

GUIDE · CAR CARE

Keeping the car like new between treatments

A polish lasts for years or for one winter. The difference is rarely the product — it is the ten minutes between the bucket and the drying towel.

When a car has been polished and sealed, the paint is in the best condition it will ever be in. Everything after that is either maintenance or wear, and it is not time that decides which. It is method.

Worth saying plainly: almost every scratch on a well-kept car is self-inflicted, and most of them happen during washing and drying — not from road grit, not from weather, but from a cloth or a sponge that dragged a grain of sand across the paint.

This guide is the routine between treatments. Seven points, none of them more than a few extra minutes.

The seven points

1. Two buckets, and why the second one matters

One bucket of shampoo, one of clean rinse water. The mitt goes on the car, back into the clean bucket first, and only then back into the soap. Every time.

Everything you wash off the car ends up in the mitt. Without the rinse bucket you carry it back to the paint on the next pass — and what you carry is not just dirt, it is sand and brake dust that are harder than the clear coat.

A grit guard in the bottom of the clean bucket helps: the particles settle beneath it instead of being stirred back up.

★ DO THIS

Rinse loose sand off the whole car at low pressure before anything touches the paint. That is the step people skip.

2. Drying is where most scratches are actually made

The wash gets the blame; drying does most of the damage. The car is wet, remaining particles float on the surface, and then a cloth is dragged across it with hand pressure behind it.

Use a large, long-pile microfibre towel and let it do the work: lay it on the panel, draw it slowly in one direction without pressing, and lift. Never circles, never back and forth.

Better still, let most of the water run off first. Drive gently a couple of hundred metres after the final rinse and the large panels shed most of it themselves.

Never wash the towel with fabric softener. It coats the fibres and makes microfibre both less absorbent and more abrasive.

★ DO THIS

Keep two towels: one for paint, one for door shuts and wheels. They never swap jobs.

3. The three things never to use

Washing-up liquid. It is built to break fat down completely, and it does not distinguish between last night's dinner and the wax or sealant on your paint. One wash with it removes a good part of the protection you paid for.

The household cloth and the kitchen sponge. A kitchen sponge has an abrasive side for a reason, and even the soft side holds particles rather than releasing them. A terry towel is no better: the loops trap sand and drag it along.

High pressure at close range, especially at stone chips, trim and seals. Close-in pressure can lift the edge of a chip and force water under the paint, and drive water past window rubbers into the door card. Keep at least thirty centimetres away.

✦ DO THIS

If water no longer beads after a wash, the protection is gone — check which soap you last used before booking a new treatment.

4. Winter: salt is not only unsightly

Road salt is hygroscopic: it pulls moisture out of the air and holds on to it. A salted car in a cold garage therefore stays wet longer than an unsalted one standing outside, and it is that duration that matters for corrosion.

It collects where you do not look: inside the wheel arches, the underside of doors, sills, the bottom of the tailgate and behind the bumpers.

Rinse the underbody and arches with clean water regularly through the winter, even when the car looks clean from the side. Once a fortnight is enough, and it does not need to be a full wash.

Do not wash below freezing unless you can dry afterwards. Water freezing in locks and seals tears the rubber when the door is opened next morning.

✦ DO THIS

We sell salt removal as its own treatment at kr 499, but a rinse with a garden hose at home does most of that job for nothing.

5. When wax, sealant and ceramic are actually spent

Protection is not measured in months on the bottle, it is measured on your car. Spray water on a dry, clean panel and watch: tight beads that roll off mean the protection is intact. Water that lies flat as a film means it is not.

Broadly: real wax lasts months, a synthetic sealant a season or two, a ceramic coating years. But all three wear faster on the bonnet and roof than on the doors.

A ceramic coating rarely stops working suddenly. It wears from the top down, and the first sign is that the car gets dirty faster and water lies on the bonnet while it still beads on the doors.

If the coating is worn but present, a fresh topper is enough. If it is gone, the paint has to be corrected first — new protection over an uneven surface just locks the flaws in.

✦ DO THIS

Do the water test on the bonnet and a door at the same time. If they differ, the bonnet is telling the truth.

6. The five-minute interior routine

Interior wear is almost always accumulated rather than sudden: sand left to be ground into carpet and seats by people sitting down, and sun breaking down plastic that never gets wiped.

Five minutes, once a week: shake the mats, vacuum the footwells and the gap between seat and console, wipe the dashboard and door cards with a damp microfibre, and empty the door pockets.

Use water and a little mild soap on the plastic, not a shine product. Silicone dressings look clean for two days, attract dust, and reflect into the windscreen when the sun is low.

The inside of the windscreen is the surface most people forget and the one that matters most for vision — it picks up a film off-gassed by the car's own plastics, and that film is what causes glare against low sun and oncoming lights.

★ DO THIS

If the seats feel stiff or tacky, the dirt is down in the fibres. No cloth reaches that; a wet deep clean does.

7. Headlights yellow anyway — but they yellow more slowly

Headlights are polycarbonate with a thin UV-protective coating on the outside. Sun, salt, sand and detergents wear it away, and once it is gone the plastic underneath oxidises. The yellow is the material breaking down, not dirt.

You cannot stop it, but you can slow it considerably: keep strong alkaline degreasers off the lenses, and never let chemistry dry on them in the sun.

Once yellowed, the only lasting fix is sanding the oxidised layer off through several grits and re-sealing with UV lacquer. Polished without a new seal, the yellow returns within a year.

We charge kr 1 000 for two lenses and kr 1 500 for four, with a new UV seal.

★ DO THIS

Check the lenses in the dark, not in daylight. The beam's reach and cut-off tell you how much you have lost.

The year in four fixed points

- ★ Every fortnight, all year: two-bucket wash, large drying towel, five minutes inside.
- ★ Through the winter: rinse the underbody and arches with clean water, however clean the car looks.
- ★ Early spring: the water test on the bonnet. If the protection is gone, renew it now — before pollen, sun and summer.
- ★ Late autumn: a thorough wash and fresh protection before the salt goes down. It is the one treatment a year that pays for itself most.

When it stops being maintenance

Maintenance keeps a surface where it is. Correction moves it back to where it was, and that is a different job with different tools.

- ✦ Swirl marks in sunlight mean the paint is already scratched, and no wash or wax removes them. One-stage polishing is kr 2 399 with us for a small car.
- ✦ For protection measured in years rather than months, ceramic coating is kr 8 999 including three-stage polishing as preparation.
- ✦ Stiff seats or a smell means the dirt is in the fibres and has to be drawn out wet.
- ✦ A standard exterior and interior wash with us is kr 1 100 for a small car.

And what you can stop worrying about

You do not need to wax monthly, and you do not need four products for four surfaces. You do not need to avoid automatic washes entirely — a well-run modern hall with a clean final rinse is better for your paint than a poor hand wash with the wrong sponge.

What an automatic wash does and does not do is covered in our car care guide. This list begins where that one ends.

Prices are ours, based on a small car. SUV adds 30 per cent, van 40.



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