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MAKING IT RIGHT Why your Car Payments are lasting longer than your FACTORY PAINT JOB (Basic Guide)

by Stephen N. Gaiski
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Rating: ★★★★★

Reviewed by: [John L. Hoh, Jr.](#)

About 12 years ago I started noticing some cars seemed to have bad paint. I would look from an upper story window onto a parking lot and see car roofs with splotches where paint had peeled away or eroded. Usually the cars I saw this happen on were painted blue. I thanked my lucky stars my Neon was black.

Soon I saw other paint problems on cars. I had read somewhere that the Neons built by Chrysler used a water-based paint and assumed that may be part of the problem. But the problem wasn't just with Neons, although I noticed the problem more on Chrysler cars. Soon co-workers were complaining about the paint on Fords. Recently co-workers owning other makes have been griping about the paint on their cars.

I had assumed it was due to eco-friendly paints that did not have the durability of previous oil-based and other types of paints.

Then I read this book and realized that this was indeed a problem. And in all too many cases, the paint problems occur within the *first year* of a car's life. A study of Ford Crown Victorias used as police cruisers were reported to have a plethora of paint problems. That is a problem.

This book documents the problems. It did start as a Chrysler and Ford problem because Chrysler and Ford were the first to employ a new method. Rather than buy paint, these two companies contracted the painting of cars out to the three major auto paint companies (PPG, BASF, and DuPont). This is called "out-sourcing." Thus these three companies stopped supplying a *product* but now supplied a *service*--instead of selling paint, they now paint the car. Now most auto makers employ this method. And thus the rise in complaints is recorded.

And the problem isn't just a few cars. Data indicates 90% of new cars come with a factory paint defect!

The book explains the paint process. Basically there are four layers applied to a car in a paint job--an electrocoat, a primer, a base coat, and a clear coat. Auto makers have set specifications for each of these layers. If any layer is applied too thinly or too thickly, the car's paint will have problems. And since the three paint companies now paint the cars, and need to show a profit, what do you think has happened? And echoing the book's title, has your car's payments lasted longer than the paint job?

An eye-opening fact is that after-market body shops offer life-time warranties. Unfortunately, the auto makers do not offer the same. That seems telling. Especially since body shops are given the specifications and deviation from the specifications may mean the auto shop loses money if the paint job goes awry. Ironically, the same companies that paint the new cars supply the paint to the body shops!

The book features many tables and charts that show the data that Zestar Corporation has compiled in studying this issue. I was surprised that luxury models like Mercedes-Benz, BMW, and Audi have extensive paint problems. Lexus and Acura weren't detailed, so can I assume the paint jobs on those cars are fine? It is a global problem. Renault, which is not made or sold in the United States, is on the list and a Nissan model I never heard of (Sylphy?) was also mentioned.

The details of painting cars are provided as well as the various defects one can find. The book is helpful in having the customer inquire about the finished paint and the specifications (the paint companies do take many, many measurements and record them). Which begs the question of fault--can we fault paint companies for skimping on paint or automakers for allowing this to happen even with the documentation done? Or is there a "wink-and-a-nod" agreement? *Caveat emptor* seems to be the theme.

The book doesn't give any indication if colors differ in rates of defects. I drove a 1996 Neon, which statistically had a very high rate of defects. My Neon was black and I didn't have any noticeable defects until I nailed a deer on the freeway outside Indianapolis. I can't say as I can fault Chrysler or the paint company for that. I do know the non-metallic components of the body seemed to fade. Should this have been a concern?

The book also seems to promote something it calls a "Truth in Finish" disclosure. However, how this would be carried out wasn't detailed. Would a government agency have oversight? Would this be recorded on a plate attached to the car or with some type of "device history record" that the car has? To me the fact this book is available is a way for the customer to know the problem, why it exists, and to demand the statistics when buying. Eventually, as the book pointed out, when people are exasperated with a bad paint job they hesitate to buy another car from that maker. Eventually the marketplace says straighten up or lose market share. Do you think BMW and Audi want to lose market share to Lexus and Acura?

I would like more details about this disclosure before I would support it.

Or another option is to buy an unpainted car and have your local body shop paint it. Think about it: the body shop offers a lifetime warranty while the factory paint job doesn't have that warranty. Unfortunately, it seems Earl Scheid is no longer in business. I wonder what would happen if I ordered an unpainted auto?

The book has many short chapters. Some use the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) format. It helps keep the subject to a manageable and comprehensible level. This is the Basic Guide; a Technical Guide exists for those who want more details. The book also lists web sites the reader can visit to learn more about the subject.

Read this book before you buy that next car. Take notes on what to look out for and ask about. The data is out there; be prepared before you buy your next car. Or read this book if you have a newer car with a paint defect and fight for your warranty coverage.

MAKING IT RIGHT Why your Car Payments are lasting longer than your FACTORY PAINT JOB is available at Zestar.com.

Learn more at Zestar.com.

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