

Making A List And Checking It Twice

by Dr. Detail

Spring will be here before we know it, even if it can't come too soon. This month would be a good time to make sure we have all the stuff we need so we can be ready to give our Miatas a good cleaning when the nice weather gets here. These are tools I am currently using. If have things that you are happy with, you can stay with them or try something new. The objective of the exercise is to get a clean car, not launch a new career.

Car Wash – The first thing to do is get all the dirt and crud that has accumulated on the car over the winter. Even if you have been taking the car to the coin-op wash like I have, it still needs a good bath now and will continue to need washing over the summer. What I am using now is Zaino car wash. Almost any good car wash will do. What you don't want to use is the basic household cleaner that is under the kitchen sink. In particular, you don't want to use dishwashing soap, as it will certainly strip of any wax that you might have on the car. You will also need a good cotton mitt for washing the car.

Drying – After you get the car clean, you will need to dry it off. If I'm washing the car at home, I dry it with an artificial chamois called the Absorber. You can get one at almost any car parts or discount store for under ten dollars. What I like about the Absorber is that you can wash it in the washer, which keeps it clean and ready to use the next time. Natural chamois are also good, but somewhat of a pain to take care of. A lot of the real geeks wouldn't use anything but 100% cotton towels. I use towels over the winter, but it gets to be a pain doing a whole load of wash every time you wash the car.

Windows – This is another area that can turn into a career if you let it. I use Windex for normal cleaning, followed by regular application of Rain-X. Rain-X is the hot setup for being able to see in the rain. We had a column a few months ago about applying Rain-X, so you can refer back to it for instructions.

Leather and Vinyl – I have a vinyl interior, so I use Vinylex to keep it and my top both looking pretty spiffy. The same people make a product for leather called Lexol. I have used both and they are excellent for cleaning and protecting. What I particularly like is that they give a moderate gloss without leaving the surface greasy like Armor All does.

Wheels and Tires – You will need a tire brush. Be sure to buy one that has natural bristles (brown) as opposed to plastic (white). The plastic bristles will scratch. For cleaning the tires and wheels, I use Castrol's Super Clean. It's extremely good at getting off accumulated brake dust and general crud. Be careful not to get it on your paint, as it will just as quickly strip off any wax you may have had on the car. To keep the tires looking spiffy, I use Vinylex, which makes the tires look nice without giving them an artificial plastic shine. I have also had pretty good luck with Meguiar's Endurance product, although it didn't seem to work well on Sara's Toyos.

Car Wax – Not trying to start a flame war here. If you have a wax that you are happy with, stay with it (although variety can be the spice of life). I am currently using Zaino and have been very impressed with the way it held up over the winter. The most important part about getting good results with any wax is to follow the instructions. It won't be warm enough to wax the car for a while anyway. Removing the wax is best accomplished with bath towels, preferably old ones (you probably wanted new bath towels anyway, so buy new ones and save the old ones for the car). If you buy new towels for removing the wax, be sure to buy 100% white cotton towels and wash them several times (no fabric softener or bleach) before using them. I also keep some diapers around for the final buff.

Odds and Ends - In addition to everything else, you will need some more stuff to finish the job. By now your wash bucket should be getting pretty full.

I keep several hand towels around. They are just the right size for washing the windows and a variety of other cleaning tasks. A small natural bristle paint brush is handy for getting in the cracks and crevices in the interior. If you are really thorough, you can keep some Q-Tips around for the really detailed cleaning. You want to avoid using toothbrushes, since the plastic bristles can scratch soft surfaces. Finally, a small stack of washcloths is useful for applying Vinylex or Lexol. You will find that you accumulate car cleaning stuff in the same way that you accumulate tools.

2002 Special Edition MX-5 For North America

It has long been a Chicago Auto Show tradition to showcase America's love affair with the Mazda MX-5 Miata, and Mazda heats things up again this year as it introduces two new Special Edition (SE) models. Both are limited-production versions of the world's most popular sports car and come equipped with a host of features that make these the "raciest" SE models to date. For starters, both Miata SEs wear exhilarating paint jobs: one is Titanium Gray Metallic, the other Blazing Yellow Mica. The Titanium Gray SE model comes with a deep saddle brown leather faced interior and door panels and the Blazing Yellow SE has, for the first time in the Miata's 13-year history, a black leather interior. The seats on the black leather SE even carry the Miata logo embroidered into the seat back.

Our informant was told that "each dealership will probably get one yellow and one gunmetal, so place your orders NOW!"

Pictures of each color are at miata.net (<http://www.miata.net/news/editions.html>) and more information can be found on Mazda's official web site. Just surf over to <http://www.mazdausa.com/miata/> to get the whole scoop.

Is it finally time to satisfy that hunger for a bright yellow roadster?