

HINTS & TIPS

What to look for when choosing a valet

Remember, valeting is about restoring the vehicle finishes to their original condition, whereas just cleaning the vehicle may not achieve that goal!

If you decide to get a valet to treat your vehicle, how do you know they are professional, well trained & have the correct tools & equipment to do a thorough job? At this moment, there is no professional body covering codes of practice for Valeting, but some simple guidelines may help with your decision.

If you don't think you need to worry about who you entrust with, what may well be your second highest value purchase, then you should consider the following **real** horror stories of what some 'valeters' do:

- a) Wash vehicles using domestic washing up liquid – long term, this can cause damage to the paintwork due to high levels of salt & detergent.
- b) To save time & money, and because they don't have the correct chemicals and equipment, they will spray your carpets with paint instead of cleaning them.
- c) Pressure wash an engine while it is still hot & fail to cover vital components. This can cause condensation or water to form inside some sealed boxes such as the engine management unit. These are not cheap to replace! The pressure & or heat, if used incorrectly, can blow holes in radiators and damage or melt some smaller plastic components.
- d) Use incorrect chemicals on alloy wheels, stripping the coating from them and causing damage.
- e) Use polish meant for paintwork on windows, especially the windscreen. The first time you will notice is when it is raining and you put your wipers on. The glass will smear and visibility will be affected.
- f) Spill chemicals on upholstery, leather, dashboard & carpets. In some cases this has resulted in the colour being bleached out of the material, switches not working, stains left behind & permanent damage to some surfaces.

That was just a few of the cases we have had to try & rectify because of the inexperience of some so called valeters.

Also, be aware that there have been instances where valeters have taken cars for a 'spin' and written them off! If you have a particularly 'exotic' car you will probably be more at risk from this behaviour.

The obvious answer to the original question, is to only use valeters that have been recommended by someone that has used their services. If this is not possible then you need to look at a number of aspects to try and weed out the less than professional.

1. Are they fully & properly insured?

At the very least they should carry public liability insurance. If it is a company that employs staff, then they should also carry employers liability insurance. If they are going to be moving your vehicle on a public highway, i.e. carrying out a collection/delivery service, then they should also carry fully comprehensive trade motor insurance. Be wary of any Valeting operation that asks you to use your insurance for them to drive. Think about the consequences to you, if they damage your vehicle and you have to claim on your insurance!
If in any doubt, ask to see their certificates of insurance and check that they are valid & apply to the business you are booking with.

2. How long have they been established?

Whilst this may not be fair to new businesses, we all have to start somewhere, it is reassuring if an operation has been trading for a year or more. It indicates that they must be doing something right.

3. What is their background?

Most reputable establishments are not afraid to publish how they started, relevant training, staff experience and even a supervised tour of their establishment.

4. Is their pricing clear?

They should publish their general prices & describe the level of service that you are going to get for your money. They should also have terms & conditions available for you to read, making any payment options, exclusions etc obvious to you.

Cleaning the vehicle yourself

Despite what you may have read or heard, regarding cleaning a vehicle, there is no right or wrong way when it comes to the sequence of events.

However, there is a recommended way which a lot of professional valeters adopt. Before you start, you will need to establish exactly how in depth you are going to clean your vehicle. Once this has been done, you will know what cleaning materials and equipment you will require.

The most important aspect of carrying out any work on your vehicle is health & safety. Read all instructions, directions for use & hazard warning labels on cleaning chemicals & take note of any recommendations. If protective equipment such as gloves, safety goggles, dust masks etc are mentioned, then you should use them. Also, be aware of the environment that you are going to be working in, e.g. is there a danger from passing traffic, are children close by etc.

It is preferable to use a hose with an adjustable nozzle to wash the vehicle, rather than a bucket, as there will be a constant supply of clean water. The nozzle should also have a facility to stop the flow so that you are not wasting water when it is not required. Do not use rotary brush heads, as these can leave fine scratches on the paintwork. If you have to use a bucket, make sure that the water is changed frequently and that sponges & leathers are rinsed often.

Step 1 - RINSE

Rinse the vehicle with clean water, starting at the top, working down to the bottom, including sills, tyres, wheels and wheel arches. Make sure that any mud & grit is thoroughly rinsed off before you proceed. Any grit or mud left on the paintwork may lead to scratches later on. If the door & boot shuts are particularly dirty, it is a good idea to wash them at this stage as well. If you are using a hose or pressure washer, make sure you point it in an outward direction, washing away from the vehicle, not into it!

Step 2 - WHEELS

Do not use chemicals on hot wheels, wait until they cool down first, or cool them with water. This is because the chemicals will dry before they have a chance to work and may cause a blotchy appearance to the finish. Depending on the type of wheels & how dirty they are, you will need to determine which is the best cleaner to use. Whatever you chose, make sure you only use a brush made for the purpose, do not use any wire brushes or abrasives such as wire wool.

Take a look at our product range to see what is available to help you.

Step 3 - WASH

Decide which shampoo you are going to use, taking into account that some shampoos contain wax additives and, if you are going to polish the vehicle afterwards, this may affect the finish. If polishing is not required, because it has recently been done, then use a wax content shampoo.

Start at the roof using a sponge or vehicle brush, such as our Van Wash Brush. Use long, overlapping strokes to cover the area. Do not allow shampoo to dry as this may cause streaking. Do an area at a time, for instance, roof, bonnet & front, boot or tailgate, side 1 and side 2. After each area is completed, rinse the vehicle thoroughly with clean water, and then rinse the whole vehicle once the last section is done. Thoroughly dry the vehicle using a leather, rinsing it regularly as you go. Don't forget the door & boot shuts.

Step 4 - REMOVE RUBBISH

This is the ideal opportunity to 'spring clean' the storage areas in the vehicle. Check glove box, door pockets, ashtrays, sun visors and any other storage areas such as those found under floor, under seats, pockets at the back of seats, in armrests etc. Take everything out and decide if you really should, or need to keep it all in the vehicle. Remember that everything floating around in the vehicle when you are travelling becomes a potential hazard if you have to stop quickly. (Also see our security section for details). Check for 'lost' items such as jewellery, money etc which may get picked up by the vacuum. Once all of the 'large' rubbish has been removed, you can proceed to the next step.

Step 5 - INTERIOR CLEAN

It is now a good idea to work on the vehicle in sections, dividing it up into manageable areas. It is usual to treat the boot as an area and then 'quarter' the remainder of the vehicle, i.e. driver, front passenger, rear nearside, rear offside. In each area, clean & dress all surfaces and then move on to the next area. Anything that can be easily removed from within, should be taken out, i.e. Rubber mats, carpet mats, even seats if they are designed to be removed. This will make cleaning them easier and, in the case of seats, will make access inside the vehicle easier. When vacuuming, don't forget ashtrays, storage bins, under seats, headrests, around windows, headlining, air vents, dashboard, centre consoles, handbrake & gear shift gaiters. Try to hold the vacuum nozzle slightly away from the surfaces to avoid scratching and creating 'scuff' marks. In delicate areas, such as the dashboard, be alert for control buttons which may get sucked up the vacuum. When cleaning the glass, remember to wind the windows down a little way to get to the top edges.

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Step 6 - POLISH

Although washing the vehicle may have removed the obvious dirt, there may still be deposits and minor scratches on the paintwork which will give it a dull appearance. Using polish helps remove these deposits and fine scratches and helps protect the paintwork from further deterioration. Before commencing, make sure any 'heavy' deposits such as tar splashes and tree sap are removed. Also make sure the vehicle is thoroughly dry, particularly around trim, door mirrors, door sills and window rubbers, as the water will 'wick' from them onto the polish and may cause smearing. Do not apply polish in too hot or too cold and damp conditions as this will affect its performance.

Apply polish to a clean, dry cloth and wipe over a section of panel, working in a circular motion to spread it and in straight lines afterwards. Do not rub hard. Cover the entire paintwork in this way until the vehicle is completed. Try to avoid vinyl trim and window rubbers when applying polish as this can sometimes be difficult to remove, or you end up with black from the rubbers getting into the polish. There is no need to overload the cloth as any surplus polish will take longer to remove and is a waste. Now take a clean, dry, lint free, or microfibre cloth, and starting where you first applied the polish, buff it off until all remnants have been removed. Continue for the remainder of the vehicle. Remember to turn the cloth frequently, or replace it with a new one if it becomes too saturated. The paintwork should now be gleaming like new.

Step 7 – TYRE & TRIM DRESSING

To complete the picture, you may wish to dress the tyres & vinyl trim to give the vehicle a 'showroom' finish. Long Life Tyre Shine and Vinyl Gel Bumper & Trim Conditioner are ideal for this purpose. Make sure that the Gel is buffed off and any surplus removed from paintwork. Tyre Shine should only be applied to the tyre walls, not the tread area.

The above steps suggested what to do in order to clean the entire vehicle. If the vehicle is cleaned and polished regularly, the time taken on each occasion will be minimal and the condition should remain good, helping to reduce the impact of depreciation when you come to sell it and making it healthier to be in.

Cleaning Products