

YOU WILL NEED...

EQUIPMENT Bucket, scrubbing brush, paintbrush, sponge, lint roller or sticky tape, PTFE spray or powdered graphite, proprietary hood cleaner, colorant, weatherproof and plastic window polish.

TIME (HRS) **3** **MONEY** (£) FROM **25**

DIFFICULTY RATING



TECH TIP

If the frame is damaged, sort it immediately as the hood can chafe and ruin.



How to take care of your classic's soft-top

Keep your interior dry and massively extend your hood's lifespan

Regular care of a classic's soft-top is essential. It has to contend with all sorts of weather, irradiation by the sun, extremes of temperature, constant flexing and being harassed by ham-fisted attempts to put it up or down.

Hoods are made from a variety of materials. These range from canvas as seen on vintage campsites, to different grades of vinyl and of course, mohair, which was originally made from the hairy bits of goats. There are also all manner of hybrids involving rubbers and vinyls sandwiched between mohair-type materials.

Padding, headlinings and hood frames introduce yet more variation in quality and price. One thing is for sure, however: over

a period of time, which could range from five years for bargain-basement vinyl to over 20 years for top-notch mohair, a hood can become porous, fade and ultimately leak.

When exposed to British weather, the interior will start to smell like a tramp's

underpants, shiny things will look decidedly secondhand, instruments and windows will steam up, and eventually you'll be able to stick your feet through the footwells.

This doesn't have to be the case. Like the rest of a classic car, a hood will benefit massively from a little ongoing maintenance. Regular cleaning will extend its life, keep it looking good and force you to inspect it. Recolouring will make it look like new and reproofing it will ensure that it's weathertight and UV-resistant. There are many different products on the market but the basic method is the same for all.

Theo says...

A mild, dull day is ideal for colouring or reproofing a hood, as it'll stay wet for longer. If it dries while you're working on it, a patchy appearance can result.

THEODORE J GILLAM TECHNICAL WRITER





TECH TIP

Never use a pressure-washer on a hood as it can damage the material.

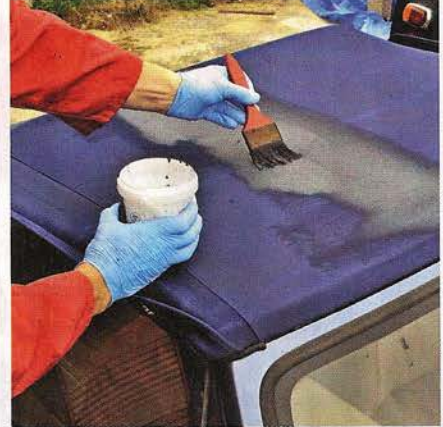
1 Inspect hood

Even the best hood protection products can't repair torn material or rotten stitching. Inspect the hood to see if repairs are needed before continuing. Pour on a little clean water and see if it beads. If it doesn't, it's time to give it a birthday.



2 Clean fabric

Buy a proprietary hood-cleaning product for the type of material you have. Most cleaners require the surface to be moistened lightly with clean water then brushed on from the centre out. Leave for up to an hour, depending on soiling. Brush off, then rinse.



3 Recolour fabric

Clean again and let it dry. If the hood's faded, find a colourant suitable for the material and colour. Test on a hidden area, then apply with a brush from the centre out. Don't panic if the colour looks wrong at first – the shade will change as it dries.

TECH TIP

Use masking tape and paper to prevent splashes on paint or windows.



4 Reproof fabric

Once the hood's dry again, make sure there's no lint or dust present by going over the surface with a clothes roller or sticky tape. Starting at the centre, work in the weatherproofer with a clean paintbrush, wiping away any overspill with a damp cloth.



5 Clean vinyl

Vinyl hoods require a different care system, so make sure you select the correct cleaning product. A proprietary vinyl hood cleaner will give best results. Again, apply the cleaner from the centre outwards. Leave it for up to an hour, scrub then rinse off.



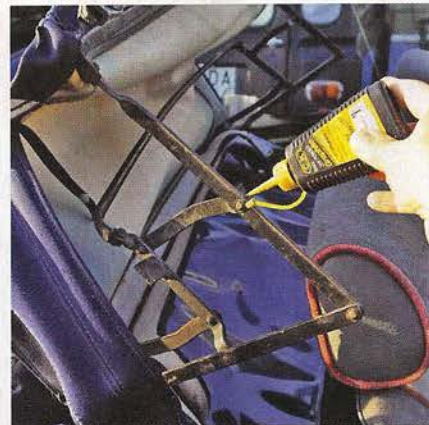
6 Reproof vinyl

Once the hood is dry, remove any lint or dust and then tip some waterproofer into a clean tub. Use a brush or sponge to quickly cover the whole area. If the hood was particularly poorly, let the product dry fully and then apply another coat.



7 Polish windows

Plastic windows can become opaque due to UV and micro-scratching. A hood window polish that contains a very mild abrasive can make a huge difference. Apply a little to a soft cloth and work in circular motions, applying little and often. Buff off.



8 Lubricate hinges/catches

To avoid fighting with a cantankerous mechanism, open out the hood and lubricate the catches and hinges. Working a dry lubricant such as PTFE spray or powdered graphite into the joints is the best approach, as oil can contaminate the hood.



TECH TIP

If your windows are creased, use a hair dryer to warm them and straighten.

9 Maintain and repair

Wash your hood regularly. Always unzip flexible windows before lowering the hood and never store a wet hood in the folded position. Tackle any minor repairs immediately using contact adhesive or sealant and thread of the right colour. ■