

Car cleanup tips for summer road trips

By Fibrenew Journal Advocate

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Before you pack the car for the big trip, it's a good idea to clean and protect the seats. Dirt, oil and dust that get on leather and vinyl seats acts like a fine sandpaper, slowly wearing down the vinyl and the protective coating on the leather, making them more susceptible to damage. Once weakened, leather and vinyl are more likely to crack and fade and won't hold up well to everyday wear and tear. Buy a good leather cleaning kit, which includes leather cleaning and protection cream, or a vinyl cleaning kit, which typically includes just a cleaner, and make a protective detour before the trip begins. It will save time and money later on. You should also pack an absorbent towel or two in addition to one or two rolls of paper towels.

"Once the summer vacation season kicks off, we receive a lot of calls from car owners wondering what can be done about the damage to their leather and vinyl seats," says Michael Wilson, CEO of Fibrenew. "Kids and adults unsuccessfully trying to juggle food, drinks and toys on the road can cause damage to car seats, but often times the worst problems are caused by car owners who don't know the best ways to clean up a mess and repair a problem."

Once on the Road

Food or Drink Stain: The kids eat a pizza slice or burger and while part of it lands in the mouth the rest goes on themselves and the car seat. The drink follows.

DON'T use window/mirror cleaner because it contains alcohol which will dissolve and destroy the surface coating on your leather.

DO use a damp towel to wipe up the mess and a dry one to finish the job. Fully-finished leather is pretty much water resistant, so a little spill isn't going to hurt as long as you clean it up quickly, before it soaks through.

Ink: Some of the bright green marker gets to color the skin of the dragon in the coloring book. Some of it misses and now the corner of the car seat looks like the dragon.

DON'T use dish soap or hair spray to remove the marks. The degreasing agents in dish soap can permanently de-gloss and damage the top coating on the leather surface. Hair spray, another commonly recommended remedy, has alcohol in it and will ruin the surface coating on your leather.

DO use a soft sponge and specialized leather cleaner. Buy it at most leather furniture retailers -- but, for serious problems, your local Fibrenew franchise can help.

Nail Polish: You try out the new bright red polish hoping to look good on the beach but end up polishing some of the car seat.

DON'T use nail polish remover because it will take all of the color out of your leather and leave a bleached spot bigger than the nail polish spot.

DO, once again, use a soft sponge and leather cleaner. However you will most likely have to call a professional for help to get rid of this stain.

Animal Scratches and Picks: Fido the dog gets all excited when you get to the rest area and scratches the car seat jumping out the door.

DON'T touch up the spots with shoe polish or markers because it makes an ugly, sticky mess.

DO try to reduce the visibility of the problem by snipping off the cotton interior strands that often get pulled out when leather gets picked. **DO** use a hair dryer and massage minor scratches with leather cleaner to try to rub it out. Call a professional to fix larger scratches and holes -- this is not a DIY kind of job.

Once you get home, it's a good idea to clean out the car, especially if you have been at the beach. The sand and salt from the beach can not only damage your leather and vinyl seats, over time it will be ground into the carpet and become almost impossible to remove. That means the salty sea smell will stick around as well. Use the leather cleaner mentioned above on the seats. In most cases, a good vacuuming will remove the sand and salt. If seawater found its way into the car and really soaked the carpet, it might be wise to get the carpets washed as well.