

Clay is the Way

Is a clay bar kit in your future?...It is if you want the best shine possible for your musclecar!

Text and photography by Jim Black

While attending the Pontiac-Oakland Club International Convention in Tulsa back in 2007, our Bonneville together with about 400 other show cars received some paint over spray damage as a result of exterior painting that was in progress at the host hotel. Those affected were told to get estimates for the cleaning and most of the body shops were saying the same thing... a clay bar is the way to go! After weeks of waiting we decided to 'clay' the Bonneville ourselves, and we were truly amazed with the results. In fact it turned out so well, that we've now decided to 'clay' the Lemans next.

What is a clay bar? Well it's actually a palm-sized bar of soft clay that when rubbed across a cars finish, strips away imbedded contamination such as paint over spray, etc. The clay bar is used with a suitable spray lubricant such as soap and water solution or a detail spray which provides a slick surface for the clay to ride on while stripping away the contaminants. A clay bar can work better than chemicals, compounding, or other cleaners that can be harmful to your cars finish. Aside from paint over spray the short list of contaminants it works on include brake dust, rail dust, tree sap, road tar, bug residue, bird droppings, water spots, acid rain deposits, and even industrial fallout.

The other benefit of 'claying' your car is that all previous wax and polish buildup is stripped away in the process, leaving an absolutely smooth and slick surface right down to the bare paint. Once 'clayed', the paints original surface will allow a new fresh coat of wax or polish to be applied which forms a stronger bond to the paint finish creating a shine with maximum reflectivity. Most clay kit manufacturers recommend 'claying' a car every two to three years as routine maintenance for your cars finish. They even recommend 'claying' new cars that were transported via rail to dealers that are prone to rail contaminants in the process.

Now it's time to clay bar the Lemans which has twelve years worth of wax and polish buildup and probably a sufficient amount of contaminants trapped in each of the layers as well. We'll be looking at three different clay kits so we can compare the contents. The Meguiar's and Mothers kits are the most common and can be purchased at many different parts stores and some discount centers. The Zaino Brothers kit was purchased online which also offers other car care products to the consumer.

When choosing a clay kit remember that the 'clay' is the key element and should have the greatest consideration. Our Lemans has a lot of surface area and naturally a larger clay bar will make the job go much quicker and easier. Also, a second clay bar is almost always a requirement since there is a good possibility that you may drop one of the bars before your finished. Once the clay hits the ground or garage floor it will pick up

dirt, sand particles, and/or other contaminants that could scratch the paint finish if its re-used so it should be discarded immediately.

Well now that we've completed a crash course in "clay bar 101", and have all the materials necessary to do the job, lets go to work. Our tester is a rare 1967 Lemans 'Sprint' with the ohc6, 4bbl, and factory 4-speed.

Clay Bar Tips: (sidebar)

1. Always wash vehicle first prior to claying.
2. Clay the car in the shade and out of direct sunlight.
3. Keeps areas to be clayed well lubricated to prevent clay from sticking.
4. Use of spray lubricant on hands will keep clay from sticking to them.
5. Rub clay across painted surfaces until smooth and then move to next area.
6. Knead the clay often and re-fold as necessary to get a clean side.
7. Once the clay bar becomes soiled discard and use another.
8. If you drop the clay bar discard it immediately.
9. After claying vehicle wash to remove any clay residue and hand dry.
10. Apply wax or polish immediately to protect finish.

Sources:

Meguiar's, Inc.
17991 Mitchell South
Irvine, CA 92614
(800) 347-5700
www.meguiars.com

Mothers Polish
5456 Industrial Drive
Huntington Beach, CA 92649
www.mothers.com

Zaino
4057 Hwy 9 North, Suite 106
Howell, NJ 07731
(732) 833-8800
www.zainobros.com

Sopus Products (Blue Coral Car Wash)
P.O. Box 4427
Houston, TX 77210-4427
(800) 416-1600
www.bluecoral.com

Photo cut lines:

Lead - Claying the Lemans 'Sprint'

Photo 1 - We purchased three different clay bar kits for comparison purposes including Meguiar's and Mothers kits from a local parts store, and the Zaino Bros' clay bar which was purchased online.



Photo 2 - The Meguiar's Smooth Surface Clay Kit cost \$19.99 and included (2) clay bars at 50 grams each with storage case; a 16 oz bottle of Quick Detailer; 4 oz sample of Cleaner Wax; and a Microfiber drying cloth.



Photo 3 - The Mothers Clay Bar Paint Saving System was \$17.99 and included (1) clay bar at 80 grams; a 16 oz bottle of Showtime Instant Detailer; and a 4 oz sample of Carnauba Cleaner Wax.



Photo 4 - The Zaino Clay Bar purchased online cost \$17.95 and included (2) clay bars at 80 grams each with plastic storage container.



Photo 5 - First we mixed Dawn liquid dishwashing soap in warm water which will aid in removing the wax buildup since we'll be removing it anyway.



Photo 6 - We washed and hand dried the car to remove any dirt, dust, and debris that could harm the finish during the clay bar process. Make sure you wash the car in the shade.



Photo 7 - We used the Meguiar's clay bars but at 50 grams each they're just not adequate to use individually and can thin out quickly, slowing the process. We recommend using a bar at least 80 grams each, as a minimum.



Photo 8 - We combined both bars by folding and kneading them together. Professionals use 100 gram bars so this should improve coverage and the time it takes to do the job will be reduced.



Photo 9 - Next, we sprayed a small area on the fender with our Meguiar's Quick Detailer which will create a slick surface for the clay bar to glide across. Working under the shade of a tree will also help keep the surfaces cool and prevent the lubricant from evaporating.



Photo 10 - We also treated our hands with the lubricant to keep the clay from sticking to them and coming apart as we worked.



Photo 11 - With light pressure we rubbed the clay bar back and forth over the lubricated section to remove the wax buildup and other contaminants. We could actually feel it working and continued until the section was smooth.



Photo 12 - After using the clay bar on the remainder of the front fender we buffed it dry with a clean cotton towel and checked for missed areas. It only took about 10 minutes to do the fender alone.



Photo 13 - We checked the surfaces and determined that all the contaminants had been lifted away. We were amazed how shiny and smooth it was once all the previous wax coats were removed.



Photo 14 - We finished the hood and left front fender and continued working around the car a panel at a time making sure we used enough lubricant in the clay bar process.



Photo 15 - As one side of our clay bar became soiled we flipped to the other side and kneaded and refolded the clay as required to keep a side clean.



Photo 16 - After running out of the Meguiar's Quick Detailer, we mixed a cap full of Blue Coral car wash with water in a spray bottle which will now act as our surface lubricant.



Photo 17 - We were concerned about pulling up our graphics, but since they were applied shortly after painting and before to the first waxing, the bond was sufficient and no problem existed. However, we proceeded with caution in these areas just to be safe.



Photo 18 - We worked the clay around thumb and fingers in tight areas, such as working around trim and moldings.



Photo 19 - Once we finished claying all the painted surfaces we used our clay bar to remove old polish and wax buildup from the bumpers and then we gave the car a final wash to remove leftover clay residue and then hand dried.



Photo 20 - With the clay bar process complete the paint finish is free of contaminants and stripped of all wax and polish buildup which leaves it vulnerable. We decided to try Zaino Brothers show car polish since we're already familiar with the other brands.



Photo 21 - Using the kit applicator we hand applied two coats of Zaino show car polish and allowed each coat to dry 30 minutes prior to buffing. The Zaino polish was very easy to use and left no film, powder, or white residue.



Photo 22 - Well the picture tells the story. Our Lemans hasn't looked this good since it was painted. The combination of claying to remove the buildup and contaminants along with a fresh coat of polish, gives this paint finish the best shine possible! Why not give yours a try.

