

A set of wheels in poor condition can ruin the appearance of any BMW, but we have the answers to keep them looking box-fresh all year round...

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Annoying isn't it, when you've just had a set of wheels refurbished and you clout a curb, defacing an otherwise perfect finish. It's also annoying when you manage to avoid curbs but the relentless onslaught of brake dust etches into the previously fresh paint.

Now, the latter will manifest with neglect, and although we don't have any miracle cures for curb rash, there are products and methods out there that will keep your BMW rolling fresh at each corner. With winter chilling anything exposed to the elements, the Highways Agency is gritting the roads, which maybe the UK's answer to staying mobile, but it's the car's Achilles heel.

Underseal can help protect the underside of your BMW, but the wheels have no barrier to shield them from the current climate, but when the salt recedes and the trees revert to green in spring, the brake dust will still be there to do its worst.



WHEEL MAINTENANCE



Any washing session should begin with the cleaning of the wheels and inner arches. Be careful what you choose though, because it's easy to assume wheels will put up with harsh products, from the brush that cleans them, to the solution that will penetrate the brake dust.

We have trialled different methods of wheel protection, but make sure you read the 'Wheel cleaner' section before continuing with a cleaning regime that could be detrimental to the protection that's going to be applied.

LOCKING WHEEL BOLTS

If your BMW uses factory locking wheel bolts, then TBMW would recommend upgrading to aftermarket versions from the likes of McGard or Trilock. It's possible to run these in conjunction with the factory versions but it will offer your wheels that added element of protection.



SWISSVAX AUTOBAHN WHEEL WAX

SIZE: 50ml | PRICE: £36.00

If you are running expensive BBS splits for example, or desirable factory wheels, and you want added protection then Swissvax's Autobahn Wheel Wax provides an extensively tested solution, that's very resilient, but the advantages do come at a premium with 50ml costing £36.00.

It is blended with PTFE which has a melting point of 327°C, which is great for the performance-derived BMWs (including cars with ceramic brakes) and Swissvax test the product following use on German Autobahns (hence the name), over the winter months and on European race circuits. It must be left for 10 minutes to cure, but it buffs off with ease thereafter and the deeper gloss finish and difference in beading set it apart from the more affordable Poorboy's product when the wheels were cleaned at the end of the test.



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Sealant product test

We tested five sealants and waxes from the likes of Swissvax and GTechniq over a period of three weeks on the front wheels of a BMW. The wheel was divided into sections where the products were then applied, to make the test fair. The wheels were then washed with pH-neutral bodywork shampoo.

Top right: Harsh cleaners and years of road salt can lead to wheels looking like this.

Far left: Dressing the tyres will be the finishing touch – natural-look dressings are also available.

Wheel Cleaner: Is it damaging?

If the wheels are washed on a weekly basis, then conventional bodywork shampoo and a mitt or sponge (designated for wheel cleaning only) will take care of removing contaminants from a wheel that's been protected by the products we are using here. There will be no need for specific wheel

ZAINO CLEAR SEAL

SIZE: 177ml | PRICE: £27.95

Zaino has been wowing the detailing scene with its bodywork products, but Clear Seal is more of a universal solution that offers protection on just about any surface; paint, glass, plastic, and what we are here for, wheels. So it serves more than one purpose on your BMW

Much like Autoglym's product, it is a spray-on application but to get the most durability from it (up to nine months), Z-CS has to be used as a top coat in conjunction with a Zaino polish, such as Z-5. It's self-curing and dries without leaving any residue behind, but we used a microfibre cloth to rub it into the more intricate areas of the spokes where the spray head didn't quite reach.

We didn't apply Z-CS in conjunction with another product but it outshone the durability of the Autoglym Wheel Seal, and the brake dust quickly washed off with shampoo. Although for durability, we would recommend using it with a layer of Zaino polish – only if you can justify the added expense over the likes of Swissvax.



cleaners if you adhere to the above. What's more, a good quality pH-neutral bodywork shampoo will not damage wheel sealant.

However, commitments elsewhere may prevent you from regular maintenance, but it's important to choose carefully when it comes to wheel cleaner. The stuff found in pound shops is usually capable of making eyebrows fall off, so it's best avoided.

Most wheel cleaner will be either acid- or alkaline-based, both of which are aimed at removing brake dust, but the harsher chemicals will also strip any previous layers of protection. If on the other hand, you are a keen detailer, then it's possible to opt for something less harsh, such as Dodo Juice Supernatural or P21S's R222. These will be much more suitable because they are non-caustic.

As a general rule of thumb, once you have sealed a set of alloy wheels, a pH-neutral bodywork shampoo on a weekly basis should be perfectly adequate, or a non-caustic wheel cleaner such as the aforementioned. Only revert to the harsher cleaners when necessary, but remember to reapply a sealant when they have been used.

Thanks

The Ultimate Finish for its help in compiling this feature. For detailing products, or to book into the detailing studio, just visit the website or call the team.

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Above: Choose wheel cleaner carefully because some can be too harsh.

Below: When the wheels are sealed, a regular bodywork shampoo will be adequate for regular washing.

POORBOY'S WORLD WHEEL SEALANT



SIZE: 8oz | PRICE: £13.45

Poorboy's may not be a familiar brand to UK readers, but it supplies a host of credible products to the detailing market. This Wheel Sealant is only £13.45 but it will give the surface a barrier to prevent brake dust and road debris from damaging your BMW's wheels.

Poorboy's offered the best value for money and offered a decent level of protection with the brake dust coming off with regular shampoo, but regular applications (once a month) will be needed keep the wheels looking fresh.

AUTOGLYM ALLOY WHEEL SEAL



SIZE: 450ml | PRICE: £6.50

Ideal for convenience, if you don't have the time to manually apply a wheel sealant with a cloth, Autoglym's Alloy Wheel Seal is good value at £6.50 and the spray-on application method will give the surface a layer of protection within seconds. After the test period, the brake dust required more encouragement before it came off. Although not as durable as the other products used here it does at least offer a degree of protection for not a lot of money. Ideal for the daily driver.

GTECHNIQ C5



SIZE: 15ml | PRICE: £29.95

GTechniq's C5 is said to last for up to one year. Our test length can't confirm this, but if the G1 rain repellent is anything to go by then the C5 wheel sealant should live up to GTechniq's claim. It's easy to apply, and although the tiny 15ml version is only enough for one car, the long-lasting protection means the wheels will only need a regular wash.

There is a cost for this level of durability though as the smallest 15ml version costs £29.95, while the 50ml version comes in at £74.95. The beading and gloss finish was very impressive when we rewashed the wheels, but another report will follow in a year's time to see if it lived up to G Techniq's claims!