

Detail Guide

Cosmetic and Exterior Trim

Exterior Plastic, Rubber and Trim

More maligned than exterior metals, more abused than automotive glass, more rejected than your ride's rubber; this is the story of exterior plastic and trim. Take heart, there are remedies close at hand. First, understand the condition of the plastic items you plan to work on. Is the buildup a light layer of atmospheric grunge or has the coloration and consistency of the plastic changed? Is the plastic and rubber in jeopardy of falling apart, or are there just a few areas that need buffing? What sort of polymer is it—rubber-based trim or hard plastic? Consider what you're working on before approaching it with a chemical.



soak to restore

Regular treatments with Mothers® Protectant preservative will greatly improve the longevity of rubber.

Even though plastic is a popular component of exterior adornment these days it doesn't last forever. It holds up well for a long period of time with minimal cleaning and maintenance, but deteriorates if you don't take care of it. There are two general types of plastic to be concerned with—trim and molding plastic, which is opaque and usually matte-finished; and lens and light plastic, which is transparent and/or shiny. If the piece is opaque, coated plastic or urethane (used on trim and moldings), then treat it with a regular application of a high-quality dressing like Mothers® Protectant. The outermost layer will last much longer, preserving the appearance and structural integrity of the piece itself.

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rubber match

Neglected black trim items or those that have become impregnated with wax residue may require a thorough soaking with Mothers® Back-to-Black® to restore them.

In the case of opaque plastic and urethanes left exposed and dirty, where the surface is eroded and oxidized, dried out and faded, you can revitalize it with a plastic restorative agent. Mothers® Back-to-Black® is a good example of a formula designed for this purpose. Repeated applications over several days can help to bridge the gap between tired or sunburned molecular bonds. When washing your car, you may notice that exterior components (such as trim, molding, bumpers, door handles, vents, seals and others) have faded from black to gray, their surface crispy and cracked. This is where restoratives like Back-to-Black® shine (pun intended). Remember this: once plastic has deteriorated so much that it needs Back-to-Black®, then lighter chemicals like Protectant can't save it anymore. At this point Back-to-Black® is the only option.



plastic fantastic

For transparent or shiny items, Mothers® Plastic Polish can help them not only look better but also last longer. If discoloring is extensive try Mothers® Mag & Aluminum Polish as a more aggressive first step. Yet another option is to use Mothers® PowerBall® with PowerMetal® or Plastic Polish to get the job done in less time.



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Clear and transparent-colored plastics can readily benefit from treatment with a plastic polish. Mothers® Plastic Polish has proven itself effective on signal lenses, head and taillights, clear emblems, plastic convertible top windows and center caps. The Mothers® product has the added benefit of leaving behind a fine layer of polymers that protect your plastics from future environmental torment. Plastic with stains and yellowing will also look better after being treated with a plastic polish. If the discoloring is extensive try Mothers® Mag & Aluminum Polish which is slightly more aggressive than plastic polishes. If you do use an aluminum polish on your plastics then chase it with plastic polish. This method is well worth the extra time and effort.

Of course saving time is also key. Using Mothers® Plastic Polish with the amazing PowerBall® will get the same job done in just minutes with amazing results. Or, for a more aggressive approach to weather beaten plastics, use Mothers® PowerMetal® with the PowerBall® and then follow with a quick coating of Plastic Polish. Your plastic will look like new in no time at all.

Restoring Rubber

Rubber is often used to surround bumpers and other external parts that regularly move out of alignment with the body structure. Like opaque plastics, regular treatments of Protectant or similar high-quality penetrating preservative will greatly improve the longevity of the rubber no matter what color. If the item has gone beyond the easy save and needs some resuscitation, then stronger plastic and rubber restoratives like Mothers® Back-to-Black® are again the smart remedy. Applied heavily and allowed to soak, these restoratives can bring lost luster back to the rubber. Try multiple coats if at first you don't succeed.



marvelous metal polish

Mothers® Mag & Aluminum Polish, Billet Polish and PowerMetal® are all flexible enough to use with brass, aluminum alloys and magnesium, and for billet aluminum, aluminum engine parts, accessories and more. With the proper technique, all of these polishes can be used with the PowerBall® as an excellent way to turn up the shine factor.

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Use an aluminum-specific cleaner (Mothers® Mag & Aluminum Polish and PowerMetal® are flexible enough to use with brass, aluminum alloys and magnesium) for billet aluminum, aluminum engine parts, accessories and more. You'll know the aluminum polish is working when you rub it onto the surface and it turns black (which is actually a secondary polish, as mentioned elsewhere in this guide). For a quick solution, use Mothers® PowerMetal® along with the PowerBall®. You'll get the same great shine in just minutes. Don't let any metal polish dry on the metal.

Mothers® Billet Metal Polish is a much finer grade of polish (you might compare it to the difference between 80 grit and 400 grit sandpaper) and is ideal for high-quality billet, forged and finely cast aluminum, brass, and other metals. The instructions are the same as with Mothers® Mag polish, but you'll get even better results with Billet Metal Polish. For fast results, spread Billet Metal Polish around with a clean towel or PowerBall®, buff to a shine using the PowerBall® and then wipe clean with a fresh towel.

Chrome and Metal Trim



chrome poly-protection

In addition to giving chrome a crisp sparkle, Mothers® Chrome Polish protects it with advanced polymers that resist smudges and fingerprints. This polish also works great on glass.

It's important to know what sort of metal you're dealing with when polishing. Certain cleaners can mar the surfaces of incongruent varieties of metal. Chrome is quite durable, for example, and some chrome cleaners can be powerful stuff. Be careful what else you expose to a chrome cleaner (like Mothers® Wheel Mist® Chrome/Wire), because rubber, paint and aluminum can suffer some damage from this chemical. Strong wheel cleaners are effective on all chrome including bumpers and pipes too.

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Mothers® Chrome Polish is popular with detailing shops because of its balance. Strong enough to clean quickly, but gentle enough not to harm the metal or its neighboring parts. That balance is an important feature of any well-designed metal polish—it's very easy for the mixture to be either too powerful or too weak. There's always been a lot of chrome on cars, so a good chrome polish is handy to keep around. You'll find this gleaming metal on exhaust tips, bumpers, emblems, mirrors, wheels, headlight bezels, under the hood and everywhere else. Another plus to using Mothers® Chrome Polish is the layer of protective agents left behind that resist smudges and fingerprints. Chrome-specific polishes are not as fierce as chrome cleaners but can still discolor plastic and rubber if left sitting.

Convertible Top, Fabric or Vinyl

Your convertible top can benefit from being washed with car wash just like the rest of the vehicle, but it needs further attention to last as long as it should. Whether dealing with a vinyl convertible top or fabric, the material itself is more porous than the rest of the car's exterior, and dirt will work its way deep into the weave. Mothers® Car Wash's most important feature is how the cleaning agent works without breaking down the top's waterproofing.



soft touch

When scrubbing a convertible top don't use a wire only nylon or a natural fiber and preferably one that's not too stiff.

It's best to wash the top first and remove all surplus dirt. Pre-treat tough stains with an extra blast of undiluted Car Wash, agitating it into the top and then letting it soak for a few minutes. Apply the Car Wash liberally, thoroughly coating the top material. Follow that with a firm scrubbing. Remember to hit the seams too, but don't be as firm there.

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Do not use a wire bristle brush, only nylon or a natural fiber, and preferably one that's not too stiff. Employ your common sense—you don't want to use a bristle that looks like it'll chew through the top material. After cleaning and allowing the top to dry (or you can dry it with a soft cotton towel), there are two paths you can take. If the top is vinyl give it a light coat of Mothers® Protectant. On a cloth top, brush the whole surface in one direction (front to back).



on the bleach

If you must use bleach, dilute it with water (less than 25 percent bleach), and be sure to wet the surrounding areas and rinse thoroughly. Too much bleach will break down the fibers and damage other components. Use bleach only as a last resort and not very often.

If your top is white and you must use bleach, dilute it with water (less than 25 percent bleach). Also, be sure to wet the surrounding areas and rinse thoroughly. Too much bleach will break down the fibers and damage other components. Mothers® Car Wash is gentle and bleach free. The same tip applies for tonneau covers, vinyl and fabric hardtops, other exterior automotive fabrics and boat covers. Most convertible tops will have either a plastic or glass rear window, so consult this guide's sections on glass or plastic care accordingly. Bleach is a last resort due to its harsh nature.