Care and Feeding of Convertible & Soft Tops

There are two basic types of convertible, cabriolet or soft tops. Most American cars, Japanese cars and Targa Tops are a vinyl impregnated or vinyl coated fabric. The vinyl coating provides both waterproofing and protection against the elements. Most European manufacturers use a non-coated fabric and the owner must apply all waterproofing and protection to the fabric, once the factory applied protectant has worn off. For this article, I will refer to vinyl or vinyl impregnated tops as vinyl and the non-coated fabric as fabric. Routine cleaning of either style is very similar.

Routine Cleaning of Fabric & Vinyl Tops: 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. Keep a bottle of no-salt seltzer water (available in any food store) in your car. If you are lucky enough to receive bird presents, take out your bottle of no-salt seltzer water, remove the top, place your thumb over the top and shake. You now have a little fire hydrant to quickly wash off the bird gift. (Just be glad that flying dinosaurs are extinct.) The seltzer water is nothing more than water and carbon dioxide, so it will not harm the top or paint. Once you get home, you may then properly clean the top.

Any product used to clean should be gentle and any product chosen to protect your top should be specifically designed for your style of top. If the top is dirty, then use a gentle, pH neutral car wash (such as Sonax Gloss Shampoo or P21S Bodywork Conditioning Shampoo) and rinse thoroughly with lots of water and allow to air dry. You do not have to use car wash on a fabric top every time you wash the rest of the car. Plain water will usually suffice. A sticky paper tape style clothing lint roller is an invaluable tool to help maintain your fabric top. It is great to remove dust and lint from the fabric and clean the plastic window without scratching.

FABRIC TOP CARE

Cleaning & Protecting Fabric Tops: About once or twice a year (less, if your car never sees the great outdoors), you should thoroughly clean and then 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. The simple method to determine the condition of existing top protectant is the water bead test. If the top beads water evenly when wet, then the existing protectant is in good condition. If water does not bead evenly or it soaks into the top material, then its time to apply a coat of protectant. To clean your top, use a specifically formulated fabric top cleaner such as Renovo Fabric Soft Top Dry 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. Gently brush the dry top with a soft brush to remove any loose dirt. I use the Detailers Choice Dip & Wash Brush. The super soft split tip bristles are gentle on the top material and the 22 long handle makes it easy to reach the entire top.

Renovo Fabric Soft Top Dry Cleaner: Shake the can well and spray the foam onto the dry top. Do not

wet the top. Spread the foam evenly over the entire top with a sponge or soft cloth. **GENTLY** agitate the foam cleaner with a sponge, soft cloth or the Dip & Wash Brush. Stubborn stains may require an additional application of Renovo Dry Cleaner and additional gentle brushing. Be careful not to allow the brush to come in contact with the rear plastic window, as it may scratch the window. To remove the cleaner, either hose off or wipe off with a wet sponge, continually rinsing the sponge in clean water.

Porsche Cabrio Top Cleaner: Mix two capfuls of the Porsche Cabrio Top Cleaner in a gallon of water. I like to fill the Meguiar Pump Spray Bottle with the cleaner solution and spray on the top, but you may also use a sponge and apply it like car wash. Wet the top thoroughly and then apply a light coating of the cleaner evenly across the top. GENTLY work into the top using a soft sponge or soft brush such as the Detailers Choice Dip & Wash Brush. Stubborn stains may require an additional application of cleaner and additional gentle brushing. Once the top has been completely cleaned, rinse with lots of water.

Rinsing: 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. Once the top is thoroughly rinsed, I like to take a soft brush and brush the nap of the top in one direction. The Detailers Choice Dip & Wash Brush or a ladies facial brush is soft enough. If you use a ladies facial brush, buy one for your car and dont borrow one from the medicine cabinet and try to return it before the owner notices its missing. This may lead to sudden marital discontent (voice of experience).

Protecting Fabric Tops: The fabric needs a coat of fabric top protectant to remain waterproof, provide UV protection and increase longevity (Always use protection in your convertible). There are three basic application methods for fabric top protectants: aerosol, brush on and pump spray. I prefer either the aerosol or the brush on application. I have found it much more difficult to maintain a thin, even coat over the entire top with a pump spray as they tend to spatter big blobs all over. Of the many protectants on the market, the Porsche Cabrio Top Protectant is the best aerosol type and the Renovo Fabric Soft Top Ultra Proofer is the finest brush on type. The top protectant should be applied immediately after cleaning, when the top is just 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 top protectants will not harm the paint but you will need a hammer and chisel to get it off the paint when dry (Just kidding). You may use either two thin plastic drop cloths (the thinner the better) or newspapers to cover the paint. I prefer the plastic drop cloths as one will cover from the front of the car to the back edge of the doors and the other will cover the rear half. You may also use lots of newspaper taped together. Loosen the windshield catches, lift up the top and slide the thin plastic drop cloth or newspaper over the windshield frame and the top of the windows as far back as possible. Refasten the top. Lower the windows and slip the drop cloth/newspaper between the top and the glass. Raise the windows tightly to hold the plastic/newspaper in place. Mask off the paint where it meets the top with a quality, paint type masking tape (such as 3M Blue Masking Tape) and tape the plastic drop cloth or newspaper to butt up to, but not over the top fabric. **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 tape, some of your paint may choose to join its new found

friend. Mask off the rear plastic window with the masking tape or newspaper. All this is time consuming and tedious but well worth the time. Use additional plastic/newspaper and tape to cover any other areas of the glass and paint that remain exposed. If you use plastic drop cloths, they will cover the entire car, just use masking tape to hold them down, If you use newspaper 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!

Applying Fabric Protectant: Once the masking is completed, the top will probably be almost dry, yet have a very slight hint of dampness left. Before applying the protectant, insure that the top is clean, as any dirt will be sealed in by the protectant.

Renovo Fabric Soft Top Ultra Proofer: Pour the Renovo Fabric Soft Top Ultra Proofer into a clean plastic cup or other suitable container at least 3 in diameter and stir well. Apply the Ultra Proofer with either a 2 wide paint brush or an air brush. Brush or spray on a thin, even coat along each of the seams. Then, starting at the center of the front edge of the top, apply a thin, even coat to the entire top working from side to side towards the rear of the top. Immediately remove any drips on the paint, glass or trim with a wet cloth. Remove all masking and allow the Renovo Fabric Soft Top Ultra Proofer to completely dry for 24 hours before folding the top.

Porsche Cabrio Top Protectant: Spray one thin coat of the Porsche Cabrio Top Protectant along all of the seams and 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 the masking as soon as possible and then allow the top to dry in the raised position for at least 24 hours.

Restoring Faded Fabric Tops: If your fabric top has faded and is looking washed out, then you may consider re-dying the fabric. Renovo Fabric Soft Top Reviver is a permanent, water based dye that may be applied with either a brush, sponge or air brush and dries in 2-3 hours. Badly faded tops may require a second coat. Clean the surface thoroughly with Renovo Soft Top Dry Cleaner. Shake the can well and spray the foam onto the dry top. Do not wet the top. Spread the foam evenly over the entire top with sponge or soft cloth. GENTLY agitate the foam cleaner with a sponge, soft cloth or the Detailers Choice Dip & Wash Brush. Stubborn stains may require an additional application of Renovo Soft Top Dry Cleaner and additional gentle brushing. Be careful not to allow the brush to come in contact with the rear plastic window, as it may scratch the window. To remove the cleaner, either hose off or wipe off with a wet sponge, continually rinsing the sponge in clean water. Once all traces of the cleaner have been rinsed completely, then allow it to dry completely. Use 3M Blue Masking Tape and plastic drop cloths or newspaper to mask off the rear window, the glass and paint. Pour the Renovo Fabric Soft Top Reviver into a clean plastic cup or other suitable container at least 3 in diameter. Start the application at the center section of the front of the top. Work from side to side, progressing towards the back, maintaining a wet edge as you work towards the rear. (The technique is similar to painting with water based paint). Immediately remove any drips on the paint, glass or trim with a wet cloth. If the top is badly faded, apply

a second coat after allowing the first coat to dry for 24 hours. Allow the final coat to dry for 24 hours and then follow with a coat of Renovo Fabric Soft Top Ultra Proofer to protect and prolong the life of your new looking top. Pour the Ultra Proofer into a clean plastic cup or other suitable container at least 3 in diameter and stir well. Apply the Ultra Proofer with either a 2 wide paint brush or an air brush. Brush or spray on a thin, even coat along each of the seams. Then, starting at the center of the front edge of the top, apply a thin, even coat to the entire top working from side to side towards the rear of the top. Immediately remove any drips on the paint, glass or trim with a wet cloth. Remove all masking and allow the Ultra Proofer to completely dry for 24 hours before folding the top. DO NOT use on vinyl or vinyl impregnated fabric tops. If you are in doubt as to your top material, consult the manufacturer.

VINYL TOP CARE

Cleaning & Protecting Vinyl Tops: Wash the top thoroughly, as outlined in the routine cleaning section. If it is still dirty, then use either Renovo Vinyl Soft Top Cleaner or Meguiars #39 Heavy Duty Vinyl Cleaner to deep clean the top. Do not use scouring powders or Comet on a vinyl top. These types 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 emollients in the vinyl and deplete the UV protectants. Park your car in a shady area and insure that the surface is relatively cool to the touch. Do not clean or apply protectant in direct sun

Renovo Vinyl Soft Top Cleaner: You may either spray on or brush on Renovo Vinyl Soft Top Cleaner. I prefer to fill the Meguiar Pump Spray Bottle with the cleaner and spray evenly over the top. You may choose to use a 2 wide paint brush and brush it on. Shake the bottle well and pour the cleaner into the pump spray container or into a clean plastic cup. Do not wet the top. Use the spray bottle or brush to spread the cleaner evenly over the entire top. Gently agitate the cleaner with a sponge, soft cloth or the Detailers Choice Dip & Wash Brush. Stubborn stains or heavily grained top material may require an additional application of Renovo Vinyl Soft Top Cleaner and additional gentle brushing. Be careful not to allow the brush to come in contact with the rear plastic window, as it may scratch the window. On a heavily soiled top, you may allow the cleaner to remain on the top cleaning for up to an hour. To remove the cleaner, either hose off or wipe off with a wet sponge, continually rinsing the sponge in clean water. Rinse until all traces of the cleaner have been removed.

Meguiars #39 Heavy Duty Vinyl Cleaner: Do not wet the top. Spray the cleaner evenly over the entire top. Gently agitate the cleaner with a sponge, soft cloth or the Detailers Choice Dip & Wash Brush. Stubborn stains or heavily grained top material may require an additional application and additional gentle brushing. Be careful not to allow the brush to come in contact with the rear plastic window, as it may scratch the window. To remove the cleaner, wipe off with a soft cloth, continually turning the cloth, until all traces of the cleaner have been removed.

Applying Vinyl Protectant: Once the top is clean and dry, apply a coat of Renovo Vinyl Ultra Proofer,

Meguiars #40 Vinyl Conditioner or Lexol Vinylex to condition and protect the vinyl surface.

Renovo Vinyl Top Ultra Proofer: Shake the bottle well, pour the Renovo Vinyl Top Ultra Proofer into a clean plastic cup or other suitable container at least 3 in diameter. Apply with either a 2 wide paint brush or an air brush. Brush or spray on a thin, even coat along each of the seams. Then, starting at the center of the front edge of the top, apply a thin, even coat to the entire top working from side to side towards the rear of the top. Immediately remove any drips on the paint, glass or trim with a wet cloth. Immediately remove all masking and allow the Vinyl Top Ultra Proofer to completely dry for 24 hours before folding the top.

Meguiars #40 or **Lexol Vinylex**: Spray a small amount onto a soft, 100% cotton cloth, apply a thin even coat onto the surface, allow to it penetrate for several minutes and then buff off the excess with another soft. 100% cotton cloth.

Plastic Rear Window Care:

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 **Mequiars**, **Renovo** and **One Grand** products seem to work the best. I have found that Meguiars #18 Clear Plastic Detailer will help maintain a plastic window that does not have any scratches or clouding in top condition. Make sure that the window is clean and free of dust. Spray a small amount of the Meguiars #18 on a soft, 100% cotton flannel cloth and work into the surface, using linear strokes, left to right, right to left. Dont go around in circles, as the resulting swirls are very visible. Immediately buff off with another soft, 100% cotton flannel cloth. Do not allow to self dry. If there are scratches or discoloration, try either the two step Meguiars #17 Clear Plastic Cleaner followed with Meguiars #10 Clear Plastic Polish or the one step Renovo Plastic Window Polish or One Grand Plastic Cleaner & Polish. Apply a very small amount of either of these to a soft, 100% cotton flannel cloth. Work into the plastic with a linear motion, left to right, right to left, until all that remains is a faint haze. Immediately buff off with another soft. 100% cotton flannel cloth to crystal clarity. Do not allow to self dry. Depending upon the condition of the plastic, you may have to repeat several times. This 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. Use a small amount of 3M Imperial Hand Glaze on a soft, 100% cotton flannel cloth and work into the surface with linear motions, left to right, right to left. Immediately buff off with another soft, 100% cotton flannel cloth. If the discoloration or scratches resists the 3M treatment, try adding a small amount (about the size of your pinkie nail) of P21S Multi Surface Finish Restorer Polish to a 100% cotton flannel cloth saturated with 3M Imperial Hand Glaze. Mix together on the cloth and gently rub the window in a linear motion and buff off with another 100% cotton flannel cloth. Follow with an application of Meguiars #17, then Meguiars #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 minimize 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 your 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 a crease in the window, try parking in a very sunny area with the sun shining directly on the window. The heat will usually soften the window enough that the crease will disappear.

If you have any questions or if you need any further information, please feel free to contact us.

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