



## DETAILERS PARADISE Car Care Institute

### All About Clay

#### First, what is clay?

Detailing clay is a malleable, clay-like substance that was originally used to by automotive paint shops to remove overspray and surface contaminants. It comes in many colors and textures and is generally sold in 4-6 oz sizes.

#### What do we use it for today?

We now use it in much the same way as it was originally intended although its scope of usefulness has expanded. What was once strictly a paint shop tool is now easily accessible to the detailing hobbyist. As consumers experiment with the clay, new uses continue to arise. Here is a short list:

1. Removing paint overspray
2. Removing embedded particles from the paint surface
3. Removing mineral deposits from dried water
4. Removing minor etching from bird droppings
5. Removing minor adhesive residue
6. Glass cleaning (beyond what typical glass cleaners can do)

#### What clay won't do.

1. It won't fix swirls, scratches or spider webbing
2. If properly used, it won't scratch
3. It won't polish
4. It won't abrade the surface

#### What kind of particles can get embedded in the paint?

Typically, your car's finish picks up all types of environmental fallout and contaminants. For new cars, it is often rail dust from the long trip to your local dealer. Rail dust is a result of the metal on metal action of the train's wheel on the track. Ocean travel can also result in the embedment of salt and other environmental particles. For most other cars, metal particles from your brakes, insect impact and water spots can become embedded in your paint. All forms embedded particles compromise the integrity of your top coat which could leave other layers vulnerable to rust or other damage.

#### What are the benefits of claying?

Clay removes the embedded contaminants from the surface of your paint. The result will be a smooth-as-glass finish and better light reflection off your vehicles surface. Imagine looking at your reflection in a dusty mirror. You can see yourself, but you are a bit fuzzy. Clean the mirror and the reflection vastly improves. It works the same way with your paint.

By claying, you will also be “cleansing” your paint at a deeper level than most soaps and shampoos are able to access. Claying shaves off the metal particles, industrial fallout and other contaminants from your finish. Of course, imperfections in the paint itself, such as swirls and scratches, will not be removed. This is because clay does not abrade the surface as it shaves. Only an abrasive polish can eliminate such imperfections. However, a good synthetic or carnauba wax can cosmetically fill and seal imperfections. Wax will protect the paint from environmental elements and will leave you with a protected and smooth surface.

### How do I know if I need to clay?

On a clean surface, run your fingertips gently across the paint surface. Do you feel tiny bumps or roughness? If yes, you may want to clay. If your car is new from the dealer, this is the best time to clay. Although somewhat covered in transport, the surface of your new car is likely to have picked up ocean salts from the boat ride and rail dust from the train ride to your dealer.

### How do I clay?

There are two parts to a clay process; the clay and the lubricant. The clay often comes in a 4-6 oz rectangle. In order to conserve your clay and make it easier to work with, it is advisable to cut it into three parts. If you drop your piece of clay, throw it out. Clay is quite sticky and will pick up dirt and other various small debris- the kind you definitely don't want to drag across your paint. It is absolutely impossible to completely clean the dirt and debris from the clay once it has been dropped.

Claying is a fairly easy process. Of course, you need to start with a clean car. After that, you simply spray a 2'x 2' area with the lubricant and slide the clay over the surface. It should glide easily across the paint with the help of the lubricant. Many people find that moving the clay in a back-and-forth motion is most effective. For really rough surfaces, you can repeat the process but this time using a side-to-side motion. Be sure to use enough lubricant. If you do not, the clay will grab and scuff your paint. If this happens accidentally, it is likely that you will only need to re-clay the area where the accident occurred. If the paint has been severely scuffed, an abrasive polish may be the only way to recover the area. Using the right amount of lubricant is a bit of a balancing act. Use too much and the clay is less effective. Use too little and you scuff the paint. Finally, as your clay becomes dirty, pull, stretch then fold it to a clean side.

After you have clayed a section, wipe it down with a high quality buffing microfiber cloth. Run your fingers over that section. Does it feel smooth? Are the tiny bumps gone? If no, hit it again with the clay.