



Liquid Wax Test Launch

Practical Sailor evaluates 25 bottled products for initial gloss and water-beading before mounting the test panels for long-term observation.

In the February 2009 issue of *Practical Sailor*, we reviewed paste waxes, those harder compounds normally sold in cans or tubs. In our perennial quest for a glossy boat exterior, we have expanded our tests to include a long list of waxes and polishes now sold in bottles.

In choosing which product is best for your boat, first decide what result you are looking for. A bright showroom shine or long-term protection? What is your location, and how is the boat used? A formula high in carnauba wax may be best for a short-term brilliant shine, but one with a hard polymer or glass-like coat and UV inhibitors may have the best long-term protection.

Even brand new boats need to have the gelcoat sealed and protected from the elements. Start with a good marine sealant and polish, preferably one of the new synthetic polymer-based types. (If oxidation has already started, you will need a rubbing compound, but all this will be covered in a future article.)

In this issue, we are addressing liquid waxes and sealants to use for the final step in obtaining the ultimate hard, glossy finish after the rubbing compound, fillers and polishes have been applied.

WHAT WE TESTED

With an ever-growing number of products on the market, *Practical Sailor* settled on 26 liquid products from 21 manufacturers that were advertised or recommended as boat and car waxes, polishes, or finish applications. We left out some that rated poorly in previous tests.

We intended to test only finish waxes, but several are multi-purpose polishes with cleaning agents. All claim to provide a high gloss or the surface ability to reflect light.

We looked for products that were easy to apply and create that sought-after mirror finish on the sides and decks of our sailboats.

In general, as with the paste waxes, these liquid products are meant to be applied after the compounding and buffing steps, if needed. These are for the finishing step and are for surfaces that are in good shape. Some waxes do contain UV-protection agents, but the amount of UV protection that a microscopically thin layer of wax can provide is limited. The primary goal of a wax is to protect the top layers of gelcoat that already contain UV-protection agents. PS tested UVA and UVB absorption among a handful of waxes claiming UV protection and no product, even when applied in a thick film, absorbed a significant percentage of these rays. In many ways they all look, feel, and smell the same. Their differences may be in the labeling and what market application the manufacturers are seeking. The

Value Guide on page 26 shows a wide range of prices for these products. Car waxes and polishes are available through a variety of automotive and hardware retailers and tend to be less expensive.

Some products are sold through marine dealers and distributors such as West Marine, and the newer specialty products are mostly sold direct and online.

HOW WE TESTED

The products were marked, tested, and listed in random order.

Two white fiberglass hatch covers were washed, dried, and prepared by machine buffing with 3M Perfect-It rubbing compound and 3M Finesse-It II Restorer to remove dirt and scratches. A grid was laid out on the covers with masking tape. One coat of each wax or coating was applied to an area about 6 by 8 inches, following maker instructions, and then buffed off by hand.

Testers observed and rated each finish in the sunlight, then sprayed them with a mist of water and rated the relative beading. In a dark room, testers held a multi-bulb LED flashlight over each polished square. The degree of clarity of the reflected LEDs in each determined the finish's degree of gloss; testers rated them accordingly.

For this test, there were no significant differences in the ease of application from one product to the next. All were easy to apply and easy to buff off, so we left that factor out of the Value Guide on page 26.

Post application, testers mounted the hatch covers face-up in an unobstructed spot on the roof of our workshop in Sarasota, Fla., basking in the hot sun, wind, and summer rains. We'll check in on the hatches regularly and will publish updates on the products' long-term performances.

WHAT WE FOUND

Star brite Premium Marine Polish No. 85716: This Star brite polish boasts PTFE (Polytetrafluoroethylene), the company's registered formula it claims produces an extremely slick, UV-protected, non-stick and durable finish. Not a cleaner, Premium Marine Polish can be applied over old wax and polish. The thick, white liquid produced a nice shine and was best on the water-beading test. Star brite Marine Polish, No. 80116: This is a thick, blue liquid multipurpose cleaner/polish. It is designed to remove light chalking from gelcoat and aluminum and to restore luster. It contains kerosene, has a very strong kerosene smell, and did well on the water-beading test.

PS VALUE GUIDE **LIQUID POLISHES**

MAKER	PRODUCT	PRICE/ PRICE SOURCE	SIZE/ COST PER OZ.	CLAIMS UV INHIBITORS	INITIAL GLOSS
STAR BRITE	Premium Marine Polish No. 85716 ★	\$28.99 / westmarine.com	16 oz. / \$1.81	Yes	Excellent
STAR BRITE	Marine Polish # 80116 ★	\$19.99 / westmarine.com	12 oz. / \$1.67	No	Excellent
CAJUN	Shine All	\$17.95 / cajunshine.com	16 oz. / \$1.12	No	Good
COLLINITE	No. 870 Heavy-duty Fleetwax	\$28.99 / westmarine.com	16 oz. / \$1.81	Yes	Very good
COLLINITE	No. 845 Insulator Wax (No. 925) ✓	\$25.99 / westmarine.com	16 oz. / \$1.62	Yes	Very good
3M	Scotchgard Marine Liquid Wax	\$34.99 / westmarine.com	16.9 oz. / \$2.07	Yes	Good
MOTHERS	Marine Synthetic Wax	\$15.99 / basspro.com	16 oz. / \$1	No	Good
RE-STRUCTURE	Professional Marine Polish	\$29.95 / re-structuremarine.com	12 oz. / \$2.50	No	Fair
INTERLUX	Premium Teflon Marine Wax	\$28.99 / westmarine.com	16.9 oz. / \$1.72	Yes	Good
INTERLUX	UV Protectant & Marine Wax Sealer	\$12.30 /jamestowndistributors.com	16.9 oz. / 73c	Yes	Fair
NU-FINISH	The Once a Year Car Polish	\$9.99 / acehardware.com	16 oz. / 62c	No	Very good
REJEX	Anti-Stain Protection	\$19.95 /corrosionx.com	16 oz. / \$1.25	No	Fair
IMAR	Yacht Polish No. 402	\$22.99 / westmarine.com	16 oz. / \$1.44	Yes	Fair
FLITZ WAXX	Super Gloss Protectant	\$14.38 / dtepp.com	7.6 oz. / \$1.89	Yes	Good
YACHT BRITE	Pro Polish	\$15.99 / overtons.com	16 oz. / 99c	Yes	Good
WOODY WAX	Carnauba Glass Coat	\$26.79 /defender.com	16 oz. / \$1.67	No	Good
RAYMARINE	Marine Shield	\$29.99 / Raymarine	22 oz. / \$1.36	Yes	Good
MEGUIAR'S	No. 56 Pure Carnauba Wax ✓	\$15.99 / westmarine.com	16 oz. / \$1	No	Excellent
MEGUIAR'S	Flagship Premium Marine Wax ✓	\$19.99 / westmarine.com	16 oz. / \$1.25	Yes	Excellent
GLARE	Professional Polish	\$34.95 / glare.com	12 oz. / \$2.91	Yes	Good
GLARE	Micro Finish & Professional Polish	\$69.90 / glare.com	12 oz. / \$5.83	Yes	Good
WEST MARINE	Pure Oceans with PTFE	\$19.99 / westmarine.com	16 oz. / \$1.25	No	Good
TURTLE WAX	F-21 \$	\$9.99 / acehardware.com	20 oz. / 50c	Yes	Excellent
ISLAND GIRL	Mirror Hard Superglaze ✓	\$63.95 / Island Girl	12 oz. / \$5.32	Yes	Excellent
PRISM POLISH	Mirage	\$19.99 / prismpolish.com	16 oz. / \$1.25	Yes	Good
ZAINO BROS.	Z-3 Show Car Polish ✓	\$14.95 / zainostore.com	8 oz. / \$1.87	Yes	Very good

★ Best Choice ✓ Recommended \$ Budget Buy

Conclusions

Most of the two-dozen products in this test did a good job of producing a nice shine. In our initial testing, the difference in gloss, water beading, and reflection was minimal, making it difficult to tap any real winners or losers in this initial report. However, it was obvious that the best finishes for initial water beading were those with a slightly oily wax formula. Both Star brite polishes beaded water best. Stay tuned for followup reports on protection longevity.

For more on gelcoat care, check out “Offshore Log: Gelcoat Maintenance” and at www.practical-sailor.com, in the “Tools & Techniques” section.

