

Cheap Tricks...

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One of the things I find interesting about the Miata community is the spirit of personalizing your car and making it uniquely your own. It seems pretty rare to find a Miata that hasn't had some little modification done somewhere. A style bar over here, new wheels over there, with maybe some leather seats or something else along the way. Don't get me wrong, I think "mods" are fun! So with that in mind, I thought I'd cover a few "cheap tricks" this month. A short list of free, cheap or at least easy things you can do to make the car your own.

First, let's talk about polishing. There are a number of pieces on the NA and NB Miatas that respond well to a little elbow grease. Generally speaking, most parts can be polished by starting with a medium-fine grit sandpaper (600-800 grit) to clean or smooth the part, followed by progressively finer paper (1000-1500 grit), and then finished off with polishing compound (metal polish or rubbing compound). We'll cover the polishing of a few specific interior and exterior parts below.

First up are the turn-signal and wiper stalks. If you look closely, you'll notice that the short section of stalk sticking out of the steering column is an olive-green color. Actually, it's aluminum underneath! Simply remove the screws underneath the steering column cover to remove the upper and lower sections of the cover. This gives you excellent access to the stalks. From there, lightly sand the stalks with 600 grit paper to remove the color and reveal the bare aluminum below. Follow with 1500 grit paper to smooth them up and start making them shine. Finally, a little metal polish will remove the last of the scratches and make them look like chrome. You might want to cut your paper into small strips to make it easier to wrap around the stalk. Don't be afraid to give it a try, aluminum is an easy metal to polish. This whole procedure will take 20 minutes or so. (Extra credit: the face of the ignition switch will polish up just like the stalks...)

Next up is the exhaust tip. Chances are, you keep your car washed and waxed and maybe you even wipe off the tip of the muffler where it sticks out of the rear bumper. But most likely, that exhaust tip has oxidized a bit and isn't as shiny as it once was. If your car has the original muffler, the exhaust tip is... aluminum. It'll polish up the same way as the stalks described earlier. Aftermarket exhausts may have chromed tips, so only use chrome polish on those, or check with the manufacturer to see what they recommend. Again, this shouldn't take more than 20 minutes or so.

By now, you should be feeling pretty comfortable with the whole polishing routine. So here's another project for those of you who like a little bling under your hood. Open the hood and look at the firewall. There you'll see a metal tube running from the brake booster, across the firewall and over to the intake manifold. Slip the rubber hoses off the ends of the tube and remove the brackets that hold the tube to the firewall. Pull the tube from the car and polish away! As they say in the shop manuals: Installation is the reverse of removal. Be SURE to connect the rubber hoses to each end of the tube. After all, this is the vacuum assist for your power brakes. Look around and you'll find a number of little things (like brackets) and big things (like the valve cover and intake manifold) to polish. Large items respond well to a wire-wheel for initial polishing.

OK, I'll mention one last item. How about the side marker lights? You know, the yellow ones on the front and red ones on the rear? You'll notice they have lettering molded into lenses, lettering that catches dirt and dried wax and gives them a dingy look. Or maybe you're just tired of cleaning all those little letters! Though these are plastic, our same polishing routine can be used to smooth them out. Simply remove the two screws holding the lens to the car, pull it out and unplug/remove the bulb. Use sandpaper to remove the letters. Wrap the sandpaper around a block to make it easier, or carefully use an orbital sander (my Dad clamped his sander in a vise then held the lenses). Once the letters are removed, use finer grit paper to remove the sanding marks and finish with metal polish or rubbing compound. A sander and buffing wheel make

VERY short work of this. (Extra credit: the heads of the screws that hold the lens polish very nicely) If your car doesn't have lights in the rear marker lenses, now's a great time to add them, but that's a project for another article.

Disclaimer: Use this advice at your own risk. Common sense should prevail. Measure twice, cut once. Using progressively finer sandpaper WILL get the sanding marks out. None of these ideas are my own but are presented for your enjoyment! :O)