



1969 Road Runner Project, Part VII

Secrets To Straightening And Polishing Stainless Trim

Photography by Brad Ocock
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They say the Devil's in the details, and no detail makes as big a statement on your [car](#) as stainless steel trim. Stainless trim can make or break a car on the show field--even if the car's paint is perfect, the engine bay is detailed and the interior is spotless, dinged and dull stainless will always catch your eye, ensuring that becomes the focal point. Conversely, mirror-perfect trim will make up for other areas of your car that may be lacking. We don't know why it seems that way, but that's the funny thing about details.

Straightening and polishing trim is an art that takes a lot of practice to master (and more than a few ruined pieces). We met George Iverson, of Iverson Automotive, while shopping for someone to handle the trim on the Holley Project Road Runner. John Balow of Muscle Car Restorations, the shop handling the project, sends all his trim to Iverson. George got started in the buffing business several years ago, when he did the trim on one of his project [cars](#). His stainless results were very good, and he started getting some "on the side" business from his buddies' cars, then from their friends, and their friends' friends. Eventually, his word-of-mouth reputation forced him to make "The Decision"--back off of doing what he really enjoyed, or ditch his regular (and very well-paying) job to make a go at it. "My only regret is that I didn't start doing this full time 10 years earlier!" George told us.

Along the way to George's reputation, he's learned the ins and outs of polishing different metals, from stainless and aluminum to custom bronze sculpture done by local artists. In addition to a 10-step trim polishing process he's developed over the years, he's also formulated and patented a unique "finishing" buffing compound called "Iverson's Secret Sauce" that he credits with putting his finished trim "over the top." "There's often a faint white or milky residue left on a piece after the polishing process," George said. "I spent years formulating a compound that would eliminate that final haze." We don't know what's in it, but when he's done with a piece of trim, it literally looks like a mirror. George has also developed a rather time-consuming process to repair and restore pot metal to like-new condition. He showed us a pair of Chrysler 300G taillight assemblies that were incredible. There are pitfalls to polishing your own stainless trim, the first being the proper equipment, and we're not talking strictly hand tools or buffing wheels. For example, the polishing process generates an extreme amount of heat, necessitating thick welder's gloves to protect the hands. George goes through two pairs of gloves a week, at \$25 per pair. The cheaper gloves don't last even that long, and in the long run the more expensive gloves are the most [cost effective](#). His double-layered Carhart canvas jeans last about two weeks. George does more polishing in two weeks than most of us will do in our lives, but you can plan on going through the same bill of materials just doing the trim from one car.

The intense heat generated during the buffing process also has two other ramifications. The first is obvious-- heat will warp the metal. Long, thin, flat panels such as rocker moldings will warp and distort if they're heated too high for too long. The other difficulty is that stainless steel trim isn't actually pure stainless, it's an alloy, as [auto](#) manufacturers usually added iron to the stainless. Stainless and iron have two different melting points, and if the trim is heated past a certain point, the iron can actually melt out of the trim piece, creating what appears to be orange peel on the surface of the stainless. This is even more of a problem with aluminum trim, where too much pressure and rpm will cause black streaks, or "mouse tails," which will have to be sanded out. George has separate buffing motors for stainless and aluminum, with the motors spinning at 3200 rpm for stainless, while the wheels he uses for aluminum are spun at about 1800 rpm.

Straightening and polishing your own trim can be a daunting task, but we got some tips from George that will make your attempts end with better results. For a lot of us, it boils down to economics, both of time and money. If you're only going to do a couple of cars in your life, it's probably better to send the parts out and have them professionally done. If you can see yourself doing several cars, or you're one of those people who likes being able to handle every aspect of a restoration, it makes sense to invest money in equipment and the time to get professional results. Check out the photos and captions to see what we learned. And don't forget to view the sidebar!

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