

## **Caring for the Roof Over Your Head**

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Fall... my favorite time of year! I hope everyone survived "hurricane '08" and the power outages that were the result. A lot of us got a taste of 19<sup>th</sup> century living didn't we? Fortunately, we have a few more horsepower at our disposal!

Those storms got me thinking about our convertible tops. Well... that and the fact that someone asked me what they should use on their top. It's kind of like driving a tent in a rainstorm; there really isn't that much difference in the amount of material between you and the elements. Add in the cost of a replacement top and caring for your top becomes pretty important.

So what ARE some good ways to care for your top, keeping in mind that some of the later cars have cloth tops instead of vinyl? Well, first you'd better know which material you have. If it looks and feels like vinyl... it is. If it feels like cloth, then that's what you've got. See the appropriate sections below for some tips and ideas.

### **Vinyl**

Vinyl is the most common of the top materials and arguably the easiest to take care of. Give it a good washing when you wash the rest of the car and it'll stay pretty clean. You can use a brush to scrub the dirtier spots if need be.

Tan vinyl tops tend to show their age and dirt more readily than the black ones. If you need to clean up a tan top, start with car soap and a good stiff brush. For more cleaning power, you can step up to a degreaser like Simple Green, Orange Power, Fantastik, etc. Be sure to rinse thoroughly. Degreasers can strip wax, so you may need to re-wax the car when you're finished. Small spots can be gently rubbed with a Mr. Clean Magic Eraser.

Once clean, be sure to protect your top with a vinyl protectant. 303 Aerospace Protectant, Ragtopp, or Vinylex are popular and work well. Follow the directions on the package, especially if it says to buff off the excess. That'll keep it from streaking in the rain. Also, try applying the protectant with a sponge. It's easier and uses less product.

### **Cloth**

OK, let's admit it; cloth tops look great! They're not really any more difficult to maintain than vinyl, it just needs to be done more often perhaps. Car wash soap and a soft brush should be all that's needed to get it clean. Be sure to not scrub too hard. If it's not that dirty, don't bother with the brush, just use your wash mitt.

If you have a spot that requires much scrubbing, perhaps you should try a chemical cleaner instead. Both Ragtopp and 303 make a convertible top cleaner that's appropriate for cloth tops. Just follow the directions on the can. The cleaners might strip wax, so you may need to re-wax the car when you're finished.

To protect your cloth top, you need a cloth protectant, duh! You need to reapply a protectant when water doesn't bead on the top. Ragtopp and 303 make a spray-on fabric protector that works really well. They work in a similar fashion to Scotch-Guard, but are rated for convertible tops. The protectants restore the water repellency and add UV fade resistance as well. I've been using 303 Fabric Protector on the Mazdaspeed's top and it works very well.

The cloth protectants are usually sprayed-on via an aerosol can or squirt bottle. You'll want to keep it off the windows and paint, just to eliminate any clean-up afterward. I recommend using an old sheet or blanket to throw over the windshield and interior. Open the doors to keep them and their windows out of the way. Spray the top and sides first, then move the blanket to the trunk and rear fenders and spray the back. That allows you to work quickly with little overspray.

I've mentioned 303 and Ragtop products because I've used them and I know they work well. There may be other products available for vinyl, but I don't know of any others for cloth. 303 is available locally at The Anderson's and Pick-ups Plus. I've not seen Ragtop locally, but both are available on-line.

Best of luck caring for your top. The Miata's top is pretty well designed and uses good materials. It's not uncommon to see a '90 with its original top. It's all a matter of proper care and using the boot to protect it from the sun when it's down.

**The fine print:** Your experience may differ. Ideas and information are presented for entertainment purposes, use at your own risk. Price does not include optional equipment shown. Offer not valid in all states. See dealer for details.