An Easy Way To Clean Wire Wheels: by JCOH Member John Walker

Few automobiles can compare with a freshly polished Jaguar sitting on gleaming chrome wire wheels. Many owners don't clean their wire wheels as often as they would like because it is thought to be a lot of work.....and it is if your wheels are neglected. Keeping new or well maintained wire wheels clean is easy.

Cleaning wire wheels can be a chore if they are neglected. Brake dust sticks to the surface of the wheel and spokes, oil and tar are thrown from the road onto the wheel and grease from the hubs themselves may be thrown onto the wheel. If the wheels are not cleaned regularly the accumulated grime can harbor moisture and promote pitting and eventual rusting of the rim and spokes. Eventually, corrosion can cause the spokes to fail and the wheel to become unsafe.

Removing old accumulated grime on neglected wire wheels involves a lot of hand work. The original wheels on my E-type hadn't been thoroughly cleaned in years. A quick trip to the high pressure self-serve car wash failed to remove most of the accumulation of years of brake dust and road grime. Various household cleaners also failed to remove it. To clean those wheels I bought a selection of toothbrushes and several cans of Turtle Wax Chrome Polish And Rust Remover and spent about 2 hours on each wheel scrubbing every nook and cranny of the wheels with the brushes and chrome cleaner.

Many of the spokes were rusted or pitted and I had to resort to a scotchbrite pad to remove the rust from the surface of the chrome. I also removed the accumulated old grease from the splines and hub of the wheels with solvent and garden hose.

Now that I had the wheels clean and polished I encountered a problem; there was no way a polishing cloth could remove all of the polish residue from the wheels. I decided that if I couldn't buff the residue off maybe I could blast it off. I borrowed a pressure washer and tried it. It worked! The 1,100 PSI jet of water from the pressure washer removed all of the residue in less than a minute and left a gleaming wet surface.

Wire wheels are about as hard to dry as they are to polish. If I couldn't wipe the water off maybe I could blow it off. I found that the air stream from an electric leaf blower was sufficient to blow the water off of the wheels and prevent water spots. I later found out an air compressor and blow gun attachment did an even better job.

Once the wheels were clean they were easy to maintain. As a part of normal car cleaning I spray each wheel with Westley's Bleche-Wite Wheel Cleaner and let it sit for about two minutes. I then scrub the wheel with a brush with soft bristles about 3 inches long. The long bristles get through and behind the spokes. I then rinse each wheel with a garden hose and blow the water off with the air compressor. It takes about 15 minutes to clean all four wheels this way.

Caution: Don't clean your wheels immediately after a drive, let the car rest for a while. Cold water hitting hot brake rotors can cause the rotor to warp.

A word on cleaners: Westley's, like most other wheel cleaners, is mildly acidic. Follow the label directions. Don't worry, it is not acidic enough to hurt your wheels. As a test I propped an old chrome wheel up so the rim would hold liquid. I then poured about 2 ozs of wheel cleaner on the rim and let it sit for 24 hours; there was no damage.