

THE NAKED

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TRUTH

THERE'S A WHOLE LOT MORE TO REMOVING AUTOMOTIVE PAINT THAN GATHERING A FEW MATES AROUND IN YOUR GARAGE WITH BEER IN HAND, BLOCKS OF WOOD AND SANDPAPER. HERE ARE SOME DIFFERENT OPTIONS SO THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO SCRAPE AWAY AT YOUR PRIDE AND JOY WHILE YOUR MATES SINK PISS AND WATCH



THE DILEMMA

If your car's paint is in good condition and has had only one prior paintjob, then you probably won't need the information on these pages. If not, then you should seriously consider stripping the surface down to bare metal.

Older vehicles have been around the block more times than any of our editorial staff, and numerous resprays can conceal a whole host of unsightly sins. Even if the bodywork is perfect, it is still necessary to remove the excess layers of paint before laying down a fresh coat over the panels.

Any imperfections in the previous paintwork can manifest in the new finish, and this is the last thing you'll want. Before you embark on this arduous journey, here's a list of the different techniques so you can consider your options.



SANDBLASTING

In essence, sandblasting consists of blasting abrasive solid particles over a hard surface in order to clean, shape or smooth it. Patented by Benjamin Chew Tilghman around 1870 in the City of Brotherly Love (Philadelphia), one of its initial uses was to sharpen files and rasps. As the name suggests, sand was employed in the blasting process. Since then other materials have been sourced for the task, and these will be covered in media blasting.

The most significant problem associated with sandblasting is the extreme heat that it creates if it is not done properly. The sand is blasted out of a pressurised air hose onto a surface, usually to the tune of 85–100psi. The heat that is generated expands the metal surface and can cause extensive warping – not



Suspension components are like new once they've been sandblasted

the ideal result when a flat, smooth surface was your initial goal.

Sandblasting is best for heavy metal parts, as well as stripping frames and running gear, but never on something smooth, large and flat like a bonnet unless it is being done by someone who knows exactly what they are doing.

Sandblasting has received a bad rap in Australia over the years purely because of a few instances where the person doing the stripping has made a mess of the panels that they were working on.

Undertaken by a technician that knows what they are doing, the results ensure you have the best surface to begin your work on. We use and recommend MK Sandblasting in Greenacre, which also works on some of the best-known show cars in the modified car scene.

MEDIA BLASTING

Instead of using sand, a wide range of other materials is employed in the media-blasting process. These materials include glass beads, metal pellets, dry ice, plastic particles, powdered abrasives of different coarseness and ground coconut shells. These have all been utilised in various ways to ensure distinct surface finishes. The fastest, safest and least-damaging way to remove paint from almost any surface is plastic media blasting.

Media blasting typically uses lower pressures (20–40psi) than the brutal pressures of sandblasting, and the soft plastic particles are safe for almost all delicate surfaces. The plastic particles are soft and angular, which makes them ideal for the task of stripping paint without damaging the surfaces beneath.

A wide range of surfaces can be stripped using this process, including fibreglass, graphite composite, kevlar, ceramic and carbon fibre, as well as the obvious metal surfaces. Other than wood, there are few restrictions to plastic media, and it has the added benefit of being the most environmentally friendly method available.



DIPPING

Chemical dipping is another option when you're looking for a fast way to strip paint – once your car is disassembled to a bare shell, that is! The procedure is just as the name describes – your vehicle will be dunked into a vat of chemicals to remove all finishes, stripping it down to bare steel.

Removing everything like interior trim, glass and seals from the body before it is submerged into the chemical cocktail is a must and thus means chemical dipping is a good idea when a total rebuild from the ground up is on the cards.

There are a few issues with regard to acid stripping. Some cars have areas that you cannot see and therefore cannot be painted, but the acid will certainly find those places, strip them and then leave them vulnerable to rust. Therefore, you must ensure that you get paint back into these surfaces somehow. Also, acid can be retained in similar nooks and crannies on the car, and then, after the paint has been applied, leach out onto your brand-spanking-new paintjob, leaving runs and other nasty ramifications.



Most dipping facilities that are equipped to treat car bodies usually pass the shell through multiple vats, including one that leaves an etched coating on the steel, protecting it from moisture. Even still, you must start work on the car almost immediately after the dipping has occurred. Consult with a chemical dipper such as Redistrip in NSW to find out what it expects from you and also exactly what it will do to the car. We've also had Redistrip work on one of our projects a few years back, and the results were brilliant. The car was riddled with rust, but that's another story.



Dipping removes just about everything



Handstripping is still widely used and very effective too



OLDER VEHICLES HAVE BEEN AROUND THE BLOCK MORE TIMES THAN ANY OF OUR EDITORIAL STAFF, AND NUMEROUS RESPRAYS CAN CONCEAL A WHOLE HOST OF UNSIGHTLY SINS

HAND CHEMICAL STRIPPING

Chemical stripping consists of applying a chemical to the surface that softens the paint so that it can then be lifted off the metal. The paint will bubble up and is then scraped off the body and discarded. Application can be either by aerosol can or pump spray. Some have to be painted on due to their thickness. This job must be undertaken in small sections, as it takes some time for the paint to soften, but if you wait too long, the paint and stripper will harden and might be even harder to scrape off.

Stripping will take some time also because it is done by hand. If the car has multiple paint finishes, it will require numerous applications before bare metal is found. Some local governments may consider chemical strippers a hazardous material, so proper collection and disposal will be necessary as opposed to simply tossing it in the bin. The most positive aspect is that with a good set of gloves and some patience, just about anyone can strip their paint off using this method in their own garage.

Finally, it is vitally important that you know what you are dealing with before you apply it. Some strippers are safe around rubber or chrome trim, while others won't be. Chemical strippers are often intended for different paint finishes, such as enamel or lacquer, or may even be designed to just strip the paint but not the primer. Make sure you shop around and read the labels.

HAND SANDING

Sanding is the timeworn art of stripping paint, but it is the most tedious and time consuming of the bunch. If your paint is already peeling or is thin, it may not take too much effort to achieve a bare-metal finish. A dual-action air-powered sander will be the go in this situation. Dual action refers to the motion of the sanding disc as well as the base the sanding disc is attached to, which results in an orbital motion. This is favoured because it removes materials more evenly than a simple spinning motion (otherwise know as grinder mode).

This fact is important to note because the grinder mode can leave gouges or minor waves in the steel, particularly if an aggressive grit or heavy-duty sanding machine such as high-torque electric units are being used. An 8in sanding disc with 80-grit paper on a dual-action sander should be sufficient for the task. **SC**

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