

Extra Protection for your Cars Paint Finish when Driving on the Track or in Autocrosses

One of the questions I am most frequently asked is "Will I damage my car during Driver Education and/or Autocross Events?" The answer is, if you are careful and take some precautions, you shouldn't. Normally, stone chips are about the worst damage your car will suffer at a driver's education event and cone rubs are usually the worst that an autocross has to offer. You will brake harder than you normally do on the street, so will increase brake pad wear and thus see more brake dust on the wheels. The tires will take a little extra punishment, but when you consider that both activities are just about the most fun you can have with your clothes on, it's worth the extra brake and tire wear. There are a few simple things that will minimize possible damage to your car's appearance.

The benefits of a good coat of wax cannot be over emphasized. The wax will help protect the paint against everything from 100 mph bugs to autocross cone rubs. Autocross courses are outlined by rubber traffic cones and the fastest way around the course is to just miss certain of these cones. All of my cone rubs occur when I direct my car to just miss the cone and it suddenly decides to ignore my directions and, of it's own free will, jump on the cone instead. These rubs are easily removed with a little 3M Imperial Hand Glaze followed by a coat of wax. The wheel wells and wheels will also benefit from a coat of wax. Prior to an event, clean the wheel wells thoroughly with a citrus degreaser such as P21S Total Auto Wash, rinse thoroughly and apply a coat of wax. Also, clean your wheels thoroughly with a quality wheel cleaner such as P21S or Sonax and give them a good coat of wax. I have found that a couple of light coats of Sonax Spray Hard Wax provides excellent protection for both the wheels and wheel wells and requires little buffing. After the event, be sure to thoroughly wash the car, the wheels and wheel wells.

Nose Mask/Bra & Mirror Bras are one of the most important aspects of your protection program. Of all the brands on the market, Colgan and the OEM bras made by Colgan are, in my opinion, the best fitting and thus able to withstand the higher speeds of driver education events without flapping and beating the paint to death. They are manufactured from heavy vinyl and fully lined with a soft felt. There are magnetic bras made from the same stuff as refrigerator magnets. They are usually comprised of several sections that will cover most, but not the entire nose. These gaps in protection may result in "stone chip strips". If you use racer's tape to fill in the gaps, they provide reasonable protection. Make sure you wash the car thoroughly before installing any bra, but especially magnetic bras as they have a tendency to scratch the paint if dirt is trapped underneath. There are also "paint-on" bras made from a water-soluble elastomer similar to thick house paint. (Didn't this go out of style with the demise of the 60's?) The jury is still out as the protection offered and the long-term safety to your paint of this item.

There are a few caveats concerning the use of a bra. Take your time and install the bra properly the first time, as this will determine the quality of fit for the life of the bra. There are a few keys to proper installation. It takes two people to initially fit a bra. Read the directions several times. You will need a screwdriver, needle nose pliers, regular slip pliers and a white grease pencil. Remove the front license plate. Lay your new bra out in the sun for several hours to smooth it out and let it get as hot as possible. With one person on each side of the car, start in the center and stretch the bra over the nose as tightly as

possible. Continue stretching (with each person pulling against each other) until you have stretched/fitted it evenly to the front wheel wells. Use your grease pencil to mark all of the tabs, on both sides, where they meet the radius of the wheel well. Place the side of your needle nose pliers along a line 1/4" TIGHTER than your grease pencil marks. Bend the tab into an L shape using the regular slip pliers. If you have fairly large needle nose pliers, you can use them as a jig to bend the tab into the required J shape. Continue bending the rest of the tabs 1/4" tighter than your original marks. Trial fit the new bra and make any necessary adjustments. On certain models, the hood release may have to be adjusted slightly to allow for the thickness of the bra material.

Make sure that your car is freshly washed and the inside of the bra is thoroughly vacuumed and cleaned before you install a bra. This way, you do not trap dirt underneath it, creating "sandpaper" that will scratch the paint. Do not leave the bra on the car for extended periods of time. The paint that is exposed to the sun will bleach out at a different rate from the areas covered by the bra. You have just created "tan lines" on your car. There are places for tan lines, but the front of your car is not, in my humble opinion, one of them.

Remove a wet bra as soon as possible. We are not talking emergency slam on the brakes and rip it off type of removal, but don't let it sit on the car for several days after it has gotten wet. The water will be trapped by the felt lining and this nice warm wet environment promotes the growth of mold. Molds produce acids that can etch your paint. So unless your car has a social disease and needs the penicillin, remove the bra at your earliest opportunity.

Mirror bras are very simple to install and require no adjusting. They do wonders at preventing stone chips.

Buy a roll of racer's tape. Racer's tape is NOT duct tape! They both use a cloth backing, but the difference lies in the adhesive. Racer's tape uses a semi-permanent adhesive, whereas duct tape uses permanent adhesive. Duct tape may gain a life-long affinity for your paint, resulting in patches of primer seeing the light of day when your paint goes home with the tape. Racer's tape is an inexpensive way to protect areas that are not covered by a bra. You can even buy it in matching or contrasting colors and make fashion statements if you wish. Tape up the headlights, fog lights, turn signal lights, gaps in the bra and the base of the mirrors that are not covered with the mirror bra. The back radius of the front and rear wheel wells are areas to spend time protecting with racers tape. Cover the inside lip, and outside 2-3 inches of the wheel well opening with the tape. This is the area most likely to get stone chips. A couple of layers will prevent any but the most determined of missiles from damaging your paint. The mirror stems are another place that should be taped. Look at your car head on from a low angle and try to visualize the areas that would be vulnerable to a rock kicked up by a car in front of you. If these areas are not covered by a bra, you may wish to use racer's tape. If some of the adhesive remains on the paint after removal of the tape, a little Oil Flo Safety Solvent on a rag will remove it. Clean with car wash, rinse thoroughly with water and apply additional wax to these areas. I would strongly suggest not taping the windshield, as this adds unnecessary guesswork to your driving experience.

Some dos and some don'ts. I would strongly suggest that you do not apply leather conditioner to your seats or steering wheel just prior to an event. The extra slipperiness will add a level of excitement that you don't need. I also feel strongly about not using loose fitting seat covers for the same reason. As far as the do's, keep a close watch on your fluid levels and tire pressures and most of all HAVE A BLAST!

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

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