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Paint Chip Repair - Fix Your Paint You Can't Show It Off And Rub It With A Diaper Until You Learn How to Fix Paint Chips - We Show You How

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Photography: Jeff Smith

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They are like butt-ugly zits on your paint job. They might be evidence that your machine is driven and not just another garage queen, but regardless of how you view those chips, they are blemishes on what could otherwise be a great paint job. We have had a bunch of self-imposed paint scars on our El Camino courtesy of 18-wheeler pot shots we received on the Hot Rod Power Tour(tm) several years back. It finally got to the point where all we saw were those three big dings in the paint every time we looked at the car. Something had to be done.

Rather than make a bad situation worse with our custom flame-job skills (the movie *Edward Scissorhands* was really about us), we decided to go back to the source, our buddy Pete Santini, owner of Santini USA Paint & Body. This was actually not the first time we'd talked to him about the chips in the El Camino. "Man, that's tough," Santini said. "The chips are in the fogged section of the paint where it's tough to match because of the yellow fade."

"You can do it," we said, "You're the man!" Little did we know how right we were. After we assured Santini we wouldn't take his 440 'Cuda hostage if the paint fix didn't match, he agreed to help. Then we told him he only had four hours



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There are several techniques for fixing paint chips, depending on how much time and effort you're willing to exert.



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The first step is to lightly sand the offended area to remove the sharp edges of the "crater." Then use a fine-tipped brush to lightly dab paint into the chip.



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Since we were in a hurry, Santini used a heat lamp to

to do the whole job, but we waited until we got there to spring that one on him. Despite our urban guerrilla ambush, Santini showed us the tricks he's learned over the last 30 years of doing this stuff. That's why he keeps us coming back.

The Quick Fix

When those of us not comfortable with a professional paint gun in our hand think of paint-chip repair, we think of the classic "just jab some paint in there with a match stick" routine. As you might imagine, there's a little more to it than that. We'll take the easy route at this stage and assume you're dealing with a chip in a solid-color paint job that's a color base with a clearcoat. We asked Santini if those little paint-chip bottles really match to factory paint and he just snorted and said, "Maybe one out of ten will be close." This means if you don't have paint left over from the paint job, you're probably going to have to paint-match your color. Work with your local paint supplier, but assume it will be expensive. Santini says he paid \$424 for a gallon of standard color that was not a custom mix.

To fix the small chip in the solid red quarter-panel on our El Camino we used the paint-dab approach. Start by smoothing the edge of the chip with 1,000- or 1,500-grit wet/dry sandpaper. To apply the paint, Santini says the best approach is to use a fine-tipped brush, but he's seen guys use a soft leaf off a tree in a pinch. Dab the paint and let it dry before adding more. The idea is to fill in the crater to just slightly above the original paint level. If you add too much, you will probably sand through the surrounding clearcoat. You want to avoid that. It may take an hour or so between fill attempts for the paint to dry, and if you have to take three or four shots at filling in the chip, this process could take most of one day. Another approach is to do one shot at filling in paint per day, which also allows the paint to fully cure before you add more.

encourage the paint to dry faster. For the backyard chip fixer, you can use a hair dryer. Ideally, allow the paint to air-dry for an hour or two between coats.



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Once the paint has cured and there is a very slight material bulge above the normal paint surface, wet-sand the area lightly with 1,500-grit paper and a short length of paint stick to act as a solid sanding surface. Work slowly.

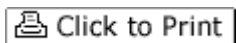


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As the final step, use a high-quality polish like Mothers or Meguiar's to rub out the scratches.

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