



“PROFESSIONAL LEVEL DETAILING” BY ROSS (CENINGOLMO)

OK... so, a detailed walk through of how I have been detailing my car.

To start with, I used Chopp's excellent detailing write up as my basis. IN fact, using his method I got some awesome results. However, my intention was to create a method that would allow for 'professional' type results without actually having to be a professional.

I will say, right up front, that my method will not give dramatically better results than Chopp's method. And, since mine is more expensive and slightly more time consuming, this may not be for everyone. My recommendation would be to use this system if you are attempting to restore paint that has been neglected. If your paint is already pretty good, then this is probably overkill.

Speaking of overkill...I picked up a fair amount of this on Meguiar's website. However, those guys are generally professionals and have an absurd amount of time, money, and experience. I tried to find a system that sort of split the difference between Chopp's system and the system a professional might use.

Hardware:

- About 15-20 VERY CLEAN towels.
 - Either micro fiber or 100% cotton terry towels. I prefer the micro fiber for some things and the cotton for others. Just use what seems best to you.
- Rotary buffer/polisher.
 - Professionals will tell you that you need to spend \$200+ to get a good one. But, since I'm not using it every day, I didn't see any reason to spend the money. I bought one on eBay for about \$50 shipped. I saw one the other day at Harbor Freight for \$34.99 The primary concern is that it be a standard polisher (not an angle grinder or some other direct drive power tool) and that it be variable speed (preferably the range will include 1000-2500 rpm range).
- 10" Orbital/Dual Action buffer
 - Just get a cheapy... nothing special needed. Wal-Mart, Pep boys, wherever, you can find these things for about \$15
- 4-6 10" terry bonnets for orbital buffer
 - You can find these for \$5 for a 6 pack at Wal-Mart

- Rotary buffer backing plate and foam pads
 - The backing plate and pads should be bought together since they need to work together. 3M, Schlegel, Meguiar's, and Lake Country all make some nice ones. Availability locally may be an issue, so just get what you can locally.
 - Backing plate should be the "hook and loop" (that's Velcro for those of you who don't care about patent violations) design that threads on to the 5/8" post of the rotary. The Velcro will allow you to quickly and easily switch from one pad to another. This part will cost you around \$20 depending on what/where you get it.
 - I am using 4 separate levels of foam pad. You could probably do it with 2, depending on how deep you want to go with the compound/polish. I use a heavy cut, medium cut, polishing, and finishing pad. 4 separate levels, 4 separate colors. I spent about \$12 per pad...just make sure you get something good.
- Two good sized buckets.
- A hose with variable spray nozzle.
- California Water blade
- A couple of those cheap, old fashioned plastic Ketchup/Mustard/condiment bottles you can buy at the dollar store. Its easier to disperse the compound and polishing liquids out of one of these than the bottle they come in.
- Chamois or synthetic Chamois like the Meguiar's Water Magnet towels
- A good mechanics stool with wheels (preferably the short kind) will make your life easier while doing the sides. I found mine at Harbor Freight for \$12!
- A tire brush. This should be a couple of dollars at the most
- A wheel brush. I would recommend getting something good for this. I bought a Meguiar's Gold Class brush for \$11. If you spent some loot on your wheels, make sure they stay looking nice!
- A shop vac style vacuum. One of those handy little car vacs is fine...just so long as it sucks.
- An extension cord. Something long enough to get to every side of your car comfortably, but not so long that you will spend the entire day tripping over the slack. 25' works nicely in my garage.

I will say right up front that I like the Meguiar's products. Chopp recommended them, and I am used to using them, so I am inclined to recommend them as well. However, there are other good brands. 3M, Mothers, Turtle Wax, and a few others all make some nice products that compare well with the software listed below. As always, choose what you prefer. I didn't give prices on any of the software. Partly because I don't remember (I didn't buy it all at once...I sort picked it up a piece at a time), and partly because I don't really want to add up how much I have spent.

Software:

- Dawn dishwashing soap.
- Meguiar's Gold Class Car Shampoo
- Meguiar's #84 cleaner/polisher/compound for Rotary buffers
- Meguiar's #2 cleaner polish
- Meguiar's Gold Class Liquid car wax
- Meguiar's NXT liquid car wax
- Meguiar's Deep Crystal #3 Yellow Carnauba Wax
- Meguiar's Quick Detailer
- Lexol leather cleaner
- Lexol Leather treatment
- Vinylex
- Aerosol Glass cleaner – don't get the cheap stuff. Get something good!
- Meguiar's NXT Tire Cleaner
- Meguiar's Hot Rims All wheel cleaner
- Armor All Detailers Advantage Foaming Tire Treatment
- Rain X
- Simple Green

Technique:

Well... here is the part that professionals will tell you makes the difference. After doing massive amounts of reading on the topic, the "pros" had me so scared I was going to take the paint right off my car that I didn't even want to start. But, the only way for me to learn was to do it. As it turns out, you actually have to work pretty hard to do damage to your paint. Don't get too nervous. Respect the equipment... you can do damage...but, if you are smart and go slow, you shouldn't have any problems at all.

There are a few points that I think are important about technique.

1. Take it slow. When using the rotary, start at the slowest speeds. It is difficult to do any damage when the wheel is turning at less than 1K rpm. Slowly work your way up in speed until you are getting the result you want.
2. Don't use too much product. The tendency for most, and me in particular, was to put on tons of compounding liquid. You honestly need very little.
3. Use light pressure and smooth movements while polishing. Try to avoid pressing hard, moving very fast, or moving very slow.

A lot of this is feel. And, it took me a couple times of experimenting on different areas of my car before I started to figure out aggressive I could get. I imagine this is one of those things you could spend years mastering...I will try to give you what you need to get a great result without months of practice.

Just one other note... change towels often. If you drop a towel, abandon it. During each stage of the process try to introduce clean towels.

The Process:

Finally, here we go. What to do, and what order to do it in.

1. Wash the car. Yep, it starts that simple.
 - a. Use the hose on a low pressure setting to really soak the car. This will prevent you from pushing dirt/pollen/whatever around on the paint with the water and creating tiny scratches. Spend a good 5 minutes soaking the car...seems like you aren't doing anything, but trust me, you are.
 - b. Use the Dawn dishwashing soap to create nice bucket of soapy water. This will help strip any old wax and crap off of the finish. I had read in a few places that doing a mix of alcohol and water is more effective. So, if you feel like giving that a try, have at it. I didn't want to risk doing too strong a concentration.
 - c. Fill your other bucket ½ way with just straight water.
 - d. Wash from the top down, and wash smallish areas at a time (only the hood, only the trunk, only the roof, etc...). Rinse each area as you go. Each time you get your towel (preferably microfibre for this task) soapy, go straight to the car with it. When you rinse your towel, do it in the bucket of straight water. Ring it out and try to get it clean, then return the towel to the soapy bucket and repeat. Make sure you use a separate towel for rocker panels, under sides of bumpers, fronts of bumpers and rearview mirrors. Any place that might have collected heavy dirt or bug guts should have a separate towel.
 - e. Spray the wheels with the wheel cleaner. Use your wheel brush to make sure all is cleaned, and then rinse.
 - f. Rinse the entire car thoroughly when you are done. Try to keep the entire car wet the entire time you are washing it. This will make a big difference when you are done.
 - g. Start drying using the California waterblade. You should be able to remove 95% of the water on the surface in under 5 minutes using this. Then, simply dry off the other wet spots using a chamois.
2. Do a "once over" of the interior.
 - a. Vacuum the carpet and floor mats. Vacuum the trunk, cleaning out all your McDonalds wrappers from the back seat. Just generally tidy things up enough so that you can actually get to the stuff you want to clean a little later.
 - b. Take a damp towel and just wipe down the dash, the seats, and the center console. Just try to make sure there isn't anything too funky left.
3. First layer of compounding.
 - a. Using the heavy cut pad and the Meguiar's #84 (M84 to the experts) its time to start the process.
 - b. Starting at one end of the car and working toward the other end, compound one area at a time. Try to do a couple square feet. The smaller the area, the better a job you can do of controlling the compound.

- c. Start the rotary at about 1K rpms for this step. You may go faster, but I didn't.
 - i. Put down a smallish amount of the M84 and then use the wheel to spread it around. Don't have it spinning, just spread the liquid around on the area you want to compound.
 - ii. Move rhythmically through the liquid until the M84 is just about starting to dry up. You can tell by looking at it, but you can also tell by the sound of the rotary. If it sounds like it is working harder then it is time to stop.
 - iii. If you are getting a lot of splash, you are using too much product.
 - iv. As soon as you pull the wheel away, wipe the compound off the paint. You definitely do not want to let it dry on the paint.
 - d. This step will take A LONG TIME... it seems like you are never going to finish. I break this job up with multiple short breaks for a beverage, an apple, or a side of beef.
 - e. You are likely to have some dust on the car from the dried compound. Don't worry too much about that, you will wash it off in a little while. Just try to keep it off the painted surfaces as you are working on them. Use a tiny spray bottle of water to mist on the areas that have lots of dust... this will contain the dust and make it easier to wipe off.
 - f. This step will dull your finish significantly, so don't get nervous. The primary role of this step is to level the finish and remove some of the scratches, watermarks, pitting, and other imperfections.
4. Second layer of compound
- a. Same as step 3, but this time use the Medium Cut pad.
 - b. Continue using the M84
 - c. Step up to about 1250 rpm for this step.
 - d. All other procedures will remain the same.
 - e. This step will continue to eliminate imperfections in the paint and will dull some of the bigger buffing marks left behind from the last step.
5. First layer of polishing
- a. Same as steps 3&4, but this time use the Polishing pad.
 - b. Switch to the Meguiar's #2 (M2 to the experts)
 - c. Step up to about 1500 rpm
 - d. You can use even less product with the M2 than you did with the M84
 - e. All other procedures will remain the same.
 - f. This step will begin putting gloss back in to the clear coat/paint. You will notice a good shine on the sections you complete.
6. Second layer of polishing
- a. Same as the previous 3 steps, but this time using the Finishing pad.
 - b. Continue using M2.
 - c. Yes, this is taking forever. Yes, it does seem like you will never finish. Trust me, it will be worth it.
 - d. Step up to about 1750 rpm.
 - e. All other procedures remain the same.

- f. This step will truly polish the finish. You will notice a great shine on the car when you are done. A lot of the imperfections that were visible to the naked eye will be gone...you will be left with a really nice mirror-like finish.
7. Wash the car again.
 - a. This time use the Meguiar's Gold Class shampoo. This is your opportunity to get rid of any of the dust that might still be clinging to the car.
 - b. Make sure you soak the car really well, and remember that the dust is compound and that it may scratch the paint again if you are too aggressive trying to wash it off. Just take your time and clean everything thoroughly. Same technique as the first wash.
 - c. Wash the wheels again, use your wheel brush.
 - d. Dry the car using the same technique as before. If you are noticing any bits of dust in the water as you are drying, then you haven't rinsed it well enough. Go back and rinse the whole car again. This is important.
 - e. Start your engine...you will see why in a minute.
 - f. Once the car is dry, take some time to dry the wheels and tires. Use the Meguiar's NXT tire cleaner. It is a foaming spray...just spray it on all four tires. Go back with the tire brush and agitate the foam...it will clean the tires up nicely.
8. Clean the engine bay.
 - a. Use your hose to mist the engine bay. You have electronics in there so don't go spraying all crazy like. Just a fine mist to get everything damp.
 - b. Put some Simple Green in a spray bottle (don't dilute it) and mist the grimmer parts of your engine bay. Again, avoid anything electrical.
 - c. Finally, spray the engine clean. Again, just a mist.... All you want to do is put in enough water to rinse the Simple Green out of the compartment. Don't flood anything.
 - d. Shut your engine off.
 - e. Take a rag and dry any level, plastic, rubber, or decorative surfaces.
 - f. Use the Vinylex to wipe down anything rubber or plastic inside the engine compartment.
 - g. Use the Quick Detailer to wipe down any painted surfaces. This will leave your engine compartment looking all shiny and new....it will almost look like you care about your engine.
9. Apply first layer of wax/glaze
 - a. Using the 10" orbital, apply a THIN film of the Meguiar's Gold Class liquid wax to the entire painted surface of the car.
 - b. Use a nice clean bonnet for this. And, make sure you don't use too much product, again. A little bit of this stuff will go a long way.
 - c. No need to apply any real pressure with the buffer...just enough to get everyone spread around evenly. This buffer is not really doing anything further to the surface of the paint...it is just saving your shoulders is all.
 - d. Now... you are going to let it set up...so, don't do anything to the paint.

10. Vacuum and Clean the vinyl and plastic portions of the interior.
 - a. Get that shop vac and do one more vacuuming. You may not have much to clean but, its worth making sure you got it all. The rest of your interior is going to be flawless, might as well make sure your carpet is as well.
 - b. This would also be a good time to use a carpet stain remover in case you stepped on a ketchup packet on your floor mats.
 - c. Grab the Vinylex and towel (I prefer the terry for this portion of the job).
 - d. Spray the Vinylex on the towel, then wipe the towel on the surfaces.
 - e. Wipe down anything that is plastic, or vinyl. Look around, the ceiling, the dash, the trim around your seats, the seat belt clips, the shouler restraint clips on the B pillars, the sun visors...get it all. If you are putting in this much time, you might as well make sure you get it all right.
11. Buff out the first layer of wax.
 - a. Nothing complicated here. Just buff out the paint.
 - b. Use light pressure and a nice clean towel.
 - c. By the end of this stage you will be thoroughly pleased with the amazing shine of your car.
12. Apply second layer of wax/glaze
 - a. Using the 10" orbital buffer and clean bonnet, apply a thin film of the Meguiar's NXT Liquid wax.
 - b. Do the entire surface the same as you did in step 9.
 - c. Let is set up
13. Clean the leather portion of your interior
 - a. Using the Lexol leather cleaner and a wet towel (I prefer terry for this one), clean the leather.
 - b. Spray the Lexol on the leather itself, then wipe down the leather with the wet towel. Keep doing this until you get suds on the towel. This should be just like cleaning with soap and water.
 - c. Wipe it all down... fronts, backs of seats, undersides, the sides, the head rests, the undersides of the headrests. Again, might as well do it right since you are taking the time.
 - d. Go back with a separate dry, clean cloth and wipe down any excess moisture. The leather will be nice and clean now.
 - e. Take the Lexol leather treatment and another clean dry towel and treat the leather.
 - f. Spray the Lexol on the leather and wipe it in with the towel. Again, get it all. Lexol is awesome stuff... your car might smell like a horse saddle for a day or two, but your leather will thank you for it.
14. Buff out the second layer of wax.
 - a. Same as step 11. Use light pressure and a new towel.
 - b. By the end of this step you may soil yourself due to the amazing shine on your car... but, wait, its going to get better.
15. Apply third layer of wax.
 - a. Using the 10" orbital buffer and a clean bonnet, apply a thin film of the Meguiar's Deep Crystal Carnauba wax.
 - b. Same as step 9.

- c. Let it set up.
16. Final tire treatment and clean interior glass
- a. By this time your tires will be nice and clean and black from the NXT cleaner.
 - b. Go around and treat all 4 tires with the Armor All Detailer Advantage Foaming spray. Just spray it on, and let it sit. The tires are already really clean at this point, so the spray will just bring a nice gloss to the tires.
 - c. Open up all the doors and try not to get fingerprints on anything. With a clean towel and the Aerosol glass cleaner, clean all interior windows. The windshield, rear window, etc. Spray lightly... you don't want any of that over spray getting on your newly cleaned interior.
17. Buff out the third layer of wax
- a. Same step 11. Use light pressure and a new towel.
 - b. Your car now shines as good as it possibly can... but, we are going to do one more layer just to make sure. Plus, for protection from bugs and birds, this last layer can't hurt.
18. Final layer of wax
- a. This time, by hand, apply a thin glaze of the Carnuba wax. Pay special attention to get anything that might have been tough to get at with the buffer.
 - b. Light pressure and a very thin layer are all you need.
 - c. Let it set up.
19. Clean and treat exterior glass
- a. Use the aerosol towel, and the same towel that you used on interior glass to clean the exterior glass. Again, be careful of overspray and be thorough.
 - b. Once clean, apply a layer of Rain X to all windows and exterior mirrors. Buff it out with a clean towel.
20. Buff out final layer of wax.
- a. This is it... the home stretch... all you have to do is buff out one more layer of wax.
 - b. Carefully, lightly, and with a clean towel buff out this last layer.
 - c. Its going to look ridiculously shiny... try to contain yourself. Take pictures, park it in front of your house and charge your neighbors admission to see it. Yes, it will be that good.
21. Rest
- a. Take a couple of Advil.
 - b. Have a beer or something.
 - c. Sit in your hot tub or bath tub
 - d. Sleep for about 14 hours.