



Workgauge



TIME (Hours)
0003

COST (Pounds)
0040

TOOLBOX

- Renovo Vinyl Soft Top Cleaner
- Renovo Ultra Proofer
- Renovo Plastic Window Polish
- Vacuum Cleaner
- Soft brush
- Scrubbing brush
- Sponge and cleaning cloths
- Light oil
- Silicone spray

GOOD HOOD REVIVAL

Caring for a soft top requires understanding, a sympathetic approach and appropriate tools and products if longevity is to be assured.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GEZ HUGHES**

At the height of summer, it's tempting to just drop the roof on your sports car, cabrio or convertible. But being in a rush to get that roof folded can cause serious damage if you're not careful.

Anything longer than a few months in storage can leave a hood frame stiff or seized, fabrics brittle and dried out, and clips and fasteners sticky and prone to breaking.

Taking a couple of hours to check, clean and lubricate the hood and its constituent parts ensures everything will function as it

should, and the working life of the hood will be dramatically extended. Worth bearing in mind, as depending on the make and model, replacement soft tops range from a couple of hundred to thousands of pounds. A small investment of time is well worth it.

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Good Hood Survival Top 10

- 1) Don't try to fold the roof down for the first time on a cold day, particularly a vinyl roof with a plastic rear window. Allowing the hood to warm up a little will make it more supple.
- 2) Clean the hood thoroughly before attempting to fold it.
- 3) Use a specialist cleaner and proofer. The proofer transforms the top – fabric certainly feels more pliable after application and as a bonus, you get UV protection too.
- 4) The frame should be checked and given a

little preventative maintenance. The hinges and pivot points all need to articulate freely.

- 5) Seized joints can wreak havoc, leading to the fabric being caught or damaged, not mention the risk of bending or breaking the frame itself.
- 6) Many soft tops have zip out rear windows – the zip is a common failure point. They can be expensive to repair properly, but looked after, will give years of reliable service. The secret is to never to force a zip.
- 7) Always take the tension off the hood before

attempting to move it, and if it does stick, don't try to force it.

- 8) Everyone has a trick for keeping zips running smoothly, but silicone spray works well.
- 9) Rubber seals. They keep the weather out and wind noise down when the car is driven with the hood up.
- 10) Check all hood seals carefully for damage, and make sure they are fixed securely. It is amazing the difference a clean and polish with a bit a silicone can make.

START

1 Under tension

Check your owners manual for the correct way to drop the hood – this usually involves releasing the tension on the roof first. On the Mazda, you release the two clamps on the screen header rail.


2 Zip along

Next step is to unzip the rear window. Zips can become clogged with dirt, and become very fragile – they're a common cause of hood failure. Don't be tempted to force the zip. Use soapy water to make things easier if required.


3 Plastic weakness

Lay the window flat. Plastic rear windows are another weak point and are easily scratched or cracked, especially when they're dirty or untreated.


4 Dig the dirt

This is the reason we wanted the window down and out of the way – the gutters that run all the way around the base of the hood catch tons of debris. We'll need to remove this before the hood gets wet.


5 In the fold

We're not ready to fold the hood down yet, but gently lift it away from the windscreen header rail to loosen the fabric and allow access to the drainage areas all around the perimeter of the hood.


TECH TIP

Check the manual for location of hood drains – keeping them clear is a top priority.

6
Brush up

Work your way around with a soft brush and clean out all the collected debris – it's amazing how much builds up in this area, particularly if the car has been parked up outside for an extended period.


7 Up the suction

Using a vacuum cleaner, work right down into the edges of the hood. Be very careful not to damage the fabric and use the brush for any stubborn debris that will not only hold moisture, but will also push the hood away from the seals.


8 Drain works

Underneath the car, locate the drain outlets and clean them out – strimmer wire is ideal for this. Blocked hood drains can lead to wet carpets, damaged trim and ultimately, body corrosion.


9 Deep clean

The soft top cleaner is brushed on to the vinyl and left for a few minutes to work its magic. Apply an even coat and make sure you get down into those recesses of the hood you've just cleaned out.



10 Brush off
We found that the dirt was so ingrained into our hood that a soft scrubbing brush was needed to work the hood cleaner in, especially along the stitched seams. Don't be too vigorous though.



11 Foam up
As per the instructions, we then used a sponge and warm water to work the cleaner into a foam that really lifts the dirt out of the hood. We released the hood clips to work the cleaner right down to the hood base.



12 In the gutters
The stitched-in gutters above the doors are also mud traps, and if left untreated, the vinyl quickly cracks – we used the scrubbing brush to work along them and clean them out.



13 Rinse down
Once the whole hood had been worked over, the cleaner was hosed off and it was left to air dry. Again, it's not a bad idea to release the hood to allow the air to circulate right down into the deepest recesses.



14 Water proof
Once the hood is completely dry, it's time to apply Ultra Proofer. With a clean brush, work around the hood and give a generous even coat. We paid special attention to those stitched seams.



15 Dry spell
When first applied, the proofer appears to 'sit' on the freshly cleaned vinyl. Don't be tempted to rebrush it – as it dries, it sinks in and leaves a pleasing sheen over the fabric of the hood.



16 Cloudy start
Time to sort out that hazy rear window. First step is to make sure that the cleaning process has removed all traces of dirt and grit – you don't want to grind that into the plastic while polishing it.

TECH TIP
Only adjust the hood tension when the material is cool, and at its most taut.



17 Window polish
Use a clean soft cloth to apply the cleaner. It may only come in a small bottle, but don't be too mean with the polish. We found that if you don't work enough into the plastic, it doesn't really cut into it.



18 On the grid
If you work a section of the window at a time on both sides, you can see how many bits you've missed. Apply in a rotary motion, and keep dabbing on more polish. As you rub, you'll feel the cloth start to drag.



TECH TIP
Never, ever, fold a roof down onto a gritty rear window – it will cause unsightly, deep scratches.



19 See the light
When you feel the cloth starting to drag, it's time to polish up the surface with a clean dry cloth. You'll be amazed at how clear the plastic becomes. A second application may be necessary on long neglected windows.



20 Pivotal point
With flexibility restored to the vinyl, gently ease back the roof. Inspect the pivot points of the frame – there are usually plenty of them. Be careful not to catch the hood fabric as you fold the roof back.



21 Loosen up
Hold a cloth beneath each of the pivot points and add a couple of drops of light oil to each one. Operate the roof through its full arch a couple of times, and make sure everything is moving freely.



22 Tighten up
It may be necessary to re-tension the hood – but make sure you do this with the hood cool. On the MX-5, it's as simple as tightening the central bolts in the windscreen frame catches.



23 Seal rescue
Check all the seals – across the header rail and around the doors, for damage. These need to be sound and clean if they stand a chance of keeping water out and wind noise to a minimum when the hood is up.



24 Rubber scrub
Clean the seals thoroughly with soapy water, making sure each face of the rubber is clean. Note that the rubbers may involve some kind of rainwater drainage channel, so make sure this is also clear.



25 Shiner
To protect the rubber and to make it seal more effectively, wipe it over with a silicone spray. Don't forget to treat the door seals, including the joint where the two parts split when the hood folds.



26 Zip along
Check the window zip is clean. I've heard people recommend everything from hand soap to beeswax as a lubricant for zips, but silicone spray works well. Apply by spraying onto a cloth and then run that along the zip.



27 Roof plus
The finished job, looking as good as new. The vinyl fabric is clean, protected and looks great. And rearward vision is restored. Almost seems a shame to fold it down and hide all the hard work...

