



If you live in one of the 9-month summer months – California, Texas, Florida, etc. – and if you are anything like the author, the top never goes up. With perpetual sun, why raise the top? Just enjoy the fresh air and warm sunshine.

It sounds great, but it certainly isn't the best thing for your convertible top. Whether the top is fabric or vinyl, being folded down over an extended period of time is not good. Both the vinyl and the fabric can take a set, they can mildew, and they can even become the home for nesting insects. There are other problems that can occur as well, and we will look at many of them.

The newest vinyls – within the past ten years or so – are far superior to the vinyl tops used many years ago. The vinyl is much more resistant to cracking, fading and mildew, but, without proper periodic care, the top can be damaged.

The vinyl is relatively easy to care for. On a regular basis, at least twice a year, raise the top



A vinyl top, whether it's on a convertible or hardtop, is prone to fading and discoloring, and will eventually crack if not cared for.

and fasten it. This will allow the vinyl to regain its shape and size. Plan on leaving the top in the up position for two or three days.

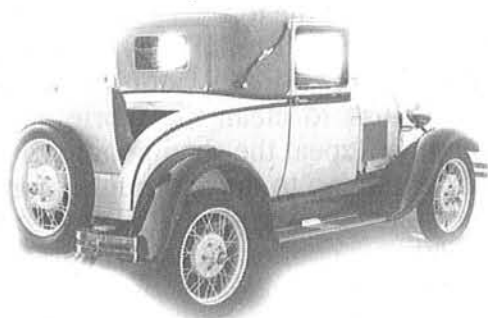
Then, before lowering the top again, wash the car and top with a mild shampoo and a soft (preferably horsehair) brush. The bristles of the brush will get into the crevices of the vinyl and will loosen the dirt and grime. Rinse thoroughly, and repeat the cleaning. Dry the top with

a soft microfiber towel. Allow the top to air dry completely, and then apply a good vinyl top protectorant. Use a product specifically designed for vinyl tops. Light applications, with complete drying of the top in between provides the most effective protection.

It is imperative that the top be thoroughly dry before lowering and refolding the top. Any residual moisture will accelerate rot and cause mildew. Often a full day or two in warm weather is required for full drying.

Care of a fabric top is similar, but perhaps more critical. A fabric top is a woven material.

The fabric is a very tight weave to minimize leaking, and then the fabric is treated with chemicals to seal out water.



A soft fabric top, if left folded down will shrink. It has to be stretched occasionally so that it will fit properly.

Even though the fabric is stabilized, there can be some shrinking while the top is folded. In order to keep the top well-fitted and properly formed, the top should be raised occasionally – at least once every six months, the top fastened and the fabric allow to 'stretch.'

If, when you first raise the top, the fabric seems too short to allow full closure of the top mechanism, the fabric will have to be stretched over a matter of days. Assuming the top does not quite reach the fastening posts on the front windshield frame, pressure will have to be applied to the top to stretch the fabric. This is assuming that the top was fitted correctly in the first place. If, when the top was fitted, the fabric was too short or the installer didn't allow for full and proper top closure, the chances of stretching the top to fit are remote.

But if the top did fit, and experienced a little shrinkage during non-use, you can gener-

ally stretch the fabric back to its original size. The easiest way to slowly stretch the fabric is to attach a bungee-cord to the front of the top frame (be sure to protect the top frame from scratching by using a rag between the hook and the frame) and anchor it to a point forward of the car. You only want to apply light-moderate pressure to start. Let the fabric stretch for a day or two, and then increase the pressure just a little. After about a week, the top fabric should have stretched enough so that the top closes properly. Tops that experienced that much shrinkage should be 'stretched' more regularly than the once or twice a year mentioned earlier.

Once the top fits as it should again, wash the top using a mild body shampoo or a very mild detergent like Woolite®. Use a soft horse-hair brush to clean the fabric and rinse thoroughly. Repeat the shampooing, rinse, and then allow the top to dry thoroughly for at least two days in warm weather (it may take longer if the weather is cool or if the humidity is high).

Lined tops should be washed as described above to clean the outer surface, but the inner layer should be gently vacuumed to remove dust and dirt.

Once completely dry – and complete drying is a necessity – treat the top with a good fabric

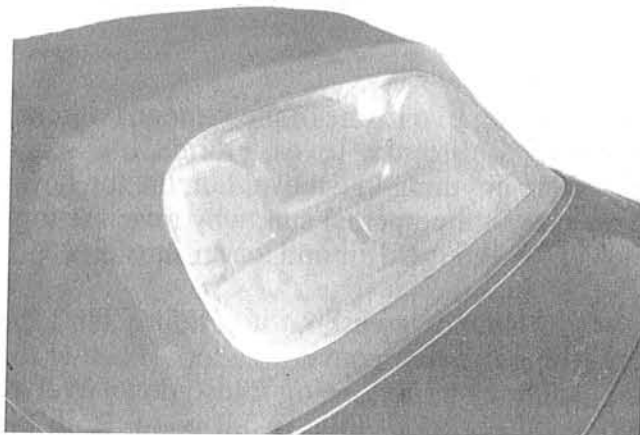


After washing the top, and letting it dry completely, apply a good top protectorant. RaggTopp and 303 Fabric Guard are two well known brands. Follow package instructions for best results

top protectorant like RaggTopp Fabric Protectorant or 303 Fabric Guard. Follow package instructions for best results. Again, allow the product to fully dry before lowering the top.

The plastic windows or side-curtain windows on convertibles or soft-top cabriolets tend to scratch, yellow, become almost impossible to

see through, and eventually crack. If the window is not beyond repair, several products are available to clean and polish the plastic, removing many of the smaller scratches and much of the yellowing. Once the plastic has begun to crack, it is too late and the window will have to be replaced.



Plastic convertible windows yellow and get scratched. Regular maintenance can help reduce the poor visibility.

First wash the plastic windows with a mild cleaner (use a microfiber mitt or rag so as not to further scratch the window) and rinse. Dry with a clean microfiber towel. Apply the cleaner polish following the package directions. Generally a light application of the product and a light, even, circular pressure is adequate to clean the window. Complete the job with a special plastic window protectorant. It will help protect against further UV damage and should soften the plastic a little. You can find a number of products in your auto supply store or in Walmart. Look for Meguiar's Clear Plastic Cleaner & Polish, Raggtopp Convertible Top Plastic Window Cleaner and Protectorant or Mothers Plastic Polish.

S.K.



Several products available at auto supply stores, Target or Walmart will reduce the cloudiness of the plastic windows.