

Detailing Wheel Wells

By Jim Pyatt



There is nothing worse than having a freshly detailed car and all that stands out is the unsightly wheel wells. You may be saying to yourself that they are behind the wheels, so who

could see them. Easy! Just stand back and take a good look. This is especially true if the vehicle has been lifted. They collect dirt, mud, and rust, and so this eyesore destroys the overall appearance of the splendidly shining, mirror-like vehicle; the good news is that this problem can easily be solved. With a little elbow grease you can have the wheel wells looking as great as the rest of the vehicle.

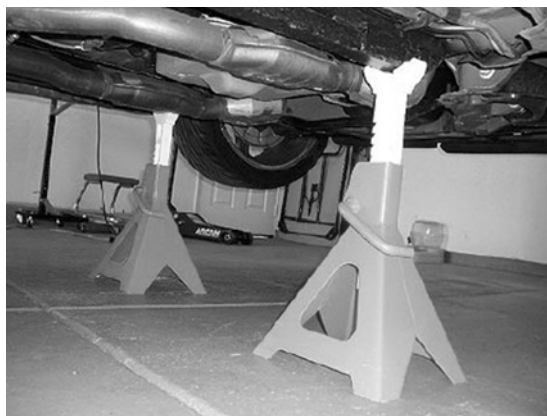
The front wheel wells contain steering assemblies, brake housings, and sometimes lift kits. This whole area can be painted flat or semigloss black. Black wheel wells look far better, compared to unsightly rusty ones. I like to use semigloss because it will be easier to clean in the future. I like seeing brake calipers painted, to match the car color (for example, painting a red car's caliper red creates a great look). Some lifted trucks paint the various parts like the stabilizer bars, springs, and fittings to highlight the lift kit. If I'm selling the vehicle, I just paint everything black. This leaves a nice clean look--that is, unless it's an exotic, classic, or show car. In this case, paint each part the original color it received in the factory.

Jacking Safety

Never work under a jacked car without the use of jack stands. The jack alone cannot be trusted. Always use prescribed jack points when lifting your car. Read your car owner's manual for instructions.

- ◆ The following procedures assume the use of a hydraulic floor jack or car jack and jack stands to lift a car for wheel removal.
- ◆ Park your car on a flat surface. Put on your emergency brake. Place blocks behind the wheels not being lifted, to prevent movement of the car.
- ◆ Use the proper size lug wrench to loosen wheel lug nuts on the wheels to be removed. Do not yet remove the lug nuts--just loosen them.
- ◆ Jack the car high enough to insert a jack stand under the end of the car you will be working on. The jack stand must contact a prescribed jack point or the suspension A-arm mount point. (see owner's manual)
- ◆ Warning: Never place a jack stand under your engine, drive shaft, or transmission, as serious damage could occur.

- ◆ Continue jacking the car until you have enough clearance to insert a second jack stand at the opposite end or side of the car. Again, align the jack stand under a prescribed jack point or suspension mount point. When two jack stands are properly placed, slowly release pressure on your hydraulic jack, or floor jack, allowing your car to rest on the jack stands.
- ◆ Failure to release pressure slowly may result in your car being dropped abruptly onto the stands, and that will damage the underside of your car. Before lowering the jack to move it out from under the car, inspect the jack stands again for proper placement. If they are not properly aligned, jack the car just high enough to make a correction.
- ◆ Remove the loosened lug nuts and remove your wheels. Be sure to set the lug nuts aside where they will not be lost or damaged. If you followed the procedure above, your car is now safely jacked for detailing. Inspect your tires for proper wear and for damage; and it's always a good idea to inspect your brakes and suspension.



Wheel Wells

- ◆ Remove wheel. Safety first! Block tires and put jack stands in place. This will ensure stability while you are working under the vehicle.
- ◆ Thoroughly scrub and clean entire wheel well. Spray with citrus-based cleaner. Let soak for 2 to 3 minutes. Then use a stiff bristle brush to scrub everything. You can use a wire brush to remove the tough old grease. Remember, you will be painting, and all the surfaces must be free from any grease, or the paint will not adhere.
- ◆ Rinse thoroughly. Let dry. Check your work. Repeat until the wheel well (not you!) is perfectly clean.

Option 1: Painting individual parts (car-show look)

Mask lugs and brake-fluid lines. Grease fittings and any other part you don't want painted; this could include part of a lift kit, or brake calipers. I like to use blue painter's tape; it comes in several different sizes. Use newspaper to cover the hole into the engine compartment and brake-pad surface. Mask the trim on the lip of the fender; this will save you the headache of removing unsightly paint overspray on the fender. The 3" tape works great here.

Option 2: Black out

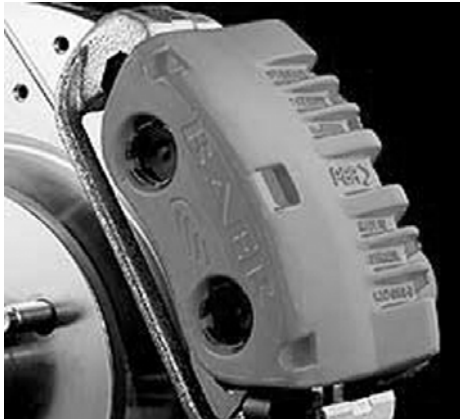
Mask the fender and surrounding area.

Painting Wheel Wells

The type of paint used is open for debate--undercoating paint or regular paint. Personally, I like to use Rust-oleum Primer and "Simi Gloss" paint. It's available at your local auto-part or hardware store. The semigloss will make it easier to clean in the future. When using any can of spray paint, it's best to spray at warmer temperatures. Warm the can in the sink with warm water for 5 minutes. This will help mix the binders and solvents in the mixture. Caution: never warm a paint can over a flame, or in the microwave!

- ◆ Paint with primer first. This will leave a good base for the main coat of paint. Follow the instructions on the can. Spray an even coat on all the surfaces you wish to cover. Let the primer dry for 30 minutes before applying the main coat of paint. Once the primer has dried, inspect and, if needed, apply a second coat.
- ◆ You are now ready to paint. Apply a thin coat. If it is too heavy, the paint will run. Let dry for 30 minutes, and apply a second coat. Check work and apply another coat if needed. Look at it from several angles to be sure of good coverage.

Brake Calipers



Have you said that you want your car to look spicy like the car parked next to yours at the car show? The one with brake calipers painted to match the car? Well, I have the answer: Folia Tec Brake Caliper Paint by Dupli-Color. I sup-

pose standard high-temperature paint could be used, but the Folia Tec paint is specially formulated. It can be found at your local performance sports-car shop or auto-parts store. Everything needed is included; Caliper Cleaner, stir stick, paint brush, masking tape, and complete instruction book. Brake calipers get mighty hot, so the Caliper Paint features ceramic resins for maximum heat dissipation. It won't blister, flake, crack, or peel, and it withstands temperatures up to 500°F.

Prep

Lay down a piece (or overlapping pieces) of old cardboard to catch the grime flowing from the car's brake calipers to the floor. You don't want that grease and grime on your driveway or in your garage, do you?

- ◆ Scrub the caliper with a vengeance and give everything a final rinse. Get out the Brake Caliper Cleaner and use

it to soak the water off the caliper! This cleaner is a volatile hydrocarbon spray and evaporates leaving a perfectly dry finish. Be sure that the caliper is perfectly dry before painting!! Please no smoking, lighting matches, when using solvent-based cleaners. You don't want your tombstone to read, he died detailing.

Painting

The kit has everything you need. Mask the sounding area. Read the directions and precautionary wording on the paint label very carefully.

- ◆ Vigorously shake paint, remove the lid from the paint can, and stir contents thoroughly with the enclosed stir stick.
- ◆ Apply paint to the caliper or drum with enclosed brush in thin even strokes. Allow paint to set for 15 to 20 minutes between coats. Apply additional coats as needed to even out brush strokes and obtain full coverage.

You will likely do one caliper at a time, unless you have a home auto lift or levitation powers! Be prepared to use only about ¼ the total amount of paint for each caliper. Look at the caliper and figure out exactly how much you want to paint, and be sure you don't paint any of the moving parts! Carefully brush your desired area and watch it become the color you wanted. I hope you like the color now since it's too late to quit! You could however change colors by stripping the paint and starting over.

The paint starts to set after about 5 minutes, so don't take forever! Be sure not to put on too much paint, and be ready to smooth the bottom edges where the paint will want to drip. Don't go crazy painting the entire caliper: you can paint just the area that will be seen with the wheel on! After another 10 minutes or so, when the paint is no longer threatening to drip, you can put the wheel back on--**CAREFULLY**--so as not to touch the drying paint. You can speed up the drying process with a professional, full-size heat gun; a hair dryer will not generate enough heat.

You can do all the calipers at one sitting or separately, but don't get the one you just painted wet! **Let it dry at least 12 hours before driving.** Driving will cause heat that could hurt the paint curing.

Jim Pyatt is the owner of Tender Rubbing Care, published author and consultant. Jim Has over 10 years experience as detail shop owner and operator. Jim has won best of show awards for Cars and Motorcycles under his care at some of the most elite car events in the US, and is a member of The National Association for Professional Detailing and Reconditioning (NAPDR). Jim is also a contributing writer for several trade publications. To request reprinting authorization, comments, questions or to submit articles. Jim can be reached at jim@tenderrubbing.com