

An Unusual Conversation Has A Shiny Finish

By Bob and Meriam Stern



While on vacation in February, we visited the local Ocean World amusement park. I had an unusual conversation with a 500-pound resident while he rested his head on Miriam's lap.

He said, "Bob, your car will always have a Parade Shine. It looks clean and shiny from 15 to 20 feet away. But, I see that you are making yourself sick trying to keep all the scratches and swirls off.

Car lovers, especially BMW owners, know that dark cars show every mark and scratch.

I am not lion when I tell you that, currently, the two cars with the softest and thinnest clear coat are BMW and Tesla.

You have two choices when you get home, replace it for a lighter color convertible or cover the clear coat with a harder material."

Several products on the market are advertised to improve the slickness, gloss, and hardness of automotive paint clear coat. Most are designed for do-it-yourself installation or by a detail shop. They promise one to two years of improved appearance and protection. You can even get a complete plastic cocoon. One product, Ceramic Pro, promises a longer life on the car but is only available for application by a licensed and trained detail shop. It's also the only coating reporting to have been tested for hardness, claiming a "9H" rating. The test they use would give a #2 pencil (for those of us who know what that is)

2H hardness. Computer screen protectors are 8H to 9H. It seemed my best choice would be a clear coat treatment based on this nano-technology.

All of them emphasize a **very critical installation requirement**. The paint on the car surface must be totally smooth and scratch free **before** the clear-coat is applied. Any mark or dust on the paint surface will be sealed underneath the new coating. That will make the damage or imperfections even more obvious to see and impossible to remove. To be real, if I had been able to make the paint surface swirl and scratch free, and keep it that way, I would not be

looking for an outside solution. Since I do not have a garage, this was definitely not a DIY project for me.

I decided to have the Ceramic Pro package applied. The closest franchised and experienced shop is Capitol Shine, located in Arlington, Virginia. A visit to Rob at Capitol Shine convinced me to take this chance.

Ceramic Pro is offered in several different configurations. I opted for the complete "lifetime" package that includes protecting everything on the interior and exterior of the car. The process is not fast. Rob told me the preparation of the paint

surface to remove chips and swirls on my 18-month-old 135i took more than 100 hours of labor. Then, many layers of the Ceramic Pro coating were applied. About one month later, a light topcoat was applied and the car was inspected for any areas that might require touch-up.

In my case, two particular areas could not be finished during the first session. Every six months I treat the top with BMW's "impregnating agent for the convertible soft top." This treatment apparently prevented the Ceramic Pro product from properly hardening. I will wait a year without additional BMW treatment and then Capitol Shine will attempt a top coating with Ceramic Pro. Rob's team also noticed some paint crazing on the wheels. This required repair by a wheel expert. Since the paint was fresh, application of Ceramic Pro to the wheels and calipers was done at the one-month checkup instead of during the first time.

So far, I am very pleased with the look and durability of the coating. I delivered all my buffing, polishing, and detail equipment to my grandson for use on his E39. Washing now consists of soaping the car, hosing it off, and

blotting or blowing it dry. Note I said; "BLOT dry". Never wipe water off a car, always blot it. When you wipe a car, any remaining dirt particles can become scratch marks.

Thanks to the suggestion from our wet friend, my 135i car cover is now for sale, as winter snow can do no damage. Birds can now only do damage

when the top is down...on me, not the car. Every part of the car has been coated, including the top, seats, calipers and wheels. I am sure I made the proper decision. I am still "anal" about the appearance, but know that it looks great and I am not killing myself getting it to meet my standards.

Naturally, everyone asks: "How much?" There is no fixed amount. The cost to complete the process is different for every car. Although the prices for the Ceramic Pro packages are published on the Capitol Shine web site, each car requires a

different amount of labor and associated cost for proper preparation. It is a costly and time-consuming decision, but, for me, a sensible one. Please contact me if you have any questions I did not answer. (bob.stern@nccbmwcca.org)



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