

Clay Bar Detailing

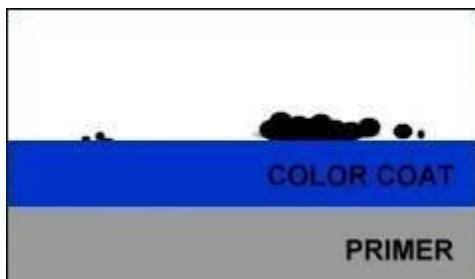
The claybar has become such an important tool for regular auto detailing. Throughout the Guide To Detailing website you will find references and how-tips to help you get the most out of your clay bar detailing work. This page in particular offers step-by-step detailing clay information.

Chances are you're here because you've seen detailing clay bar kits in stores or you've heard other people talking about it. Perhaps you've tried it before and simply didn't get the results you expected. You're in the right place!

I have been using clay bars since 1997. During the years I was making and selling products, I sold many thousands of them under my Autopia and Sonus product labels, including a custom blend made exclusively for me. I know a lot about detailing clay, its history, its benefits and the limitations.

What Exactly Can a Clay Bar Do

I've read a lot of clay bar product reviews. Typically when someone gives a 1 or 2 star rating, it's because they are disappointed that the product did not remove the swirl marks and scratches from their car's paint. So, I'd like to start with what detailing clay can do and what it cannot.



Surface contamination, as shown by this diagram, is difficult to clean or polish off, yet a detailing clay bar can remove it with ease.

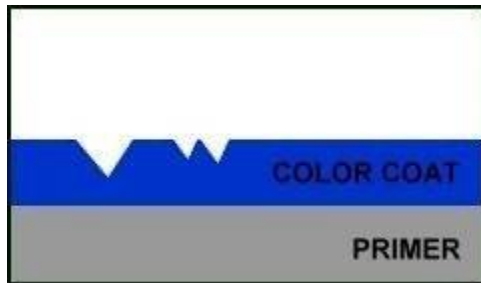
The Real Truth About Claybar Products

A claybar is a paint cleaner. Its one and **only job is to remove bonded contamination on the surface of the paint** (or glass). When properly applied, the claybar itself never touches your paint. It glides over it on a layer of lubrication (detail spray).

The benefit of using detailing clay versus a traditional car polish or cleaner wax (to clean your car) is that claying is faster and it does not physically wear on the paint finish.

By comparison, other forms of paint cleaning use chemicals and abrasives that thin your paint or clearcoat over time which contributes to premature wear.

Once again, a clay bar cannot remove paint imperfections such as swirl marks or scratches. It also won't improve the shine. What it will do is remove the grunge so you can see a bright, clear finish.



A Clay Bar won't remove scratches and swirl marks because they are defects in the surface of the paint. To remove these defects you must, instead, use an abrasive polish.

Consider A Few Other Key Benefits

There are several side benefits to using clay. The most noticeable is how slick and smooth your paint feels after claying. You can polish your car for hours and it won't feel as slick and smooth as it does after just a few minutes with a clay bar.

The biggest true benefit this has is that it makes waxing easier and more effective. With a super slick finish, wax glides on and buffs off with ease. Plus, the contamination-free finish allows for a tighter wax job that lasts longer and looks better.

Evaluating Paint For Clay Bar Use

How do you know if you need to use a clay bar? After thoroughly hand washing your car, feel the surface of your car's paint. Do you feel bumps and rough spots? These bumps are contaminants attacking the finish of your car.

Removing these surface contaminants (road tar, acid rain spots, bug residue, paint over-spray, brake pad dust, hard water spots, etc.) will improve both the look and health of your car's paint. By the way, you can magnify your sense of touch by inserting your fingertips into a sandwich bag or a piece of cellophane.

No matter how well you hand-wash your car, many of the contaminants that have worked their way into your car's paint finish will remain.

Have you ever looked at your foam wax applicator pad after applying a coat of wax? What do you think that black stuff is? It's dirt, and you're waxing over it, sealing it in.

How To Properly Utilize a Clay Bar

Using a detailing clay bar is easy, but you must properly follow the instructions. Use a clay bar incorrectly and you will create a mess or scuff the surface of your paint.

Before using detailing clay, you must thoroughly clean and dry your car to remove any loose dirt. Direct sunlight should not fall on your car's surface, and it's best if the work area is relatively cool to prevent rapid evaporation of the claybar lubricant. Also, most claybars become soft as they get warm, making them less effective.

To use a clay bar, spray a lubricant on a small area of your car and rub the clay back and forth with light to medium pressure. If the lubricant begins to dry, you'll need to spray more.

Warning: Detailing clay is sticky and cannot be used dry. Try using a clay bar dry and you'll make a big mess and scuff your paint.



Be sure to use plenty of clay lubricant. Holly is using the original Clay Magic detailing clay and lubricant.



An alternative to a spray detailing lubricant is good old soapy water. This is ideal if your paint is heavily contaminated. Be sure to rinse your wash mitt thoroughly and use a fresh bucket of soapy water, not what's left over from washing. After claying one or two body panels, your clay will begin to look dirty. Don't be alarmed, that's just the clay doing its job. Flip it over and use the other side. When both sides are dirty, remold the clay into a ball and flatten to reveal a clean surface. After a few passes, rub your hand over the area you've cleaned to check for any misses. You should feel a distinct difference between the areas you have clayed and the areas you haven't. Keep rubbing until all contamination bumps are gone.

Finally, wipe the clay lubricant residue off with a soft microfiber towel, and buff to a nice luster. Just like waxing, it's best to work in small areas.

Tip: You'll want to check the clay bar frequently for hard particles. When found, pick them off. Make it a habit to occasionally knead and reform the bar so that a fresh portion of the bar makes contact with your car's paint.

Always Toss Away a Contaminated Clay Bar

If you drop your bar of detailing clay on the ground, it's history. Toss it out. Don't take any chances, discard the clay bar if it becomes impregnated with grit. Read the manufacturers' directions regarding the number of uses. Do not overuse your detailing clay.

When you're finished claying your car, you may need to wash it to remove any lubricant film. If you plan to use a pre-wax cleaner polish, it will remove clay residue so there's no

need to wash. After using clay, seal your freshly cleaned paint with your choice of wax or sealant.



With just a little effort, stubborn brake dust that even the strongest cleaners won't remove comes off with detailing clay. Automotive detailing clay isn't just for paint. You can use detailing clay on any smooth, hard surface, including glass and chrome. Never use clay on clear plastic, such as headlight lenses.

When I can no longer remold clay to get a clean surface, I retire it for use on my windows. The dirty clay will not harm glass, and it's amazing how much dirt film clay can remove from exterior glass.

I also use my old clay to clean wheels. Detailing clay will safely remove stubborn, embedded brake dust, tar and road film from all factory wheels. However, I don't recommend using a clay bar on wheels that do not have a factory clearcoat or powder coat finish.

Clay Bar Detailing Common Questions & Answers

I've received a lot of email questions regarding clay bars. Here are some common questions and answers:

Q1. *I dropped my clay bar on the ground. Can I still use it?*

A1. The safe answer is no. A clay bar will pick up small particles of grit from the ground that will scratch your paint.

Q2. *If I clay bar my car do I still need to polish my paint?*

A2. Yes. Detailing clay will not remove swirl marks, scratches or etching from acid rain or hard water spots. Paint polish is still required to remove these paint defects. If your paint is

new or like-new, detailing clay will significantly reduce the amount of polishing required to keep your paint in good condition.

Q3. *What is the best claybar?*

A3. What label do you like? There are only a couple manufacturers of clay, and the technology is protected by U.S. patents. Clay is manufactured with different levels of abrasiveness and colors to suite different applications. There are subtle differences in technology (plastic vs. elastic material) and the firmness of the material. In general, softer clays are safer and easier to use. A firm claybar cleans better with a little more risk of scuffing or scratching.

Q4. *Is it better to use soapy water or a detailing spray for lubrication.*

A4. Both work equally well. If you want to do the job fast, use a bucket of soapy water. If you want to work inside or do a thorough job, use a spray lubricant. With a spray lubricant you can wipe down each panel as you go and feel for areas you've missed.

Q5. *How do I store my clay bar?*

A5. If your claybar did not come with a re-usable plastic container, store it in a Ziploc baggie.

Q6. *Will a clay bar remove my wax?*

A6. In most cases, a clay bar will "scrub off" wax protection. Some paint sealants are hard enough to withstand being cleaned with clay, but most are not.

The Need for Polishing After Cleaning

Many people assume that a detailing clay bar completely replaces car polish. While it's true that detailing clay does the heavy lifting, it doesn't replace the need to use a car polish cleaner.

A fine car polish which is often called a pre-wax cleaner, will remove old wax, embedded dirt and light stains from your paint. They also help to restore gloss and remove light surface imperfections, such as swirl marks and water spot etching.

I recommend using a car polish at least twice a year. If your paint is in excellent condition, a good car polish will keep it healthy so you can avoid having to use heavy rubbing compounds to remove paint damage.

Making the Process as Easy as Possible

When cleaning or polishing paint, always work in a shaded area, out of direct sunlight. **Polishes and cleaners do not work well on hot surfaces.** Work on one area at a time, covering 2 to 4 square feet.

Buff off the polish residues as you go. Most car polishes do not need to dry or haze before being wiped off, but be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions.

You can use a foam, terry cloth or microfiber applicator pad to apply car polish. If your paint finish is in new or like-new condition, I recommend a [quality foam applicator](#). If your paint is moderately oxidized, I recommend a microfiber applicator.

Use a small amount of car polish at a time. With most products, several pea-size dabs is enough to clean and polish an area of approximately 2 square feet. If the polishing residue does not buff off easily, switch to a clean wipe towel. For best results, I recommend using a [quality microfiber polishing towel](#).

After cleaning your car's paint it should be squeaky clean, smooth, and free of streaks and minor swirls. It's now ready for waxing.

Clay Bar Detailing Summary

With detailing clay, you can clean your paint regularly without being concerned about reducing clearcoat thickness or scratching. It's the perfect solution for crystal clear, super smooth paint.