

Car Care Specialties, Inc

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TOLL FREE ORDER LINE (877) 796-8300 WWW.CARCAREONLINE.COM

Car Care Specialties Wheel Cleaning Update

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One of the questions I am most often asked is "What is the best way to clean my wheels?" The correct answer is use the least aggressive cleaning product/method possible. If you wash your wheels frequently and keep up with the accumulation of brake dust, a simple car wash solution may be enough. If you allow the brake dust to build up, then you must resort to stronger cleaning agents.

To discuss cleaning methods/chemicals, we should first discuss the agents that attack your wheels. The main culprit



is brake dust. Brake pads are made from several components, including monofilament carbon fibers, sintered metal particles, Kevlar fibers and polymer-based adhesives. The brake pad adhesive is the root of most of our problems. When the adhesive residue (a component of brake dust) becomes wet, it turns acidic and will etch your wheels. The sintered metal particles, during braking, will become red hot and tend to "burn" tiny holes in the finish of your wheels. If you have small droplets that look like road tar on your wheels, this may not be road tar but may in fact be re-polymerized brake pad adhesive. These polymer adhesives flocculate and form droplets that wind up on the wheels, where they adhere with a vengeance. The only sure way to stop all this etching/burning/flocculating (sounds kind of kinky) is to refrain from using your brakes. Such a course of action is not usually desirable, even

though some drivers are proponents.

One of the keys to maintaining your wheels is a coat of wax or polymer sealant. The wax or sealant acts as a sacrificial protectant. The damaging effects of red-hot brake dust, brake dust acids, pollution and ozone are unleashed upon the wax or sealant and not your wheel. Waxes will tend to melt with high temperature and need to be reapplied more frequently. My favorite is [One Grand Blitz Carnauba Wax](#). A polymer sealant will give better longevity but many brands tend to yellow over time. Menzerna Power Lock Sealant is the least yellowing and longest lasting sealant I have found.



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There are several ways to clean your wheels. Choose the least aggressive method that will get the job done. A quality car wash/water solution is the least aggressive and will probably remove most of the dirt/brake dust from relatively clean wheels. My favorites are [P21S Bodywork Conditioning Shampoo](#) or [Sonax Gloss Shampoo](#) at a dilution of 1 capful per gallon of water to clean wheels. If car wash does not do the trick, then try a quality wheel cleaner. My two favorite wheel cleaners are both made in Germany, [P21S](#) and [Sonax](#). Be careful when choosing a wheel cleaner, as most of the popular mass market brands are highly acidic and may damage the finish on your wheels. The active ingredient in many wheel cleaners is hydrofluoric acid (the same stuff they use to etch glass). There have been lawsuits that allege that several mass market advertised brands are damaging to almost all wheel finishes. I get 2-3 calls a week from people who have stripped the finish off their wheels with highly acidic products. [P21S](#) and [Sonax](#) are both pH balanced and developed specifically for the delicate wheel finishes. They may not be as aggressive as other brands but neither will they strip the finish off your wheel.



The [P21S Wheel Cleaners](#) are based upon specially designed ph



balanced detergents that break the bonds between the surface of your wheel and the brake dust. The [P21S High Performance](#) formula is for wheels with minimal amounts of brake dust and the [Gel Special Performance](#) formula is thicker and stronger. The thicker/stronger formulation allows the Gel to cling better to the vertical surfaces of the wheel and the stronger formulation helps remove stubborn brake dust accumulations. [Sonax Full Effect](#) is a brand new, pH balanced formula wheel cleaner that is safe for all types of wheels. Sprays on fluorescent green and then turns red as it reacts with the iron particulates in brake dust making it easier to remove. The sintered iron particulates in brake dust are one of the more difficult components to remove from your wheels. This new formula attaches to the sintered iron particles creating a water soluble iron complex that allows the surfactants to rinse off easily. The [P21S Gel](#) works slightly better on some types of brake dust and the [Sonax Full Effect](#) works slightly better on other types of brake dust. We are conducting studies to try to link brands of brake pads with each

wheel cleaner.

Wheel cleaners work best on a cool, dry wheel. Spray the cleaner on the wheel and work evenly into all areas of the wheel with a soft sponge, wash pad or dedicated wash mitt (Never use a wheel tool on the car as the sintered metal particles will scratch the paint). Try to smooth out any drips or runs so there is an even coating of cleaner over the entire wheel. Allow the wheel cleaner some time to work (3-5 minutes) and gently scrub the wheel with your sponge or mitt.



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Some areas of a dirty wheel may require gentle brushing with a soft wheel brush to dislodge the dirt. If areas need additional cleaning, re-spray with wheel cleaner and gently brush. I repeat the warning, the keywords here "soft" and "gently". The finish on many wheels is acrylic enamel or a high-temperature lacquer that is relatively soft and may scratch. Once the dirt/brake dust is loosened, rinse thoroughly with water and dry.

Give your wheels a coat of a quality carnauba wax or polymer sealant to help protect them. If your painted and/or clear coated wheels are slightly faded or dull looking, [3M Imperial Hand Glaze](#) may help clean the faded, clear coat or paint. Apply the glaze to a [Blu-Velvet Microfiber Applicator Pad](#), gently rub out the clouding and buff off with a [Blu-Velvet Microfiber Buffing & Polishing Cloth](#). If this does not do the trick, put a generous amount of [3M](#) on your applicator pad and add a small amount of [P21S Metal Finish Restorer Metal Polish](#) (about the size of your pinkie nail). Polish out the clouding with this combination. The P21S/3M combination will usually get the job done. When it has, follow up with a coat of quality [Carnauba wax](#) or polymer sealant.



If your wheels are anodized, the manufacturer may recommend a protective coating of petroleum jelly. I have tried this and have chosen to use a Carnauba wax instead. I found that the petroleum jelly attracted every dust particle within a half mile. Anodized wheels that have stain marks are difficult to restore. Most manufacturers do NOT recommend the use of any metal polish on anodized wheels. It will remove some of the anodization and change the appearance slightly.

If you can live with the removal of small amounts of the anodization and the slight appearance change, P21S Multi Surface Restorer Polish may help remove some of the stains. Test any metal polish on the back of the wheel before using. Once the wheel is polished, apply a coat of Carnauba wax or polymer sealant.

How do you determine if your wheels are painted/clear coated or anodized? The painted/clear coated finish is smooth to the touch and the anodized finish feels slightly rough. If you have any doubts, one method of testing the finish is to touch the tip of your tongue to the wheel. If you taste metal, it is usually anodized. If you taste almost nothing, it is usually clear coat. Your tongue is very sensitive to metallic tastes (I had a \$1.00 bet I could get you to lick your wheel.)

If you have any questions as to product usage, please do not hesitate to call. If we don't have the answers, we have vast information resources that do. We look forward to serving your car care needs. Please feel free to call if you have any questions, or need help selecting items.

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