

When to Wax

Knowing When to Wax a New Car Could Help Your Business.

By Kevin Farrell

My wife and I just purchased a new MINI Cooper. The day we picked the car up, it looked great! Clean windows, shiny new tires, and no blemishes of any kind. The dealer did a great job prepping the car. The paint surface however, was a bit dry and felt a bit gritty. This told me that the car had not been waxed. When asked, the salesman confirmed that the car was washed, but not waxed. He further informed me that the dealership does not wax new cars because the paint is still “drying,” as he put it, and the wax may actually hurt the paint.

His answer concerned me. Not because the dealership chose not to wax the car, but because of

his explanation that the paint was still “drying.” I am not sure if this was a convenient excuse to give the customer because the dealer didn’t want to take the extra time to wax the car, or if the dealer personnel are under the misconception that new cars really should not be waxed because of possible paint damage. Let’s examine why the salesman’s statement was incorrect.

OLD TECHNOLOGY, OLD THINKING

Twenty years ago, cars were typically painted with lacquer or enamel paints. These were single-stage paints, with a large volume of solvents that needed to escape

before the paint would fully dry. These paint systems dried from the outside in. The paint would look and feel dry, but the layers underneath could still be a bit wet and soft because all the solvents in the paint had yet to escape. Therefore, if wax was applied to the paint surface before it was fully dried, there could be problems. There could have been solvent pop, which occurs from solvents pushing up through the paint and the wax, giving the paint a crater-like appearance. The paint could also have “died back” or faded a bit because of the trapped solvents clouding the paint. Also, solvents that did not escape would leave the paint softer and more susceptible to scratches and blemishes.

So, 20 years ago, it was important, and correct, not to wax a new car with these paint systems. However, that is old-school thinking and no longer applies with today’s base-coat/clear-coat paint systems.

TODAY’S FACTORY PAINT PROCESS

When a car is produced at the factory, painting it is one of first steps. This makes sense because you start with a bare body, which is easier to paint than a car that is assembled and that would require taping everything off, and then painting it. This would be extremely time consuming and costly. After the vehicle is painted, the car is put together — body, drive train, interior, suspension, etc. It makes sense that the paint needs



Above: The first day at home for the author’s new MINI Cooper. The car was 25 days old total from the factory and already waxed to protect it against a harsh winter.



Above left: This new car sitting on a dealer's lot has no protective wrap on it, and will be exposed to the elements until sold. Who knows when it was built, how long it's been there, and if it will be waxed upon delivery? It's seen its share of snow and salt.

Above right: Another car on the same dealer's lot still sports a protective wrap. This indicates the car is newer and there is some time remaining before the wrap needs to be removed.



to be dry and cured before the rest of the car is built.

Today's clear-coat paint systems are higher in solids and have far less solvents than the paint systems had 20 years ago. In part, this is a response to Environmental Protection Agency concerns, and because a paint with higher solids dries and cures faster. Also, activators and hardeners are added to accelerate the process. On top of that, the car is baked in a curing oven to further decrease the dry and cure time.

Almost every car produced today with a base-coat/clear-coat paint system goes through this process. These paints are 95 percent dry and cured before they ever leave the factory. It is safe to say that by the time a car reaches the dealership, it is almost 100 percent dried and cured. At this point the car can be wet sanded if needed, buffed, and yes... *waxed!*

BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO THE UNWAXED

Our MINI was built in early December and delivered to us December 31. I clayed, polished, and waxed it the very next day with absolutely no fear of hurting the paint. Incidentally, it snowed a week later and the car was full of

salt and road grime. As bad as it looked, I knew I had already taken care of the paint and had no fear that the salt and harshness of winter would hurt it.

The MINIs also arrive at the dealership with a protective plastic wrap on the top surfaces of the car to protect against atmospheric pollution and the elements during transit, and the short time it is at the dealer before it gets delivered. MINI, or any other car manufacturer, would never use a plastic wrap such as this

if the paint were still in the process of drying.

Some cars do not have plastic wrap, or the wrap may have been removed after its expiration date. Sometimes cars sit on a dealer's lot for a very long time if they are in low demand or if the dealer is overstocked. I have seen cars sit on a dealer's lot for four, six, and eight months or longer. These cars sit out there unwaxed and unprotected against the elements. They are rarely or never washed, and when



Above: The customer has had this car for less than 20 days. Was this car waxed upon delivery? How long was it on the dealer's lot? When was it actually built? When will the customer get it waxed for the first time?

the car finally is sold, a misinformed salesman tells a customer not to wax his car for another six months to a year. How much damage could be done to the paint surface over the period of time indicated in this scenario?

Also, it is important to consider how a customer takes care of his new car? Is it garaged? Is it parked outside in the hot summer sun? Does he let the car sit with road salt all over it for weeks? Does he wash it often? I know what you are thinking. This “new” car is going to need some serious paint correction when it is a year old. Not a simple “wax job.”

DO THE MATH

Customers, as much as they dislike dealerships and sometimes their practices, will still believe a salesman when he tells them not to wax their car for six months to a

year. Then, when you finally see their “new” car, it may need some serious work. If you do that serious work and want to be paid accordingly, you look like the bad guy for charging such a steep price for servicing a “new” car.

Let’s say a customer is driving a “brand new” 2003 model. As you are reading this article, it is sometime in April 2004. He tells you it’s a 2003, so how bad can it be? However, you look at the production date and find that the car was built in October of 2002. He finally decides to get it “waxed” in April 2004, so, in reality, it’s not so new. This “brand new” car is 18 months old! If this car was never waxed when it was delivered, do you think it would need more than a simple “wax job” at this point? I bet it does, and I am sure you see this all the time. Unfortunately, the customer who was actually trying to protect his car against damage by “not”

getting it waxed was doing exactly the opposite — more harm than good!

CLEAR COAT IS NOT BULLETPROOF

Many customers think that the term “clear coat” means that they have some kind of protective coating or “special” paint on their cars. They think this is what allows them never to wax their car. They assume there is some kind of bulletproof shield on their vehicle. Clear coat is simply the final step in the factory paint process, and while it is a far better technology than the single-stage paints of 20 years ago, it still needs to be cared for. Customers must always be informed of this fact. Today’s cars still need to be waxed and, if they are not, paint damage is likely to occur. This will result in the overall value of the vehicle being greatly reduced.

THIS THINKING HURTS BUSINESS

I love to detail cars when they are brand new. They are easy to work on and I can plant the seeds of proper cosmetic maintenance from the very beginning. This also means more business. Some customers will have their cars detailed numerous times before the car is a year old. On the other hand, a customer with the thought of not getting his car detailed until it's at least a year old can significantly hurt your bottom line.

EDUCATE YOUR CUSTOMERS

I like to talk. (Perhaps that comes through in the writing.) It seems my customers like to talk also. Customers constantly ask me about different models of cars they see or are thinking of buying or leasing. I happily give my opinions and tell the person inquiring as much as I know, including my honest opinion of a

particular car. The key in these conversations is building trust with customers and constantly educating them on what may be a good choice for them. I explain why black is a difficult and more challenging color choice to take care of, and why a "light" interior may not be practical for the customer with three kids and a dog.

They appreciate this advice, and these conversations give me an opportunity to educate and explain a little about paint and the care it needs. These conversations build trust. I become the person who they believe when it comes to their cars paint and how to take care of it. This is very important when there is misinformation being given by a dealership or anyone else who steers a customer in the wrong direction.

Once you have the trust of your customer and show them that you have the required skill and knowledge, they will listen and believe you. Make sure what

you tell a customer is correct and be confident in what you are saying. I never hesitate to inform my customers that if they are in the market for a new vehicle to make sure that they bring it in shortly after they take delivery because it will need to be waxed. If you do it in a caring manner without pressure, they will listen and believe you when you say that a new car should be waxed. Not only will you generate more revenue by getting these cars into your shop quicker, you'll prevent potentially serious damage being done to your customer's new car. You will be doing the right thing! 🚗

Kevin Farrell owns and operates Kleen Car (www.kleencarauto.com), a full-service auto detailing business located in New Milford, NJ. Kevin is also an instructor for a detailing program he developed for, and in conjunction with, BMW of North America. His background includes auto dealership experience and training through DuPont, General Motors, and I-Car.