



Plastic Polishing



By Roger Kizer

We all have them. Lenses that are less than perfect or worse and no cash to buy new ones. Or you have plastic A pillar interior trim that looks dull or fuzzy. Or even dome lights that you can't tell if the lights are on or off. Well, I'm here to walk you through a simple process to restore the usability of these parts without buying new ones. What is this magic procedure I speak of? Elbow Grease. With some steel wool, sandpaper and polish we will restore the plastic parts on our early cars to a usable status. While they may not be perfect, at least they will be usable until we can save up some cash to get new ones.

Here is one of my spare A pillar trim parts. As you can see its very dirty, oxidized and just plain cruddy.



If you look at the end that has been covered by the upper door trim, you can see how good it looks. not being exposed to the elements has kept it looking good.



Since this was a spare part I decided to try something. I grabbed some very fine steel wool and my Mag & Aluminum polish to see if I could bring back the original luster of the plastic.

First I buffed the plastic with the steel wool to remove all the years of grime on the part.



Then I started with the polish. There are plastic polishes out there, but I was experimenting and used what I had.

If you are or were in the military, you know the drill here. Just like "Spit Shining" your boots. I'm using a paper towel, but an old t-shirt will work too. Just dab some polish on your finger and move in small circles. Do a small area at a time until the polish is almost dry. Then buff it off with a clean paper towel or t-shirt.



Here you can see the left side is cleaned with the steel wool and the right has been polished. Looking Good Now!

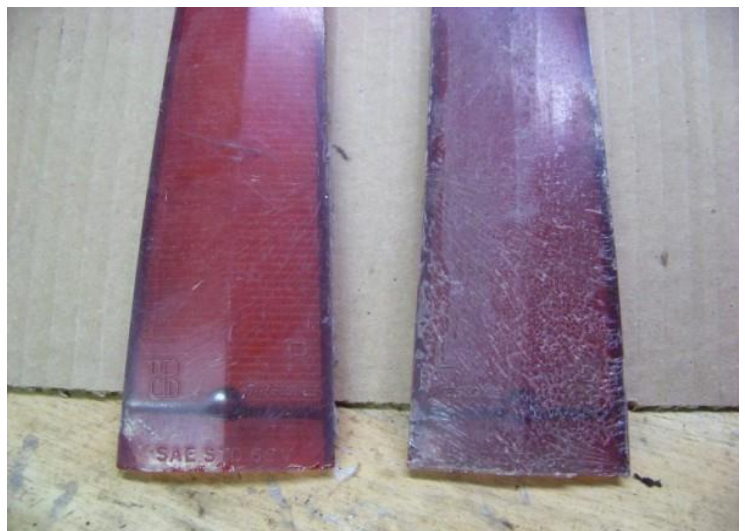


I did a little more to show that you may need to repeat the polishing in one area to get the shine back. I was moving quickly and my finger was getting sore.

The photo shows the difference between the newly polished part and the untouched opposite part.



This worked well on the A pillar trim, I decided to try it on some lenses. Here are two tail light lenses, one ok, one badly cracked. We will make the one on the right usable.



Just like before, a little polish, working in small circles until the polish is dry, then buff it off.



The difference is clear. The left lens is in much better condition than before. The right lens could use more buffing to make it more clear but a huge improvement. If you have lenses like the ones on the right and their condition is preventing you from driving your car, then try this first. Lenses are expensive, polish and hard work are cheap.



We are going to switch gears here. The other parts we worked with are of a hard plastic. The dome light lenses are much softer and is why they look so bad. They get stained and become opaque. Polish will not work here.



You need sand paper. Here I started with 80 grit because we need to really remove a lot of material to get to the un-stained plastic. Then I sanded with 220 grit, 400 grit and finished with 600 grit.

Working with the dome light lenses is like wood working. Just sand it smooth. This will only work if your lenses are not too brittle.



Here is the finished lens. Looks as good as new. Its still a little stained, but much better than before, and at a car show or cruise night, most people won't look close enough to know the difference.



Don't forget to polish your trim ring before putting it back together.

I hope this helps you with some of your cars journey back to the usable. Here are some numbers for you, as of this writing, Dome lenses new are \$25 to \$30 each. Tail light lenses new, like the ones used in the article, are \$72 each.

A 5oz container of aluminum polish, \$ 5.99. Pack of steel wool, \$4.99. Sandpaper, \$1.00 a sheet. Hard work and time, priceless.





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