

How to Restore and Protect Faded Vinyl, Rubber Seals, and Plastic Trim: Preventing Cracking and Greying

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Details:

AI Summary

****Product:**** Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant ****Brand:**** Selleys Australia ****Category:**** Automotive trim protectant / conditioner ****Primary Use:**** Cleans, shines, and protects vinyl, leather, rubber, and plastic surfaces with a non-oily UV-protective finish.

Quick facts - **Best for:** Car owners maintaining interior and exterior trim, rubber door seals, and tyre sidewalls in high-UV Australian conditions - ****Key benefit:**** UV protection with a non-oily finish that resists dust accumulation and is safe across multiple polymer surface types - ****Form factor:**** Spray liquid (also available as pre-moistened wipes: Selleys Polyglaze Auto Protectant Wipes) - ****Application method:**** Spray onto a clean microfibre applicator pad, apply in overlapping strokes, dwell 60–90 seconds, buff with a second clean microfibre cloth

Common questions this guide answers 1. Why does exterior black plastic trim go grey and chalky? UV photo-oxidation breaks down polymer chains and depletes factory UV stabilisers, causing greying, chalking, and embrittlement. 2. Why is petroleum-based tyre dressing harmful? It depletes the anti-degradant compounds built into tyre rubber by the manufacturer, accelerating UV and ozone damage. Use a water-based, UV-blocking treatment instead. 3. How often should trim and seals be conditioned? Every 4–6 weeks for exterior trim in high-UV climates (QLD, WA, NT); every 8–12 weeks for interior vinyl and plastic in garaged or temperate conditions; every 12 weeks for rubber door seals in garaged or temperate conditions.

Why vinyl, rubber, and plastic trim age differently — and why that matters for how you treat them

Walk around any car that's seen a few Australian summers and you'll spot the same pattern: the paint still holds up, but the black plastic door trim has gone grey and chalky, the rubber window seals are cracking at the corners, and the dashboard carries a fine network of stress lines across the top. These surfaces didn't deteriorate randomly. They deteriorated because they were ignored — or worse, treated with the wrong products.

Most automotive care advice lumps these surfaces together. "Interior cleaner" gets sprayed on rubber seals. Paint protection wax gets wiped across plastic cladding. Petroleum-based dressings get applied to tyre sidewalls. Each of these errors accelerates the very degradation it was meant to prevent. This guide explains what's happening at the molecular level to your vinyl, rubber, and plastic trim, how to correctly diagnose the stage of deterioration, and how to apply Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant in the right sequence to slow the clock on these surfaces.

This is a fundamentally different problem from paint care. If you're looking for guidance on protecting your clear coat and painted panels from bug acids and road contaminants, see our guide on **How to Remove Bugs and Tar from Your Car Without Damaging the Paint**. The science here is separate — and the product choices must be too.

The science of degradation: what's actually happening to your trim

UV oxidation: the primary threat to plastic and vinyl

Automotive plastics and coatings contain polymers that break down under UV light. The energy from UV rays cleaves the chemical bonds in the polymer chains, causing them to lose mechanical strength. This process, photo-oxidation, is the dominant force behind greying, chalking, and surface embrittlement in exterior plastic trim.

UV-weathered plastics show colour fading, cracking, or surface tackiness — all signs that the molecular weight of the plastic has been reduced. In automotive applications, UV absorbers are built into materials exposed to harsh outdoor conditions: bumpers, trim, dashboards. These additives prevent discolouration, brittleness, and surface cracking. The problem is that they're finite. Once depleted — typically after several years of unprotected sun exposure — the substrate is on its own.

Plasticiser migration: the hidden mechanism behind vinyl cracking

Vinyl (PVC) is inherently rigid in its base form. Flexibility depends entirely on plasticisers staying put. When plasticiser migration occurs, these molecules move to the surface, evaporate into the air, or transfer to adjacent materials. The result is deterioration that can take weeks, months, or years to become visible.

Heat accelerates this dramatically. Plasticiser migration roughly doubles in speed for every 10°C rise in temperature — which is why car interiors get sticky in summer but stay stable in winter. In Australian conditions, where parked car interiors can exceed 70°C on a hot day, dashboard vinyl and door card surfaces are losing plasticiser at an accelerated rate every summer.

The visible progression is predictable: small stress cracks appear first, often at corners or areas that flex regularly. By the time cracking is visible, substantial plasticiser loss has already occurred. As plasticisers leave, the polymer chains that were once separated by those molecules move closer together, and the material becomes hard, brittle, and prone to cracking.

Rubber seal degradation: oxidation, ozone, and chain scission

Rubber door seals and tyre sidewalls face a different — and in some ways more aggressive — degradation pathway. Rubber deteriorates through a combination of oxygen, ozone, UV light, and heat breaking down the polymer chains that give it flexibility and strength.

Research published in **ScienceDirect** (2025) on EPDM rubber sealing materials found that surface crack formation, driven by oxidative chain scission and crosslink network breakdown, induces localised stress concentration, leading to marked reductions in tensile strength and fracture toughness.

Critically, unlike surface blooming, oxidative degradation is irreversible. Once the polymer chains are broken, no conditioner or protectant can restore them. The goal is always to catch deterioration early and slow it down — you cannot reverse it.

Tyre rubber presents a specific additional concern. Tyre manufacturers add anti-degradants to the rubber compound to combat UV and ozone damage. Petroleum-based dressings break down these anti-degradants, leaving the tyre exposed to the oxidising effects of UV and ozone. This is precisely why using the wrong dressing on tyre sidewalls isn't merely ineffective — it's actively harmful.

Diagnosing the stage of deterioration: a surface-by-surface assessment

Before reaching for any product, you need to accurately read the condition of each surface. Treatment at Stage 1 is preventative; treatment at Stage 3 is largely cosmetic.

| Surface | Stage 1 (Early) | Stage 2 (Moderate) | Stage 3 (Advanced) | |---|---|---|---| | ****Exterior plastic trim**** | Slight dulling, loss of deep black | Grey, chalky appearance; no gloss | Pitting, surface erosion, structural brittleness | | ****Vinyl (interior/exterior)**** | Faint surface film or stickiness | Stiffness, fine surface lines | Visible cracking, material shrinkage | | ****Rubber door seals**** | Loss of sheen, minor surface hardness | Visible surface cracking, reduced compression | Deep cracking, seal deterioration, water ingress | | ****Tyre sidewalls**** | Slight browning or flat appearance | Chalky grey, surface micro-cracks | Deep radial cracking (structural concern) |

****At Stage 3, consult a professional.**** Deep rubber cracking on tyre sidewalls is a safety issue, not a cosmetic one. Similarly, severely crazed vinyl door cards may need replacement rather than conditioning.

Why you cannot use paint products on these surfaces

This is the most common and most damaging error in automotive surface care. Paint wax and sealant products are formulated for clear-coated paint — a hard, non-porous surface. Applying them to rubber seals or uncoated plastic trim creates several problems:

1. Silicone-based waxes on rubber can accelerate the leaching of the rubber's own anti-degradant compounds, leaving the surface more vulnerable to UV and ozone. 2. Solvent-containing polishes on vinyl can strip plasticisers from the surface layer, triggering or accelerating the migration process described above. 3. Abrasive compounds on uncoated plastic remove the oxidised surface layer but also strip any remaining UV stabilisers, leaving fresh polymer exposed without protection. 4. Oil-based dressings on tyre sidewalls are particularly damaging: rubber is sensitive to petroleum-based products, which cause it to dry and become brittle.

The correct approach is to use products specifically formulated for each substrate — and to understand which surfaces can share a product without cross-contamination risk.

For glass surfaces — particularly the interior windscreen — different chemistry applies entirely. See our guide on **The Complete Car Interior Cleaning Checklist** for the correct treatment of interior glass, including the anti-fog considerations that make windscreen care a separate discipline.

The correct process: cleaning, conditioning, and protecting vinyl, rubber, and plastic trim

Step 1: Pre-clean to remove surface contamination

Applying any protectant over a contaminated surface traps grime beneath the protective layer and reduces adhesion. For all three surface types:

- Use a pH-neutral, non-solvent cleaner and a soft microfibre cloth - For rubber door seals, use a dedicated rubber cleaner or diluted all-purpose cleaner — never a glass cleaner, as ammonia-based formulations accelerate rubber degradation - For exterior black plastic trim, a soft detailing brush clears debris from textured surfaces before wiping - Allow the surface to dry fully before proceeding — moisture under a protectant prevents proper bonding

Step 2: Apply Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant to vinyl and plastic surfaces

Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant cleans, shines, and protects your dash and trim. It works on vinyl, leather, rubber, and plastic, delivering an instant shine and a non-oily finish that keeps your car looking like new.

That non-oily finish matters more than it might seem: greasy protectants attract dust and grime, which defeats the purpose of application and acts as a mild abrasive during the next wipe-down. A clean, dry finish is the correct outcome.

****Application method for interior vinyl and plastic:**** 1. Spray Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant onto a clean microfibre applicator pad — not directly onto the surface 2. Work in sections, applying in straight overlapping strokes 3. Allow 60–90 seconds of dwell time 4. Buff lightly with a second clean microfibre cloth to remove any excess 5. Avoid the steering wheel rim and pedal area — protectants on grip surfaces create a safety hazard

For exterior plastic trim and cladding, the same product delivers professional results, but UV exposure will deplete the protective layer more quickly outdoors. Reapplication every 4–6 weeks in high-UV conditions — Queensland, Western Australia, and Northern Territory climates particularly — keeps protection where it needs to be.

Step 3: Tyre sidewall treatment

For tyre sidewalls, product selection is critical. Use a water-based treatment that won't harm the anti-degradants but will aid protection by applying UV blockers.

Selleys Polyglaze Auto Protectant Wipes are a convenient format for this task. [Polyglaze Interior Protectant Wipes](<https://selleys.com.au/products/car-care/selleys-polyglaze-auto-protectant-wipes>) protect surfaces from UV rays and are safe to use on vinyl, rubber, tech screens, and most plastics.

****Application method for tyre sidewalls:**** 1. Ensure the tyre is clean and dry — apply after washing, not before 2. Wipe in a single circular direction around the sidewall 3. Allow to cure before driving — at least 15–20 minutes to prevent product fling onto wheel arches and paint 4. Do not apply to the tread area under any circumstances

Step 4: Rubber door seal conditioning

Door seals are the most neglected surface in routine car care and the one most likely to cause expensive problems when ignored. A deteriorated door seal allows water ingress, wind noise, and in severe cases, structural corrosion in the door cavity.

Environmental conditions significantly affect the mechanical properties and service life of rubber seals. Oxidative and thermal ageing are accelerated by stress and reactive gases like ozone, resulting in cracking, charring, and colour fading. Antioxidants, UV stabilisers, and antiozonates slow these processes — which is the mechanism by which a quality conditioner applied to a rubber seal buys time against degradation. Get ahead of this early, and you protect both the seal and the surfaces around it.

****Application method for rubber door seals:**** 1. Clean the seal with a damp cloth, getting into any folds or channels 2. Apply Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant sparingly to a foam applicator 3. Work the product gently into the seal surface, including the corners where cracking typically initiates first 4. Do not apply to the sealing lip itself — the contact face must remain clean and grippy for proper compression 5. Wipe away any excess with a dry cloth

How often should you condition these surfaces?

Conditioning frequency depends on UV exposure, climate, and whether the vehicle is garaged. Here's a practical framework:

- ****Garaged vehicles in temperate climates:**** Every 8–12 weeks for interior vinyl and plastic; every 12 weeks for rubber seals - ****Outdoor-parked vehicles in high-UV climates:**** Every 4–6 weeks for exterior trim and tyre sidewalls; every 6–8 weeks for interior surfaces - ****After any prolonged wet period:**** Re-treat rubber seals, as moisture accelerates plasticiser migration in adjacent vinyl components

A useful field test for rubber seals: if you can flex a rubber hose or seal and it returns to shape without cracking, it's still in good condition and conditioning is preventative. If it resists flexing or shows surface cracking, conditioning is remedial and should be applied more frequently. Act on what you find — consistent care at this stage delivers results that neglect never can.

What not to use: common products that cause harm

| Product type | Surface | Why it's harmful | |---|---|---| | Paint wax / sealant | Rubber seals | Can coat the sealing lip, reducing compression and water resistance | | Petroleum-based tyre dressing | Tyre sidewalls | Depletes anti-degradant compounds; accelerates UV/ozone damage | | Ammonia-based glass cleaner | Vinyl or rubber | Strips plasticisers; dries and embrittles the surface | | Abrasive polish | Uncoated plastic trim | Removes oxidised layer but exposes fresh polymer without UV protection | | Solvent-based cleaners | Interior vinyl | Accelerates plasticiser migration, leading to premature cracking |

Key takeaways

- Vinyl, rubber, and plastic degrade through different mechanisms — plasticiser migration (vinyl), photo-oxidation (plastic trim), and oxidative chain scission (rubber) — and each requires a surface-appropriate response. - Petroleum-based dressings actively harm tyre rubber by depleting the anti-degradant compounds built into the compound by the manufacturer. Always use water-based, UV-blocking treatments on sidewalls. - Degradation is irreversible once polymer chains are broken. The window for effective conditioning is early-to-moderate deterioration — once deep cracking appears, restoration is cosmetic at best. - Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant is safe across vinyl, rubber, leather, and plastic surfaces and delivers UV protection without the oily residue that attracts contamination and creates safety hazards on grip surfaces. - Routine conditioning every 4–12 weeks — depending on climate and parking conditions — is the single most effective strategy for extending the service life of trim, seals, and tyre sidewalls, and for avoiding the expensive replacement costs that follow advanced degradation.

Conclusion

The grey, cracked trim and deteriorating door seals you see on older vehicles aren't simply the result of age — they're the result of neglect of a specific and well-understood degradation process. UV photo-oxidation, plasticiser migration, and ozone-driven chain scission are all preventable when the correct conditioning routine is established early and maintained consistently.

The key discipline here is product specificity. Rubber, vinyl, and plastic trim are not paint, and they must not be treated as such. Using paint-focused products on these surfaces — or skipping them entirely in favour of a general-purpose cleaner — accelerates the deterioration timeline rather than slowing it. There is no shortcut worth taking when the cost of getting it wrong is replacement, not just retreatment.

Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant, used correctly and regularly, provides the UV barrier and surface conditioning that these polymer surfaces need to maintain their flexibility, colour depth, and structural integrity through Australian conditions. Pair it with the right cleaning sequence and the right application technique for each substrate, and the service life of your trim, seals, and sidewalls is measured in years rather than months.

For the complete picture of automotive surface protection — including paint care, headlight restoration, and interior cleaning — visit our pillar guide: [*The Complete Guide to Automotive Care & Cleaning: Protecting Every Surface of Your Car with Selleys*](#).

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Frequently asked questions

- **What is Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant:**** UV-protective conditioner formulated for vinyl, rubber, leather, and plastic surfaces
- **Does Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant leave an oily finish:**** No, it delivers a non-oily finish
- **Is Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant safe on vinyl:**** Yes
- **Is Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant safe on rubber:**** Yes
- **Is Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant safe on leather:**** Yes

****Is Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant safe on plastic:** Yes**

****Is Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant safe on tyre sidewalls:** Yes, when using the water-based formulation**

****Does Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant protect against UV rays:** Yes**

****Does Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant attract dust:** No, the non-oily finish resists dust accumulation**

****Should Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant be applied directly to the surface:** No, spray onto an applicator pad first**

****What applicator should I use with Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant:** A clean microfibre applicator pad**

****How long should Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant dwell before buffing:** 60–90 seconds**

****Do I need to buff Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant after application:** Yes, with a second clean microfibre cloth**

****Can I apply Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant to the steering wheel rim:** No, it creates a grip safety hazard**

****Can I apply Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant to pedals:** No, it creates a safety hazard on grip surfaces**

****What is the primary cause of exterior plastic trim going grey:** UV photo-oxidation**

****What process causes vinyl to crack:** Plasticiser migration**

****What causes rubber door seals to deteriorate:** Oxidative chain scission from oxygen, ozone, UV, and heat**

****Is rubber degradation reversible:** No, once polymer chains are broken it is irreversible**

****Can any product restore deeply cracked rubber:** No, deep cracking restoration is cosmetic only**

****At what temperature do Australian car interiors commonly reach on hot days:** Over 70°C**

****Does heat accelerate plasticiser migration in vinyl:** Yes**

****How much does plasticiser migration speed increase per 10°C rise:** It doubles in speed**

****What is the first visible sign of plasticiser loss in vinyl:** Small stress cracks, often at corners**

****What is the first visible sign of exterior plastic trim degradation:** Slight dulling and loss of deep black colour**

****What does Stage 3 exterior plastic trim deterioration look like:** Pitting, surface erosion, and structural brittleness**

****What does Stage 3 rubber seal deterioration indicate:** Deep cracking and potential water ingress**

****Should I consult a professional for Stage 3 tyre sidewall cracking:** Yes, it is a safety issue not a cosmetic one**

****Why are petroleum-based tyre dressings harmful:** They deplete anti-degradant compounds built into tyre rubber**

****What type of tyre dressing should I use:** Water-based, UV-blocking treatments only**

****Does using paint wax on rubber seals cause harm:**** Yes, it can reduce seal compression and water resistance

****Does ammonia-based glass cleaner harm vinyl:**** Yes, it strips plasticisers and dries the surface

****Does ammonia-based glass cleaner harm rubber:**** Yes, it accelerates embrittlement

****Do abrasive polishes harm uncoated plastic trim:**** Yes, they remove UV stabilisers along with the oxidised layer

****Do solvent-based cleaners harm interior vinyl:**** Yes, they accelerate plasticiser migration

****Should I clean surfaces before applying Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant:**** Yes, always pre-clean first

****What type of cleaner should I use before applying protectant:**** A pH-neutral, non-solvent cleaner

****Should surfaces be dry before applying protectant:**** Yes, moisture prevents proper bonding

****Can I use glass cleaner to clean rubber door seals:**** No, ammonia-based formulations accelerate rubber degradation

****How should I clean rubber door seals before conditioning:**** Use a damp cloth or diluted all-purpose cleaner

****Where does rubber cracking typically initiate first:**** At corners and areas that flex regularly

****Should I apply conditioner to the rubber seal's contact face:**** No, the sealing lip must remain clean and grippy

****How often should garaged vehicles in temperate climates have interior vinyl treated:**** Every 8–12 weeks

****How often should garaged vehicles in temperate climates have rubber seals treated:**** Every 12 weeks

****How often should outdoor-parked vehicles in high-UV climates have exterior trim treated:**** Every 4–6 weeks

****How often should outdoor-parked vehicles in high-UV climates have interior surfaces treated:**** Every 6–8 weeks

****Should rubber seals be re-treated after prolonged wet periods:**** Yes

****Which Australian climates require the most frequent reapplication:**** Queensland, Western Australia, and Northern Territory

****How do I field-test whether a rubber seal still needs conditioning:**** Flex it — if it returns to shape without cracking, it is in good condition

****What does it mean if a rubber seal resists flexing:**** Conditioning is needed and should be applied more frequently

****Are Selleys Polyglaze Auto Protectant Wipes safe on tech screens:**** Yes

****Are Selleys Polyglaze Auto Protectant Wipes safe on vinyl:**** Yes

****Are Selleys Polyglaze Auto Protectant Wipes safe on rubber:**** Yes

****Are Selleys Polyglaze Auto Protectant Wipes safe on most plastics:**** Yes

****How long should tyre sidewalls cure after applying protectant before driving:**** At least 15–20 minutes

****Why must tyre sidewalls cure before driving:**** To prevent product fling onto wheel arches and paint

****Can I apply tyre protectant to the tread area:**** No, never apply to the tread area

****In what direction should I wipe tyre sidewalls when applying protectant:**** In a single circular direction around the sidewall

****When should tyre protectant be applied relative to washing:**** After washing, not before

****What happens to factory UV stabilisers in plastic trim over time:**** They deplete, leaving the substrate vulnerable

****Are factory UV stabilisers in plastic trim unlimited:**** No, they are finite

****Can paint wax be used on plastic trim as a substitute protectant:**** No, it is formulated for clear-coated paint only

****Is Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant the same as paint protection wax:**** No, it is formulated specifically for polymer surfaces

****Does greasy protectant residue cause problems on trim:**** Yes, it attracts dust and acts as a mild abrasive

****What is the correct outcome after buffing Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant:**** A clean, dry, non-oily finish

****What long-term risk does a deteriorated door seal create:**** Water ingress and potential structural corrosion in the door cavity

****Is vinyl naturally flexible without additives:**** No, base PVC is inherently rigid

****What makes vinyl flexible:**** Plasticiser molecules within the polymer structure

****What happens to PVC polymer chains as plasticisers leave:**** They move closer together, reducing flexibility

****Can Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant be used on exterior plastic cladding:**** Yes

****How frequently should exterior plastic cladding be retreated in high-UV climates:**** Every 4–6 weeks

Label facts summary

> ****Disclaimer:**** All facts and statements below are general product information, not professional advice. Consult relevant experts for specific guidance.

Verified label facts

****Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant**** - Product category: Interior protectant / conditioner - Stated compatible surfaces: vinyl, leather, rubber, plastic - Finish type: non-oily - Application method: spray onto applicator pad (not directly onto surface) - Recommended applicator: clean microfibre pad - Dwell time before buffing: 60–90 seconds - Buffing required: yes, with a second clean microfibre cloth - Suitable for exterior plastic cladding: yes - Manufacturer: Selleys Australia - Product URL: <https://www.selleys.com.au/products/car-care/polyglaze-interior-protectant/>

****Selleys Polyglaze Auto Protectant Wipes**** - Product format: pre-moistened wipes - Stated compatible surfaces: vinyl, rubber, tech screens, most plastics - UV protection: stated - Manufacturer: Selleys Australia - Product URL: <https://selleys.com.au/products/car-care/selleys-polyglaze-auto-protectant-wipes>

General product claims

- Selleys Polyglaze Interior Protectant cleans, shines, and protects dash and trim - Delivers an instant shine - Keeps your car looking like new - Non-oily finish resists dust accumulation - Provides UV barrier and surface conditioning for polymer surfaces - Suitable for use on tyre sidewalls when using a water-based formulation - Extends service life of trim, seals, and tyre sidewalls - Recommended reapplication frequency: every 4–6 weeks in high-UV climates (QLD, WA, NT) for exterior trim; every 8–12 weeks for interior vinyl and plastic in garaged/temperate conditions; every 12 weeks for rubber seals in garaged/temperate conditions - Should not be applied to steering wheel rim or pedal surfaces due to grip safety risk - Should not be applied to the tread area of tyres - Tyre sidewalls should cure at least 15–20 minutes before driving to prevent product fling - Selleys Polyglaze Auto Protectant Wipes described as a convenient, high-performance format for tyre sidewall treatment