

Concours Corner: Polishing Alloy Wheels by Bev Frohm

This month I was asked to discuss how to polish the aluminum Fuchs wheels. Once you get them prepped, they are fairly easy to maintain. Don't get me wrong, they take work – but not as much as you think. This process is only for untreated wheels, if they are chromed or have another coating on them, this will not work.

We'll divide this into three types of wheels

- A) Those in good shape
- B) Wheels that have a major scratch in them.
- C) Wheels that have some paint chips and minor scuffs

The wheels that are in good shape are the easiest to work on. They need elbow grease, but not much more. You will need the following tools; soft rags, water, polishing compound and Mothers Wheel Polish. Do not use rubbing compound, it is too harsh and will scratch your rims. Take a rag and dip it into water. Wring as much water as you can out of the rag. Next scoop a little polishing compound onto the rag, maybe just enough to cover the tips of two fingers. Choose a flat part of the wheel to start on. You haven't done this before, so you do not want to start on the petals of the wheel. Move the rag with the compound using a circular motion, similar to how you put on wax. Press on the rag, but not too hard. You are just trying to move the surface grit off the wheel, not dig into it. Keep doing this in the same area until the compound starts to disappear. That part of the rag will get really black, don't worry that is normal! Now let's take another rag and wipe that section off, you will see the dull finish is beginning to disappear. Do this with the rest of the wheel, but be patient! Do not start this project an hour before your are to go somewhere, because you will not be done. Once you have used polishing compound on the entire wheel, rub the wheel down with a fresh rag. You will see some improvement just from using the polishing compound. Now, get another rag and put some Mothers on it. Using the same circular motion and pressure, rub the Mothers into the wheel. The oxidation will come off on the rag, causing it to turn the blackish color. Make sure you rub it in good, refreshing the rag with Mothers as needed. Once you have completed rubbing in the Mothers, take another rag to wipe down the wheel. Your arms are going to get tired, you will need to put muscle into rubbing the wheel down – the more pressure you use wiping off the wheel, the

more gleam you will get! To finish one wheel probably took you a couple hours – If not you probably did not get the results you were hoping for. That was the hard part! Rubbing Mothers onto your wheels once a month will increase the depth of the shine, but the amount of elbow grease actually decreases.

Wheel's that have some scratches (not gouges) in the aluminum are another matter. I would suggest you take these to a professional, but there is a way to do them yourself if you have a strong constitution. Take 1500 grit sandpaper and wet it down with water. You are going to use the same technique as color sanding – only you are doing it on aluminum instead of paint. Keep the water nearby as you are going to dunk the sandpaper into the water frequently. Using an even motion, sand the area that is scratched, plus some of the surrounding surface. There are special rubber pads that can be purchased at automotive paint stores, that work well with this technique, helping you sand evenly. Make sure you do not press too hard, you do not want to create more scratches than you are trying to remove. Once the scratch on the wheel, feels as smooth as the surrounding area, take a wet 2000 grit sandpaper and sand the area you were working on. Use the same motion as you used with the 1500 grit sandpaper. Make sure as you work with the sandpaper you keep wetting it down – the water reduces the friction of the sandpaper, allowing you to remove miniscule layers of material without scratching it. By refreshing the sandpaper with water – you are also cleansing away the tiny metal particles. Once you are satisfied that you have removed as much of the scratch as you possibly can, use the steps above to polish out the wheels. We have done this with our Fuchs wheels and the results were great. As I said earlier, if you feel uncomfortable using this process, take your wheels to a professional. If you need a recommendation, I have taken wheels to Al Reed, in Orange County, and been very happy with the results.

Now, let's talk about wheels that are in good shape, but have some paint chips/scratches on them. You will want to purchase some Satin Black aerosol paint and masking tape. There are many types of Satin Black paint out there and I cannot say there is one that is better than the other – just trial and error. Carefully mask off any part of the wheel that is not painted. Your wheel will start looking like a giant piece of masking tape – but it will be worth it. Do not use newspaper, newspaper can absorb the paint and leave blotches or bleed on the aluminum. Once you have all the non-painted areas of the wheel masked, check to make sure your masking lines are even. For example, on the rim of the wheel, you do not want a wavy line demarcating the aluminum from the black paint – which would just be tacky. So take your time; make sure the edges of the

masking job are even – that includes the petals of the wheels as well. The easiest way to paint the wheel is if it is elevated a little bit. Lars uses an upside down trash can and creates a little table using cardboard and paper. The elevation keeps you from standing on your head to paint, which gives you more control over the flow of the paint. Besides as we age, our knees are not as friendly as they used to be. While painting the wheel put thin layers on paint on at a time. This technique will reduce the propensity of the paint to develop legs (run). Make sure the paint has completely dried before removing the masking tape. Take the tape off slowly, especially from the painted edges. Some paint may bind with the wheel as well as the masking tape, so it is best if you pull the tape away from the painted edge. Now one more item, make sure you paint the lug nuts, they probably need it! Once all the masking tape is removed, your wheels will look fresh and ready to strut their stuff.

In one of my earlier articles, I mentioned a product called Black Chrome. It seems another great product has bit the dust. Many of you told me you couldn't find it – so I went on a search. I looked in Orange County and Los Angeles without any luck. So I guess the hunt is on for another great rubber treatment product. Ahhhhhhh....

Bev Frohm

Bev Frohm, together with her ex-husband Lars, restored 'Bevees, a 1970 911E that has won many concours events in the Southern California regions of PCA. Bevees was chosen by PCNA to represent the 1970 911E at Porsche's 50th Anniversary at Monterey.