



Spring is here ... or is it?

Stop me if you've heard this one before, but spring is just around the corner. Right. As I write this, about 12 inches of snow have just fallen across New England, a timely gift to remind us that sometimes, March comes in like a lion.

The mild thaw of the past week or so has given way to freezing temperatures once again, and most of us have scuttled plans to get the summer wheels out early.

Despite the thick coat of white that currently blankets Boston, the fact remains that within a few weeks time, the grass will once again begin to show through and the roads will be on their way to clearing up for the new season. For BMW enthusiasts, this is a time of much rejoicing, a prelude to a summer filled with track events, autocross, barbecues and hanging out with old friends under the warm sun.

It's also a time to help you car recover from the wages that have been exacted by the winter climate. Without question, winter is the single dirtiest driving season. Let's start with the indignities suffered by your automobile's paint and finish through repeated exposure to ice pellets, gravel and sand and especially salt accumulation. Fortunately, for the most part, Boston's use of salt on our roads is fairly restrained, but what does get laid down inevitably ends up mixed in with standing water and sprayed all over your vehicle, giving it a white, frosty appearance that is worn all winter like a badge of shame.



At the top: Two samples of new detailing clay. On the bottom: A sample of what the clay will look like after use. Notice the fine dirt particles in the clay.

As long as temperatures are below freezing, corrosion related to salt build-up on your vehicle's body is minimal. However, once temperatures climb, the presence of water and salt together can definitely catalyze a steel-munching situation on your vehicle's panels. The key is to regularly wash your vehicle during warm spells to avoid salt from eating away at your car.

Clay therapy for the car

Once the mercury has begun to regularly hover above the thaw point, it's time to take a more aggressive attitude towards cleaning your car of salt. This involves a thorough wash and detail using something

called a clay bar. A clay bar is just that - a bar of detailing clay that comes in a small package that can be picked up at almost any automotive supply shop. After a regular car wash, follow the directions that came with the clay to remove the salt and other chemicals that have bonded with your vehicle's paint. The gentle abrasives in the clay, mitigated by the lubricating liquid that is used during its application, are the best way to remove contaminants from your paint that detergents and a wash glove just can't touch. Once clayed, a car should be waxed in order to add a protective shield over the paint.

At this point it's also a good idea to tackle the chrome and stainless steel tarnish that has built up over the winter, as well as the dulling of rubber and plastic trim pieces. You can use a number of different polishes and treatments to restore life to these components - I prefer Mothers products for chrome and 303 Aerospace protectant for rubber and plastic.

Detailing the interior

Once the exterior of your BMW has been taken care of, it's time to turn your attention to the interior. The carpets in your car take a lot of abuse during the winter time, thanks to all of the dirt, salt and snow that get tracked in to melt into your vehicle's floor. This can lead to nasty white and brown deposits that just don't seem to brush out. Salt build-up on fabric can be quite difficult to remove, but there are a number of enzyme-based cleaners that can be used to break down the crusty, crystalline formations that have colonized your floorboards and restore some order and cleanliness to your passenger compartment. Using

them in conjunction with a stiff scrub brush is usually the best way to release the salt. While you are down there, and once things have dried out, it's also a good time to vacuum out all of the bits of garbage and crumbs that always seem to accumulate over the winter.

The final steps to take when it comes to preparing your car's interior for the summer have to do with protecting your dash and other trim panels from the soon-to-be-harsh rays of the sun. We've all been burned by hot leather seats on a bright summer day. Consider for a moment what all of that concentrated heat is doing to the integrity of the vinyl, plastic and leather that are distributed throughout your car's cockpit. Spring cleaning is the perfect time to protect these surfaces by applying products which can nourish and seal in the moisture that the sun works so diligently to evaporate.

Heat and sun protection

For vinyl and plastic, try to avoid silicone-based products - they may make things look shiny, but they lack the ability to block the UV rays which really do the most damage. The oils in the silicone can also accelerate decay by working

against the action of the oils already found in vinyl. Zymol and Lexol vinyl and plastic protectants avoid the use of silicone. For seats, Lexol, Color Plus and Leatherique offer a range of products which should cover the materials you might be sitting on. Make sure to match the material with the right product, and when it comes to seats it's always a good idea to test out the cleaner or treatment on a small, hard to notice area in order to check for color-fastness.

An ounce of prevention

These tip should have your BMW looking as good as it did the day the very first snowflake landed on its hood. Making a regular effort to keep your car clean and protected will go a long way towards maintaining the shine depth of your paint and trim for years to come. ♦

Editor's Note: Benjamin Hunting is a professional Canadian writer who divides his time between Boston and Montreal. When not training his team of sled dogs back home, he enjoys participating in BMWCCA events in his E34 and covering the automotive and music industries for a variety of publications.

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