This is intended to be a quick guide that will outline the major steps required to detail your car and thoughts that may be helpful to keep in mind as you work. Some steps can be skipped, while others need to be added. The time required to complete the job can be 1 hour to 30 hours...it really all depends on your goals. This is in no way an exhaustive list and every car will dictate what it may or may not need on a case-by-case detail. Our McLaren detail was abnormal because of the size of the crew, limited time, ability to remove panels, material sensitivity, non-water tight construction, no carpet or fabric, no glass, no ability to lift the car due to its height and sensitive garage floor...ie detail location, amongst 100 other unique factors.

01 INSPECTION: Before you touch the car, decide what the end results must be to satisfy the customer, yourself or a fastidious concours judge. Take note of the heavily soiled areas, dents, scratches, or haze and allocate sufficient time to properly repair and not just hide the blemish.

02 CREATE A GAME PLAN: How many detailers are working at one time? How much time until the show? Is the vehicle carbon fiber, composite, aluminum, etc... What kind of tools, pads, and liquids are available? There are a 1000 different scenarios that differ from one project to the next, so don’t be surprised if you find out that you have no access to air or water source, or your electricity fuse POPS when using a polisher and vacuum at the same time! Take a few minutes to assess all the elements and make a plan based on the limiting factors.

03 TEST SPOT: Although it may seem odd to perform a test spot now, prior to a full wash, it can prove helpful later in your detailing steps. Spend time now figuring out the perfect pad/liquid combination. Since every car is different, it is likely you will spend a great deal of time in “testing mode”. It’s also likely you will need to seek advice or try 20 different techniques to find the sweet spot on your respective paint, which is a harder task when in a time crunch. If you wait until the last minute, it may be too late. In concours detailing it can be helpful to focus on the most important and obvious aspects of “the judging”, which of course, is the paint first. This is called “Triage Detailing”. However, performing the paint repair should be left for the last major step before adding protection, so that it’s fresh before the show.

04 WASH: This is very broad term for cleaning, degreasing or otherwise removing foreign substances such as dirt, oil, grease, bugs, etc., from the engine, undercarriage, wheels, and paint, in this order. (see other PDFs for specific steps for these areas). Your goal should be to get the car (everything but the interior) perfectly clean.

05 DECONTAMINATE: Removing contamination, which is when paint feels rough to the touch, can be helpful in preventing “pad load”. This is when your pad becomes full or loaded with contaminants. Clay will remove these contaminants and prevent them from sticking to your pad and causing swirls, pad-hop, or decreased cutting ability.

06 ENGINE: At this stage of the process the engine is degreased, but not detailed. Many different sized brushes, clothes, Q-tips, wooden sticks, penetrating oils, and APC’s should be used to get into the tight areas that were unreachable during the initial degreasing.

07 UNDER CARRIAGE: The use of a car lift can be very helpful to reach the under tray, wheel wells and exposed suspension parts. Likewise, remove the wheels to get access to the brakes and calipers. Put the wheels to the side, as you will address them later.

08 INTERIOR: With a normal or “non-concours detail” I encourage detailers to clean the interiors first to allow carpets sufficient dry time. However, most concours details do not require a full shampoo or scrub down, so I purposely moved this step to later in the process. (Please note that Interiors is typically my 2nd or 3rd step on a normal detail, after inspection and game plan). Use a small interior brush to loosen any dust or dirt and sweep it into a near by vacuum nozzle. If you were to use compressed air FIRST, the dust will lodge itself into tiny areas causing hours of tedious work. Only use compressed area when all visible dirt is vacuumed. (No interior leather, plastic, or vinyl should look greasy or shiny. Points will be deducted. The interior must look natural or “factory” for high score.)

09 PAINT: Every paint job is different, so it would be impossible and useless for me to give you an exact step-by-step guide. However, the mystery of what your paint needs should be solved at this stage of the detail. Now, you are simply repeating the steps you uncovered in the Test Spot procedure. Be prepared to spend hours on this step. Have proper lighting and do not move onto another section or paint until you are satisfied. DO NOT GO BACK LATER. Once it’s done, it’s done. Don’t work over yourself or you will never finish the job. Furthermore, spending “time” does not equal “doing a good job”. Yes, sometimes it’s necessary, but not always. If your test spot proved accurate and your process is working, finish the area and move on. Work smart, not hard.

10 TRIM AND WEATHER-STRIPPING: Sometimes trim is simply covered in painters-tape and sometimes its polished. It depends on its material. If it’s soft porous plastic, then it needs to be covered in tape prior to step 9. However, it’s the most overlooked
aspect of detailing and usually where most points are deducted (along with glass). Once the trim is polished or coated or oiled or whatever the respective trim needs...then the intricate work begins. Use short hair or stiff brushed to agitate the edges to release dried up wax. Use a credit card wrapped in a microfiber cloth to clean the rubber creases around the weather-stripping.

11 WHEELS AND TIRES: If the wheels can be removed easily, DO IT! At this point the wheels should be cleaned and degreased from the earlier wash. However, now they can be polished and sealed with wheel wax (AMMO GELÉE). The rubber should not be too greasy or shiny. Deep black tone with medium light reflection is ideal. The "bling bling" look will most likely irritate the judges, so avoid it. If the car is being driven to the show, I prefer to add 1 or 2 coats of tire dressing (AMMO MUD) the day before and then reapply 1 coat once the car is in place at the show.

12 PROTECTION: The paint is now perfect at this stage of the detail. Light reflection is near 100% without adding a coating, sealant or wax. By layering protection over the paint you increase the depth of shine or “wet-look”. Add 2 coats of AMMO REFLEX, followed by 1 coat of AMMO SKIN the day before the show.

13 WINDOWS: It’s best to detail windows with a helper. One person should be outside directing and inspecting, while the other remains inside, cleaning. Window towels must be 100% clean and lint free. Each window will require at least 4 to 5 passes with fresh towels to remove streaks. This is extremely tedious work but essential to avoid quick point deduction for fingerprints and smudges.

14 DETAIL: Now its time to detail the car! Your mission is to find something wrong or out of place. What will catch the judges eye? Is there grease in the key hole? Does the hinge on the doorjamb have grease dripping on the frame? Is dirt trapped in the brake pedal? Check the fuel door, fuel cap, and radiator fins. Also make sure bolts and screws are symmetrical with each other, the insides of the exhaust pipes are finger-swipe clean, and that the tire treads are clean and rock free, etc. It’s best to change your point of view by getting on the ground and looking from below while altering one source of light to see through the paint. This is my favorite part of the job and will cause you to lose your mind after you’ve walked around the car 7000 times with your face 1 inch away from the paint.

15 AT THE SHOW: Start with re-cleaning the wheels/rubber and exhaust once you arrive and remember to re-re-clean if you plan on revving your engine during the show. (as silly as that sounds, I’m actually an advocate of “tasteful” engine revving for a few seconds during the show to cause a crowd to gather. This is a popularity contest as much as it is a concours. So if you have a unique sound, let it fly. But don’t be “that guy” either.) Then very very lightly spray wax (AMMO SPIT) on the paint to remove any dust, then add a quick layer of carnauba wax (AMMO CRÈME) to give the paint its final glow before judging occurs. I always try to avoid wiping windows at the show because it turns into a huge mess and I end up running around trying to get a smudge clean that should have been cleaned the day before. Adding wax and tire dressing is ok at a show, but detailing your engine, polishing your paint, or spending 20 minutes on the inside of your windshield looks bad.

DETAILING A CAR for a concours is crazy to most people. Much the same as combing a show dogs furs 10,000 times in 5 minutes before it runs across the floor with its handler yanking its head up in the air. I don’t get it…but I respect the enthusiasm and appreciate the same attention to detail in their hobby as we have in car detailing. Remember, detailing is supposed to be fun. As soon as it get tiring, go for a drive and get it dirty.