Tools you’ll need: besides using a specialty tool to remove the moldings, a power buffing wheel is the only tool needed.

Tinware you’ll need: various grits of fine wet sandpaper (320, 400, 600, 800, 1000, 1200, 1500 grits), stainless polish, microfiber towels.

Considering the amount of chrome, stainless steel, and polished aluminum that was originally bolted or stuck to these old Chevys of ours, cleaning and polishing your body moldings and trim can drastically change the appearance of your car. Think about it. From grilles and bumpers to window reveals and door moldings, these cars were clad to the hilt with all things bright and shiny. It was the style of the times, and we love it! Nothing looks better rolling down the highway than a nicely restored car with highly detailed trim and appointments. Picture a ’66 Marina Blue Impala SS convertible dancing and sparkling in the afternoon sun like a two-ton disco ball. Now that’s what you’d call Saturday Night Fever!

In reality, most of us probably fall a little short of the kingpin styling and prestige of such an Impala. But the truth is any car will greatly benefit from the time invested in precise detail work. However, this is an area that many car crafters seem to glaze over or just forget about altogether. You see it all the time. Somebody will strip a car down, spend $8,000 on bodywork and a new paint job, and proceed to reinstall the same faded-out and pitted-up chrome and trim that originally came off the car. That makes no sense. Not to mention it heavily detracts from the overall appearance you just spent a grip of cash to improve. Sure, many reproductions are available nowadays, and sometimes this is simply the best route to go. Repro moldings may not be available for all models though, so re-finishing just might be your only option. For stainless steel, you would be surprised what you can do with a buffer, a little polish, and your own two hands. In fact, we will show you just how easy it is to do, and put a little sparkle back into your car’s cosmetics. Here, we’ll concentrate on stainless only. Aluminum parts are a little trickier – they can be very fragile, and can require anodizing or re-chroming after being refinished. If you need to re-chrome a part, there are many companies around the country that offer this service.

The windshield reveal moldings are constantly under fire from the rays of the sun (or rain and snow depending on the car’s origin). Regardless, over time they fade and dull and can even rust due to the harsh elements of the outdoors. We decided to pull the original set of moldings off the car and treat them to some long-awaited TLC.

After removing the moldings (go easy, they can be brittle!), we gave them a quick once-over cleaning with a little soap and warm water. Then, start sanding with wet fine grits sandpaper – we’d recommend starting with a 320 grit, then move up to 400, then 600, then 800, then 1000. See how it’s looking at this point. You may need to use a 1200 or even 1500 if you want it to really gleam. By this time, the surface should appear almost mirror-like. Don’t apply all the sanding force in one direction either, use a cross-hatch formation to evenly cover the surface. Go easy and cover the molding completely. Wet sanding is a delicate process and does not require much force. When completed, wipe the molding dry with a clean rag and proceed to the buffing wheel. Again, the trick here is to go easy. If you press the molding too hard into the wheel or stay in the same spot for too long, you run the risk of burning and ruining the finish of the molding.

Working in a smooth side-to-side motion, run the molding back and forth under the wheel at a slight angle. It helps to roll the piece in your hand along the wheel to prevent constant direct friction in one specific area.
Occasionally pause and inspect the finish to decide what is adequate. If you plan on restoring a car and currently do not own a bench grinder/buffing wheel, we strongly recommend buying one. They are fairly inexpensive and will help tremendously on a variety of projects such as this.

The last and final step is hand polishing. This is where the magic happens. In a small circular pattern, apply the soft polishing compound with a microfiber towel. Light pressure is all that is needed. When the compound begins to dry or disappear, wipe the molding off with a separate clean towel. You may need to repeat the process a couple times to achieve your desired results. You will be amazed at the brilliant finish and how quickly you got the job done!

Tip: Be careful not to burn the finish of the metal on the buffing wheel. The wheel turns at a very high speed and produces quite a bit of heat generated from the friction.

HOW TO: REMOVING AND REFINISHING PAINTED MOLDINGS

Tools you’ll need: Will vary depending on parts. Typically, a screwdriver or socket set will do the trick.

Tinware you’ll need: Spray paint, masking tape, fine grits wet sandpaper (600, 800 grits)

Face it. If you drive an old car on a semi-regular basis, you are bound to catch a few chips and dings here and there. Along with the paint job, the body moldings are very fragile pieces of the exterior that can often take the brunt of time on the open road. Most were made of thin aluminum or pot metal and don’t exactly stand up well to tiny rocks or dirt clods being hurled at them at 70+ mph. In fact, just about every original car we have seen has some sort of trim damage from the road (not to mention all the years under the scorching sun). Although minor in comparison to some, it’s the attention to finishing details like this that can really set a car apart from the rest of the pack.

In the world of aftermarket reproduction trim, there are obviously plenty of parts available, but, like the stainless steel pieces we spoke of previously, new repro trim/grilles/bezels are not available for every make and model out there. That leaves us either scrounging through scrap yards hoping to find something in better shape than we already have (not likely), or embarking on a fanatical and quite expensive journey to locate NOS pieces. Considering the big picture here, most of us are probably better off just making the best of what we have. However, that is not necessarily a bad thing. In extreme cases, some pieces will need to be sent out to a competent pro for re-working. But for everything else, you can knock it out yourself right in the comfort and convenience of your own garage. Even better, the fix is easy and costs about next to nothing. So with that said, let’s get started!

We decided to nominate a pair of painted aluminum headlight bezels for the job. The bezels are decent, but with spotted and flaking paint they lack the clean show-quality look the rest of the car deserves. We started by first removing them from the front-end assembly with a small Phillips screwdriver. On this particular car (’67 Chevelle SS), there are just two screws on the top and two valance-mounted retainers securing the bezel on the bottom.
Once they were off, we used fine grit wet sandpaper (started with 600 grit, finished with 800) to slightly scuff them up and flatten the old paint “edges” for better paint adhesion. It’s only necessary to sand the painted areas of the molding.

After sanding and cleaning the parts of all dirt and grease, it’s now time for the tedious chore of masking. If you have ever painted anything before, you know the importance of properly masking off with clean, straight lines. The tape edges will ultimately determine the finished product. So make sure the tape is well adhered and flat on the surface to be painted. This will help prevent bleed-through and runs in the paint. By taking the extra time to carefully prep and mask the parts, you will ensure quality results.

With all the hard stuff out of the way, the actual painting process can be fun. I love watching an old cracked-up, faded paint job transform into a clean, glossy coat of glass. It can be addicting! Follow the manufacturer’s directions on the paint being used and always lay down light, even coats (until complete coverage is achieved) especially for high profile items such as grilles and bezels. They definitely need the extra coating and protection. If at all possible, paint outdoors in a dry, warm, sunny climate. Garages are often damp and are prone to hold moisture. The sun will not only speed up curing times for the paint, but it will also supply plenty of natural light. After the painting is done, allow ample drying time before reinstalling the pieces back on the car.

**Tip:** Spray paint has a nasty habit of traveling. Make sure you mask off other areas of the molding that are not intended for paint.

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**Want more how-to?** How about showing us (and other Chevy Classics readers!) some of your favorite tech tips and tricks? All of us gearheads have picked up some great ideas over the years—some big, some small. It may be something that you’ve taken for granted all along, but haven’t shared with anyone else. Could be some technique you’ve mastered for removing/installing coil springs, could even be the brand of detergent you use to scrub down with after a knuckle-busting session.

Let us know! Next issue we’ll expand on this a bit more—heck, we may even offer a reward for your efforts!

**Coming up next month in Chevy Classics:** we’ll show you how to soda blast smaller parts—save money and get the job done right the first time! Stay tuned.