

WHY YOU NEED A CARPET / UPHOLSTERY EXTRACTOR AND HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT ONE

Have you ever wondered why interior cleaning is so important to the detailing industry?

Think about it. Carpet and upholstery cleaning is one of the most important elements of car detailing. It's the one task the car owner really can't do for himself, and it's the one place where automobile detailing really impresses the consumer. So you cannot risk that your business would fall short in this critical area. Inadequately cleaned carpet or upholstery left soggy or unevenly cleaned will be a constant reminder to your customer that maybe he should consider another detailer or car wash the next time he needs service.

There are detailers who still attempt to provide carpet and upholstery cleaning service using the old-fashioned method of a scrub brush, detergent of some kind and a wet/dry vacuum. Except for the smallest of stains, this just doesn't work. The net effect is usually to mix the dirt and contaminants in the carpet more uniformly, effectively recoloring the pile or the fabric using the soil as a primitive dye. But it isn't true cleaning. Water temperatures aren't anywhere nearly as high as they should be, and failure to remove the loosened dirt prevents proper cleaning from ever taking place. In addition, hard to reach areas of the interior remain either dirty or clean depending on their condition and are a sure sign to the customer and his passengers that a less than professional job has been done.

The most effective way to clean soiled carpets and upholstery is with an extractor. There are several on the market today offered by a variety of different manufacturers and distributors. Outlined below is a list of components common to all extractors and guidelines for selecting the best machine for your operation.

- **Pump Pressure-** The best cleaning units allow the operators to control the pressure where the water and cleaning agent leave the nozzle. Water pressure can actually be too high, causing the fluid exiting the nozzle to actually bounce off the carpet or fabric rather than penetrating properly to allow for effective extraction. If pressure is too low, the effect can be the same. There is no perfect operating pressure, however, you should try to keep it in the 60 to 100 psi range.
- **Instant heat helps you** - Heat is an essential component in cleaning. Whenever you rinse dishes or wash clothing, the best results are obtained when hot water is added. There are two basic types of heating systems found in today's carpet extractors- immersion heaters and heat exchangers. Have you ever wondered why some machines heat their water instantly while others can take up to an hour to reach operating temperature? Operators have learned that instant heat helps their businesses in a number of ways. First, it helps cut labor costs by making technicians able to clean interiors from the moment they start work. Secondly, instant heat is an excellent way to support express extraction services where time is critical.

- **Vacuum Motors-** All extractors have a vacuum motor. Some even have two motors. More is better. Dual vacuum machines will remove more of the water than a single vacuum machine. The unit of measure common to extractors is “water lift” and it should fall within a range of 130” to 150. This is an area where some manufactures become a little overzealous in their claims, so, do your homework.
- **One-cord versus two-** One of the most common questions we’re asked is why some cleaners come with two cords while others only have one. Machines with two cords give you faster heat response by allowing the water heater portion of the machine to draw more amps solely for its use. Generally speaking, two-cord machines require that separate circuits be used for each cord. While this can be an inconvenience, good machines with two cords include a circuit locator light to help determine when the operator is on two separate circuits. Single cord units can be effective for smaller or mobile operations.

Maintain your equipment well; it is an investment. Because water contains minerals that leave deposits over a period of time, scale buildup can form on the inside water lines, heater and pump. This buildup can clog the machine and reduce its effectiveness or even cause it to fail entirely. Regular use of a quality descaler will prevent this from happening and keep your machine running smoothly.

When selecting a machine, look for signs of durability and serviceability. You wouldn’t buy a car that only lasted for a year, so why buy equipment that won’t last much longer than that? Quality cleaning machines can be distinguished from cheaper models by features like hospital quality plugs, top mounted waterproof switches, easy serviceability. If you do need to work on the machine, make sure you will be able to easily access all of the components.

Optional cleaning accessories will provide you with everything that you need to handle all the cleaning situations you’ll encounter. A detailing wand allows you to reach remote, but visible areas of the interior. A crevice tool with a sprayer attachment allows you to effectively clean the hard-to-reach areas of a vehicle’s interior. Some operators purchase a floor tool capable of doing carpeting in homes or office, thereby enhancing the benefits of machines.

An item worthy of your consideration is what to put into your machine in the form of a detergent. A product that is designed to remove brake dust or grease could destroy the pump in an extractor. Use common sense and ask your distributor what he or she recommends. Cleaning agents for extractors are produced in a variety of strengths so it’s difficult to judge the value of a product by looking at the price per gallon. Dilution ratios and the quality of the emulsifiers in the product itself make all the difference. A low cost per gallon is often the sign of cheaply produced product made attractive by its seemingly inexpensive price. But to achieve effective cleaning, a cheap mixture may require two or three times more volume than another product. Also, the emulsifiers used in cleaning agents vary greatly and are often kept secret by the manufacturer. So be sure to try a variety of products and judge their effectiveness for the price, not just the cost per gallon.

Experience has taught us that, in the long run, quality equipment and products will usually pay for themselves in the form of durability, performance, lack of down time, and ease of operation. Many of your customers know this. That’s why they drive the BMW, Mercedes, Lincoln and Cadillac. Quality is worth it. You’ll discover that also when you buy quality products.

Talk to other detailers or car washers about the equipment they use- what has worked well through the years, who provided them with service, and how was a complaint or downtime handled? Was the staff knowledgeable and helpful?

Choosing the right carpet upholstery equipment is so important to the success of many car detailers. I hope this information will help you make an informed decision when you are ready choose the extractor which is right for your particular operation.