

# **Fix It!** How to Repair Automotive Scratches, Dings, Dents, Tears, Stains and Odors



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First published in 2010 by MBI Publishing Company and Motorbooks, an imprint of MBI Publishing Company, 400 First Avenue North, Suite 300, Minneapolis, MN 55401 USA

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

To Come

President/CEO: Ken Fund  
Publisher: Zack Miller  
Editor: Jeff Zuehlke  
Creative Director: Michele Lanci-Altomare  
Design Managers: Brad Springer, Jon Simpson, James Kegley  
Designer: Kim Winscher

Printed in China

Cover photo (main) by Ron Hoeschen—QuadPhoto

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# PROJECT 1

## De-greasing the Engine

 **Skill Level:** 

 **Time Required:** 1 hour

 **Tools Required:** Spray-on engine cleaner, rubber gloves & safety goggles

 **Parts Source:** Auto parts store

 **Cost Estimate:** \$15

Something about a dirty engine gives us pause, whether working on our own car or considering buying a used one. “What is all that grease hiding? Can I even touch that engine—to check the oil, top up washer fluid, or replace the air filter—without leaving greasy fingerprints wherever I go for the rest of that day?”

A clean engine is inviting and luckily, not difficult to achieve. Just use a spray-on engine cleaner. The best place to do this is at a do-it-yourself car wash where the chemicals will be caught by the facility’s waste-water system. As usual, wear gloves and safety glasses to protect your eyes and skin.

Do you want to work under this hood? Not yet.

Off-the-shelf engine cleaners include spray foams like this product from Gunk. Read the label first to understand the best method of use. This product, for example, works best starting with a dry, cool engine. Spray it on liberally, so it can loosen up accumulated grease.

Not every part benefits from liberal application of cleaner or water. The alternator, distributor, and coil-on-plug ignition in this Geo may perform poorly if doused with liquid. One approach is to avoid spraying cleaner or water directly at the components. Another option, as done here, is to cover the alternator and distributor with plastic. Make sure your engine is cold to the touch before covering these parts.

This foam cleaner is a spray-on-rinse-off product. We’re using a car-wash-style wand here. Its powerful stream is useful in most areas, though we would not spray it directly into the alternator or at the distributor.

Now the engine doesn’t look like something we want to avoid.




## PROJECT 38

# Cleaning Aluminum Wheels

 **Skill Level:** 

 **Time Required:** 1 hour

 **Tools Required:** Car wash soap, sponge, wash bucket, alloy wheel cleaner, rubber gloves & safety goggles

 **Parts Source:** Auto parts store

 **Cost Estimate:** \$30

**C**lean wheels and tires make a car look newer, more valuable, better cared for—perhaps because they are so commonly dirty. Because they are the components making contact with the road, they are nearest to the dirt, mud, salt, sand, and other substances that collect on once-clean surfaces. Wheels also collect brake dust: fine particles scrubbed off the brake pads through friction.

Your wheels are made of steel or aluminum alloy and may have been painted, polished, or fitted with wheel covers (often called hubcaps). Basic cleaning may be done with the same mild car wash soap and sponge you use to clean the rest of your car. (Do the car first, so you don't

rub the dirt and grit from the wheels into your paint via the sponge and wash bucket.) For a dirty alloy wheel, a cleaner specifically for that purpose will make the process a lot quicker.

In this project, we clean an aluminum wheel along with its tire. The best place to do this job is at a do-it-yourself car wash. These facilities capture the run-off water so that it receives proper waste-water treatment. Their brushes and wands also make this sort of basic cleaning easy.

Strong cleaners contain solvents that irritate eyes and skin. Wear gloves and safety goggles when working with chemicals.



1

This wheel displays accumulated dirt and grime.



2

We sprayed it with an alloy wheel cleaner—this one being an off-the-shelf Napa Auto Parts product. Read the label to make sure what you buy suits your wheels. The product we used is not for clear-coated wheels. If your wheels have plastic center pieces, note whether the cleaner can be used on that area.



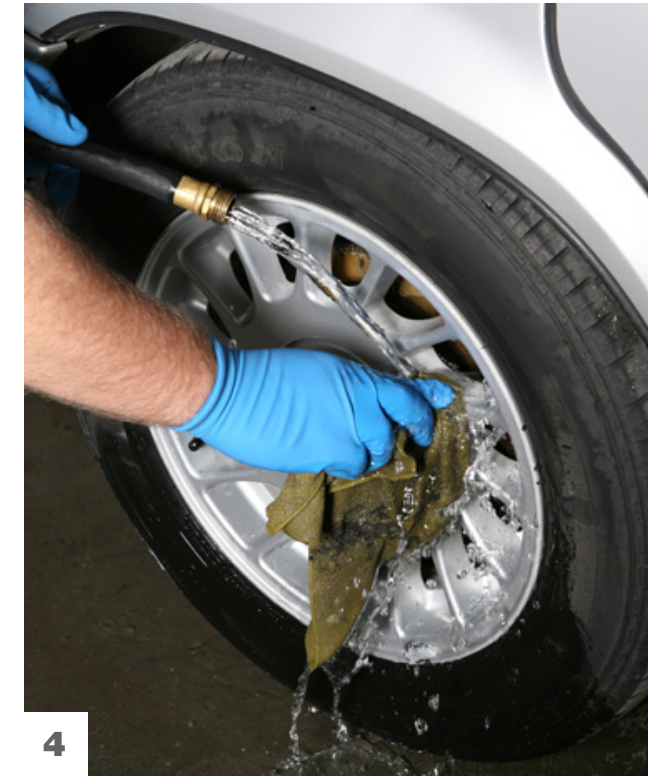
3

A brush is helpful. For stubborn grime, try a steel wool pad. Be sure to use “0000” super fine steel wool to avoid visible scratches.



5

The tire may be cleaned initially with a mild, general-purpose cleaner.



4

Rinse off the wheel thoroughly after cleaning. Not bad, eh?



6

Then spray the tire cleaner on the sidewall once the tire has dried. It requires no rubbing or wiping. When this dries, it will have a new-tire look that is not overly glossy.

