

Concours the Easy Way

By Lee Fowler

Or how I can clean my car and have fun doing it. I have preached this sermon a number of times and it's a good thing I didn't take up religion as a profession, 'cause I ain't had any converts yet. It's true I wasn't a believer many years ago. When Suzanne and I were seriously active in PCA back in the late sixties and early seventies, our focus was mainly autocrossing, with rallying and driver education sessions thrown in. Our attitude was that prepping a car for a Concours was a total waste of time. Never once thought about the amount of time spent changing tires, tuning the engine, etc. Every weekend. That's right! All day Sunday from spring to fall. The only reason we quit was because we started a family. Packing a crib in the 912 plus watching a baby while trying to run an autocross got to be too much. Never occurred to us that cleaning a car for a Concours event would be much easier. We washed the car occasionally, especially in the winter to make sure we got the salt off the underside. In fact, we had one PCA friend comment that their car was cleaner on the outside than ours was on the inside. Yep, they were Concours nuts.

But that changed back in 2007 at Winterfest. We were cajoled into entering the Concours and came home with a 3rd place trophy. I looked at that trophy and thought, "That was pretty easy!" We had applied tire shine to the tires, which is a no-no. The headlights had dead bug guts on them and we still won a trophy. In hindsight I'm wondering if that trophy was just a hook and we bit.... hook, line, and sinker.

The three main out-of-region events that we attend are Winterfest in February, Spring Thing in April, and Rennfest over Labor Day weekend. A Concours is a big part of each event. But we look at it as a "social" event where we also do a thorough cleaning of the car. The analogy that I've used to describe this is, "We go to the dentist on a regular basis to have our teeth cleaned. Sometimes the dentist will say that we haven't been doing a very good job brushing so we need a deep cleaning." Well, we all wash and wax our cars on a regular basis but occasionally they need that "deep cleaning". That's the Concours cleaning.

There are two classes for judging a Concours – "Touring" and "Street." Don't ask me how they came up with those names because they make absolutely no sense. In

the Touring class the entire car is inspected. For Street, only the exterior, wheels, and interior are judged. The underneath, storage, and engine are not included. We've entered both classes in the past but as we progress through our "golden" years we tend to stick with the Street class. Less work and more time for Suzanne to socialize. One of my daughters-in-law gave me a special chair for Christmas with "Supreme Curmudgeon" embroidered on the back. That's where I'll be sitting while cleaning the outside of the car.

So, what does it take to get a car ready for a Concours? The answer is soap, water, some rags, and a Q-Tip. I buy a box/bag of white rags from Lowe's and when they get dirty they go into the trash. A couple of years ago the Schroetters attended a Parade and entered the Concours. It gets really competitive at Parade. Ann, HOD First Lady, came back ranting and raving about how stupid people were for using a Q-Tip to clean the door handles. Well, I have photographic proof that she did the exact same thing at Winterfest last year. Even borrowed a couple of Q-Tips from us. Granted, she would rather find an antique store, but she'll help out in a pinch.

Getting the car ready for Concours competition is not as difficult as some make it out to be. For us, most of the effort is done at home in the garage. Once we get to the event, we go over the car for a final cleaning but also spend a lot of time looking at other cars and talking to other PCAers. It's amazing how many friends we've made all up and down the East Coast just going to these events. Well, Suzanne has made us a lot of friends. Curmudgeons are socially inept.

First of all, we'll start with the tires and wheels. Shiny tires are sure to get points taken off. Judges like natural looking rubber. We use Pledge furniture spray. Wipe it on and the tire looks like new and it doesn't hurt the rubber. Dave Schroetter uses a product from Griot's Garage. It looks just as good but costs more. Clean the wheels, making sure all chunks of tar are removed. If you have chrome wheels, Johnson's floor wax works real good. "You're giving away all your secrets," says I. "Dummy, you didn't think of these tricks all by yourself," I replied.

And that's all for the tires and wheels. Oh, one more thing. Use your white rag to clean the crevice between the tire and wheel. For the car overall, just wash and wax if needed. Most events will provide a wash station at the Concours site. Using a clean rag, start in the front of the car and wipe down where

metal/chrome/rubber meet. The air vents in the front need to be cleaned and any dead bugs removed. I once found a dead bird next to my cooling vents. Aftermarket grills solved that problem. But it doesn't really take all that long to go over the entire car. Don't forget the inside of the gas filler and doors. If you have a sunroof, make sure you go over the felt lining. Do you have windshield wipers? Of course you do. A judge will rub his or her fingers down the rubber. If that results in a black stripe on the fingers...points deducted. Wipe the edges of the exhaust pipes. Black exhaust soot is a no-no!

For the glass, the best product is just distilled water in a spray bottle. Wipe the glass in one direction only. Up and down or side to side. I'll explain why later. With that, you're through with the exterior.

The only thing left is the interior. Did I say "only?" This is the most difficult part mainly because crawling around that small space is difficult on old bodies. Let's start with the rear compartment, unless you have one of those mid-engine cars, in which case you can skip this part. Wipe down the seats with a decent interior cleaner. For the carpeting you should vacuum while at home then, at the event, go over it with that blue painter's tape or a lint roller. Clean the interior window glass wiping in a different direction than the outside. Why? Have you ever cleaned the glass inside and out only to back it out of the garage where the sun is shining and see streaks? Well, if so then you can tell whether the streaks are on the inside of the glass or the outside based on which way the streaks are going. Simple.

Use that same distilled water on the instrument cluster. Q-Tips also work well for cleaning around the trim. We also use a very soft bristle brush. You can get them from Griot's Garage. You will be asked to open all inside compartments. That means you will have to remove everything except what came with the car, which usually means only the owner's manual. Many a contestant has been chagrined to learn that they left a flashlight in the door compartment.

Seatbelts. Wipe down the belts and clean the buckles. The rubber trim around the door opening is a prime place for dirt to hide and it's simple to clean. Also, clean the door hinges for grease. Wait! Aren't those hinges supposed to have grease on them? I'm told that there's a difference between "clean" grease and "dirty" grease but for the life of me I don't know that it is. And don't forget the mirrors. The rear-view and visor mirrors are dirty. That I can guarantee. A film

will form on the glass and the judges will surely check there. I always do when I'm judging. Take out the floor mats. They'll be judged and there's no point in having more stuff for the judges to look at. So you say that there's no need 'cause you cleaned the mats. Well, the judges will lift the mats and look under them.

That's it! You're done. Oh, one more thing. Bring along a couple plastic bags from the grocery store. They make handy temporary garbage disposal units. Rag gets too dirty to use anymore? Put it in the bag and keep on cleaning. Most of the time Suzanne and I will finish in plenty of time to visit and chat with all the others. Here's the great thing about these events. Yes, it's competitive, but I've never seen anybody refuse to help a fellow contestant either by pointing out a spot that needs cleaning or lending a tool or supplies.

Now, would a Supreme Curmudgeon lie to you? Well, probably. But not this time! If you want to have a fun, relaxing weekend away from the hustle and bustle of big city life, try going to one of these weekend events. And don't let the idea of a Concours keep you from it. You'll get hooked just like we did. But even if you don't, you'll enjoy the time with other Porsche folks.