Products to Clean Aircraft on page 39

Mike Busch discusses The Dark Side of Maintenance on page 26

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I have been an aircraft owner all of my adult life. Add that as a teenager I used to wash aircraft in exchange for flight lessons and one could say I have more than a bit of experience in cleaning aircraft. Over all these years I have tried just about every cleaning product there is. Trial and error has shown me what works and what doesn’t. I am sharing my list of tried and true products.

First a little on my philosophy of aircraft care. A general aviation aircraft is nothing unique as far as keeping clean and shiny. Products that work well on a car, boat or kitchen appliances will work just as well on an aircraft. I will buy the expensive care product if that is what does the job best. However I have found that most of the expensive products are more hype than performance and there is usually a common, inexpensive product that will perform as well as, if not better than the expensive product. I remain a dog who can be taught a new trick in that I will try new products as they are available and if I find something that does a job better than what I am currently using I will change to the new product.

Here is what I have found works best.

**Basic Aircraft Cleaning**

Back in the days when my aircraft used to sit outside on tiedown, every so often it would need a good soap and water bath. I found that JOY LIQUID DISHWASHING DETERGENT did an excellent job. Heck if it will clean the barbecue grease from your spouse’s fine china it ought to be able to get your plane clean. I have heard from others that they like to use WOOLITE because it is so gentle though when I tried it I found I preferred the JOY.

Washing the cars around the house my family has found that the Mr. Clean Auto Dry Pro Series is a step up from rinsing off with just the water from the hose so if I were washing my aircraft today that is what I would probably use.

My airplane now resides in a hangar so it rarely needs a bath, rather an occasional dusting is called for. For this I use micro-fiber towels and LEMON PLEDGE.

**Windows**

The best product to use to clean Plexiglas windows is about as hotly a debated subject among pilots as is lean of peak operations. I have tried just about every product there is and have not found anything that does any better than what I have been using for over 45 years, the afore-mentioned LEMON PLEDGE. Is there a reason to use Lemon Pledge as opposed to the original non-scented Pledge? Actually there are a couple of reasons. Using the Lemon Pledge on the interior side of the windows adds a pleasant scent to the aircraft. More important is that such products have a citrus element to them cut through insect remains better than similar products without any citrus in them.

One thing that I have changed over the years in regards to window cleaning is the cloth I use to wipe the windows clean. I started with paper towels but quickly abandoned them. I don’t care what Rosie says, none of them are soft enough to not cause some abrasive damage long term. Cloth diapers are excellent but my source of those went away when the kids were no longer infants. For many years I used Terrycloth Towels and still do in a pinch. They are soft, clean, cheap and readily available in quantity from places like Costco and Sam’s Club.

A couple of years ago I purchased a Corvette and got introduced to the world of totally anal Corvette owners. Those guys and gals swear that the only thing that can touch their cars are Microfiber towels. Until I started talking to the car owners I had never heard of these towels. I purchased some and found them very soft with an extremely high fiber count. I thought if they were that great for Corvettes, wouldn’t they work well on aircraft, especially on the windows? Well, they do. And that is what I now use.

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**Products To Clean Aircraft**

*By John Frank*

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use to clean aircraft windows, Microfiber towels and Pledge. Fortunately Costco carries both.

**Belly Crud**

The bottom of our aircraft get particularly dirty with stuff that is not easy to clean. Oil and exhaust are the prime culprits and each requires something special.

To clean off the belly oil, or BO as it is called around the airport, I have found that a particular hand cleaner works best. GOJO Without Pumice does a great job. The Without Pumice is very important as if you get the product with pumice it will scratch the paint. The one you want is the original GOJO in the white container. This is available at any auto supply store such as Pep Boys.

There is no way to make this a pleasant, easy job. Put on your grubbiest clothes. Now put on some nitrile gloves. The hand cleaner is fine but the stuff coming off the aircraft is not something you want to be working into your skin. For the same reason I recommend wearing safety goggles as well. With GOJO and plenty of towels at hand get underneath your aircraft, a creeper can be useful, and start slathering on the GOJO to about a 2 square foot area at a time. Work it around a bit with your hands and then wipe it off with a towel. Voila, a clean belly! And a pretty messy you, but you’ll clean up fine after a shower and clean clothes. Are you a real detailed person like CPA’s Kim Huntington? Having a little oil residue around rivet heads that you can’t get at with you
hands will drive you so crazy you can’t sleep at night? Use a tooth brush and GOJO to clean around the rivet heads. The soft bristles will get the crud but not harm the paint.

It takes me forty minutes to clean the belly of my 210 but I don’t usually clean around every rivet head with a toothbrush. Probably takes Kim all day to do her 210.

You have cleaned the belly with GOJO but there is still some white residue that won’t come off no matter how hard you rub? This is exhaust residue and contains the by-products of combustion including lead, if you are operating on av-gas. There actually is a magic potion to deal with that. It is called HOPPE’S #9 POWDER SOLVENT and it’s original intended purpose is to remove bullet and powder residue from gun barrels. It is available at K-Mart, Walmart and gun shops. Just pour a little on a cloth and with some mild rubbing all the exhaust residue will be gone.

Make It Shine

Now that your bird is nice and clean, you want to shine. In the old days it would be time to get out the cheesecloth and Carnuba paste wax and rub, rub, rub. Today there are better products that give a high shine with a lot less effort. One of the best that I have found is REJEX, brought to you by the same folks that make Corrosion X. REJEX is not a wax, it is a polymer coating. It won’t restore old faded paint but it will make a finish
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that is in good condition really shine. It gives a really slick finish to which bugs and exhaust do not adhere as readily. It is applied with a soft cloth, allowed to dry and then buffed out by hand. One coat is good enough, two coats is better and three coats becomes almost blinding. Nothing lasts forever so to maintain the high level of shine you will have to reapply the product periodically. How frequently depends on environment and how much rain you fly through, I redo my aircraft about once a year. REJEX is available from Aircraft Spruce and some boating supply stores.

Got a polished spinner you want to keep gleaming? For years the product of choice was MET-AL. That is still a good choice. A little of the past on a cloth, some rubbing and the original shine returns. Another popular product is FLITZ which will give similar results. Sports cars have a lot more shiny things on them than airplanes and that group of owners have steered me to another product that I am very happy with. It is MOTHERS MAG & ALUMINUM POLISH. Available at any auto supply house.

Other Useful Cleaning Supplies

When there is a stain that won’t wash off or similar blemish, it will have to be polished out. This will require some sort of abrasive compound. Of course you should start with a mild abrasive. Dennis Wolter of Air Mod taught me about one of the mildest abrasives to use – Toothpaste! Since then I have on a number of occasions used common household toothpaste to polish out a blemish. If something stronger is called for, go to your auto supply store and buy some polishing compound (usually in a green can) and the larger grit rubbing compound (usually in a red can) and use these to polish away the defect. Try the milder polishing compound first. After the blemish is gone use REJEX to add some shine and away you go.

And there you have the basic primer of what 45 years of cleaning aircraft has taught me.

• LEMON PLEDGE
  Source: Supermarket

• JOY DISH WASHING DETERGENT
  Source: Supermarket

• GOJO HAND CLEANER WITHOUT PUMICE
  Source: Auto Supply Store

• HOPPES #9 POWDER RESIDUE CLEANER
  Source: K-Mart, WalMart, Gun Shop

• MOTHERS MAG AND ALUMINUM POLISH
  Source: Auto Supply Store

• REJEX
  Source: Aircraft Spruce

• CORROSION X
  Source: Aircraft Spruce

• RUBBING COMPOUND
  Source: Auto Supply Store

• POLISHING COMPOUND
  Source: Auto Supply Store

• TOOTH PASTE
  Source: Supermarket

• NITIRILE GLOVES
  Source: Costco

• TERRY TOWELS – Source: Costco

• MICROFIBER TOWELS
  Source: Costco

Ed. Note: To see what other members are using for bug cleaning, go to From the Forums... on page 52
Bug Cleaning

For what it is worth, I purchased a bottle of the Turtle Wax Ice in a spray bottle. This is the best thing I have seen at removing bugs from the leading edges. Spray it on, wait about 30 seconds, and they just wipe off. It was amazing.

Just thought I would pass this info along.

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Barney

I’ve been using Armor-All Protective Wipes on my leading edges. They are in a handy dispenser for trips and they work very well. An extra benefit is that they deposit some kind of film that aids in cleaning the next batch of bugs.

The main thing is the convenience and the container is very light.

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Jim Nance

If you want to impress your hangar neighbors, go at the leading edges with a slice of pineapple. The enzymes in pineapple cut bugs as well as anything man-made.

Rub it on, wait a while, then wipe the bugs off with a rag.

The chemical products might be cheaper, but the fruit solution has personality.

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David Bunin

I have very good results using Nanowax from Eagle One. It is a spray on wipe off wax with no buffing.

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Bryan Burnett

After an application of Top Gun Supreme, all you need is a wet rag or fly through a rain shower. Keeps the polished spinner polished a bit longer, too.

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Manny Puerto

A CFI/owner at my field suggested dryer sheets. Dampen with a little water and with a touch of elbow grease the bugs come right off. Smells nice too! I do try to be gentle, especially around paint chips and such.

It does seem to leave a little protective coating that keeps the bugs from sticking so bad for the next couple of flights. So far so good.

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Brock Boss

I used to use Pledge on the leading edges, but switched to RejeX (from the CorrosionX folks) a few years ago. When applied twice a year, it only takes a damp cloth to wipe the little critters off.

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Jim Lyon

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