests, seat backs and door panels are vinyl made to simulate leather.

Leather requires essential oils to keep its luster. Start with the cleaner and work it in gently with minimal water on the applicator. After applying the cleaner, rinse your applicator and wipe down again, then towel dry. Use the same procedure to apply the conditioner. Do several applications of conditioner (as opposed to one heavy one) if you feel that the leather needs more work. Leather might add that extra touch of class to a cars interior, but it does require more maintenance than vinyl or cloth. A car with a leather interior should be garaged or covered when not in use for maximum longevity.

There is a reason they call it detailing. Work a q-tip into the vents with some of the Simple Green solution applied followed with a pass with a dry q-tip. It may seem like a detailing cliché, but it works. It's the sort of thing that will go a long way towards making your interior look "right", although it might not be obvious until after the job is done.