



# CAR CARE SPECIALTIES, INC.

## CARE AND FEEDING OF CONVERTIBLE & SOFT TOPS

There are two basic styles of convertible, cabriolet or soft tops. Most American cars, Japanese cars and Targa Tops are a vinyl impregnated or vinyl coated canvas. The vinyl coating provides both waterproofing and protection against the elements. Most European manufacturers use a non-coated canvas, and the owner must apply all waterproofing and protection to the canvas. Routine cleaning of either style is very similar.

**Routine Cleaning:** Any bird bomb hits on your top should be removed as soon as possible, as they are highly acidic and will quickly damage your top. Any product used to clean should be gentle and any product chosen to preserve your top should be specifically designed for your style of top. You do not have to use car wash on the top every time you wash the rest of the car. Plain water will usually suffice. If the top is dirty, then use a gentle, pH neutral car wash (such as Sonax Gloss Shampoo) and rinse thoroughly. A sticky paper tape clothing lint roller is an invaluable tool to help maintain your top. It is great to remove dust and lint from the top and clean the plastic window without scratching.

About twice a year (less, if your car never sees the great outdoors), you should thoroughly clean and protect the top. In my humble opinion, the best time to do this is the beginning of Spring and start of Fall. This way the top is prepared for the harsh sun of summer and the ravages of winter. To clean your top, use a specifically formulated soft-top cleaner such as Sonax Cabrio Top Cleaner or Porsche Cabrio Top Cleaner. Park your car in a shady area and insure that the surface is relatively cool to the touch. Do not clean in direct sun. Wet the top thoroughly, spray a light coating of the cleaner evenly across the top, and GENTLY work into the top using a soft sponge or very soft brush. Once the top has been completely cleaned, rinse with lots of water. I find that using a hose without a nozzle, allows the gentle flow of water to rinse out the cleaner as I gently brush the surface. Continue rinsing until the top stops sudsing and the rinse water runs clear. On non-coated canvas tops, I like to take a very soft brush and "brush" the nap of the top in one direction. A ladies facial or complexion brush is usually soft enough. Buy one for your car and don't "borrow" one from the medicine cabinet and try and return it before the owner notices it's missing. This can lead to sudden marital discontent (voice of experience).

**Vinyl Coated Tops:** Wash the top thoroughly as outlined above. If it is still dirty, use Meguiar #39 Heavy Duty Vinyl Cleaner to deep clean the top. Do not use scouring powders or Comet on a vinyl top. These type of products will get the top very clean for about two weeks and then it will start to crack and fail. The chlorine bleaches leech out the essential oil in the vinyls and deplete the UV protectants. Once the top is clean, apply a coat of Meguiar #40 Vinyl Cleaner/Conditioner or Lexol Vinylex to condition and protect the vinyl surface. Apply the conditioner with a soft cloth, work into the surface, allow to penetrate and buff off the excess.

**Canvas tops:** The canvas needs help to remain waterproof. Porsche offers a Cabrio Protectant Aerosol Spray that helps waterproof and protect the top. I have tried to find comparable products, but have been unable to do so with confidence. BMW and Mercedes Benz also offer Cabrio Protectants, but both are pump sprays and are much more difficult to maintain a thin even coat over the entire top. The Cabrio Top Protectant should be applied just after cleaning, when the top is just "damp" dry. I use the top drying time to mask off all the glass, paint and the rear plastic window. This masking process is an important one. The Porsche Cabrio Protectant Spray will not hurt the paint, but you will need a belt sander to get it off the paint when it is dry. Loosen the windshield catches, lift up the top and slide newspaper between the windshield frame and the top. Refasten the top. Lower the side windows and slip newspaper between the top and the glass. Raise the windows tightly to hold the newspaper in place. Mask off the paint with a quality paint type masking tape and newspaper. Do not use scotch tape, electrical tape or duct tape, etc., as these products may develop a lifelong affinity for your paint. When you try and remove these types of tapes, some of your paint may choose to join it's new found friend. Mask off the rear plastic window with masking tape and newspaper. All this is time consuming and tedious, but well worth the time. Use additional newspaper and tape to cover any other areas of the glass and paint that remain exposed. I find that one width of newspaper works well on the sides, but use additional paper to cover the hood and trunk. If you are working outside and it is a windy day, you may consider masking the entire hood and trunk, as the over spray travels quite far (there is no such a thing as over masking).

Once the masking is completed, the top will probably be almost dry, yet have a slight dampness left. Before applying the protectant, insure that the top is clean, as any dirt or "bird offerings" will be sealed in by the protectant. Spray one thin coat along all of the seams, then spray an even thin coat over the entire top. An even thin coat is easy to maintain, as the top will darken slightly as the protectant is applied. Do not apply so much that the protectant forms "wet spots". Remove all your masking as soon as possible and then allow the top to dry in the raised position for at least 24 hours.

**Rear Windows:** The last item on your agenda is the clear (or maybe not so clear) plastic rear window. Do not use glass cleaners on a plastic window as they are too harsh and may actually damage plastic. There are several cleaners and polishes on the market that are specifically designed for plastic windows. Of the many that I have tried, the Meguiar's products seem to work the best. I have found that Meguiar #18 Plastic Polish will help maintain a plastic window in top shape. Make sure that the window is clean and free of dust, spray a thin coating on one third of the window and immediately spread out with a 100% cotton cloth. Turn the cloth to a dry section and buff out using linear strokes, left to right, right to left. Don't go around in circles, as the resulting swirls are very visible. Repeat the process for the entire window. Once the window is done,

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rebuff with another soft cotton cloth. If there are scratches or discoloration, try Meguiar #17 Clear Plastic Cleaner and follow with Meguiar #10 Clear Plastic Polish. This two-stage cleaning/polishing will usually remove most light scratches. If not, you may have to resort to a more aggressive cleaning product. I have found that 3M Imperial Hand Glaze will remove almost all deeper scratches. If the discoloration or scratches resist the Meguiar or 3M treatment, try adding a small amount (about the size of your pinkie nail) of P21S Multi Surface Polish to a cloth saturated with 3M Hand Glaze. Mix together on the cloth and gently rub the window in a linear motion and buff out. Follow with Meguiar #10 and you are done. If none of the above work, it may be time to call 1-800-new-window.

One of the problems many convertible owners encounter is a crease in the plastic window from repeated folding. The easiest way to prevent this problem is to use a super soft 100% cotton blanket or towel that is a little larger than the rear window. Place the blanket/towel over the window as you fold the top down, so that the blanket/towel is folded within the rear window. The thickness of the blanket prevents the plastic window from creasing and also keeps the two halves from rubbing against each other.

If you have any questions or if you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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