



*Zymöl polishes and waxes were used to bring out the lustrous finish of Ralph Lauren's prize T57 Bugatti.*

## Guitar Polish Good Enough For A \$10 Million Bugatti

*Zymöl built a reputation with polishes and cleaners for the world's finest automobiles. Now it's applying that technology to a new line of polishes for musical instruments.*

Chuck Bennett, the founder of Zymöl car care products, has made it a personal mission to warn the world of a serious threat to quality fretted instruments everywhere. The common bacteria that resides in everyone's fingertips likes to take refuge in fingerboards, where over time it will eat away at the wood, doing irreparable damage. "Your fingers are

actually eating your fretboard," he warns. Fortunately, for all the players panicking at the thought of their precious guitar collection succumbing to unseen bacteria, Bennett is also offering a solution. His new selection of Zymöl musical instrument polishes is designed to thwart bacteria while enhancing the beauty and longevity of guitars, violins, drumkits, pianos, and any other instru-

ment with a wood finish.

For anyone with even a passing interest in fine automobiles, the Zymöl name should ring a bell. For more than three decades, Zymöl cleansers and polishes have been the first choice for bringing a lustrous finish to vintage Ferraris, Bentleys, and every other investment-grade auto. This preference for Zymöl stems from the simple fact that the stuff really works. At the Pebble Beach Concours D'élégance, the world's premier classic car show, for several decades now, virtually every prize-winning car has been prepped using Zymöl products. The dollars at stake are considerable: a first place in Pebble Beach can add as much as \$500,000 to the value of a vintage car. This hard-won reputation for products that deliver, combined with a serious music background and a solid understanding of chemistry, is why Chuck's observations on instrument maintenance deserve a serious hearing.

Chuck didn't set out to become a car polish guru; his first passion was actual-



*Synthesized out of organic materials and free from any solvents, Zymöl musical instrument polishes are safe for any and all finishes. They also boast a strictly enforced MAP pricing policy.*

ly music. As a bassist in the '70s, he toured with bands throughout New England, playing seven nights a week. When it finally became apparent that a recording contract wasn't going to materialize, he took a day job in the technology industry working with mainframe computers. Then two unrelated events set him on the path to founding Zymöl. One day, as he was waxing his prized topaz-colored BMW, he noticed paint pigment coming off on the polishing cloth. "This can't be good for the finish," he thought. Not too long afterwards, he made a trip to the town of Bischofsheim, Germany in an effort to trace his ancestry.

Bischofsheim is the birthplace of the "Landau," an elegant horse-drawn carriage, distinguished by a glass-like finish achieved by laminating enameled clay panels to the wooden carriage frame. Marveling at the beautiful antique carriages, Chuck asked the locals how they managed to maintain such a delicate century-old finish. They showed him their secret: a gooey wax mixture made from a variety of rendered animal fats. He filled an empty jar with the stuff to bring home and try on his car. It worked beautifully, but there was one small problem: "It smelled so bad, you couldn't stand to be near it," he recalls.

Chuck was so impressed with the qual-

ity of the Bischofsheim wax that he consulted with a chemist friend to see if there was a way to get the same polishing quality without the smell. After some experimentation, they concocted a mix of beeswax and carnuba wax, derived from the carnuba palm, that fit the bill. He began cooking the mixture up in electric coffee percolators and putting it in empty pickle jars to give to grateful friends at the Connecticut BMW club. Then one day his wife announced, "You've spent \$1,500 making this wax. You've got to stop giving it away." Disheartened, at the next BMW club gathering, he announced that he could no longer give away his wax. But when he said he'd gladly sell it, he received a spirited round of applause. "From that point on, I knew there was a business opportunity," he says.

Word of Zymöl's unique finish quality quickly spread among BMW clubs across the country, and within a short time, Chuck and a team of detailers were being asked to prep cars for noted collectors running the gamut from Jay Leno to Bill Gates, as well as former Guitar Center owner Ray Scherr, who, according to Chuck, "has one of the most important car collections in the U.S." Today, Zymöl polishes are sold in more than 70 countries. At a recent auto show in China, which is now the world's largest luxury car market,

Zymöl was one of the biggest exhibitors. "It's a great life," says Chuck. "On some days, my office is outside in shorts working on some of the greatest cars in the world, like Einstein's Packard or the very first Dino Ferrari."

About two years ago Chuck's son, an accomplished bass player in his own right, called and said, "Dad, there are tons of musicians using Zymöl polish on their drums and guitars." Initially skeptical, Chuck began checking out chat rooms and YouTube videos and found his son was right. Guitarists and drummers were using Zymöl because the waxes, which contain no solvents or abrasives, won't damage a delicate lacquer or nitro-cellulose finish. However, he also knew that his car wax was not ideally suited to a musical instrument. "With car wax, you want to create a thick coating to keep the water out," he says. "But when you put a thick coating on a musical instrument you change the tonal characteristics."

The quest for an ideal musical instrument polish began with a beat-up, barely playable guitar, with loose frets and a finish that looked like it had been dragged for miles on a rough road. Chuck's first step was to slice off a piece of the fretboard and have it analyzed under an electron microscope. He discovered that, like leather, human

skin, or any other organic material, it began decomposing when it lost its natural oils and dried out. He also found that the common coxis bacillus that exists in the human skin had taken up residence and was slowly eating away at the wood, loosening the frets. To address these issues, he devised a family of waxes based on spun coconut oil, which is lighter than water and won't leave a heavy, tone-killing residue. Different formulations were sent to dozens of guitar techs around the country for testing, and refinements were made based on their comments.

The resulting Zymöl family of musical waxes now includes GBC<sup>b</sup>, with separate formulations for satin finished guitars and violins, as well as GBC# designed specifically for high-gloss finishes. The Bridge line of polishes is tailored to guitar and violin fingerboards and contains peppermint oil, which effectively kills wood-eating bacteria. The Solo spray-on cleaning and waxing compound is designed for wood finish drums. Chuck emphasizes



*Sam and Emily Mann, among the world's most prominent car collectors, pictured with their 1938 Delage, swear by Zymol products.*

that all the Zymöl polishes are made entirely from natural ingredients and contain no silicon, formaldehyde, or petroleum-based solvents that can penetrate and erode finishes. He adds, "Our finishes repair small abrasions, and restore and preserve the beauty of the instrument."

The Zymöl music product line will be offered in eye-catching packaging and floor and countertop point-of-purchase

displays. Chuck is also planning an expansive consumer education campaign, with a combination of advertising and events. "We need to explain to consumers how these polishes will enhance and prolong the life of their instruments," he says. For distribution, he's targeting a limited number of specialty retailers who focus on service. "These are high-quality, high-priced products with MAP price protection," he adds. "They're best represented by retailers who emphasize service and have a real relationship with their customers."

Cars and musical instruments have one shared characteristic that makes Chuck confident about his new musical polishes venture. "In both cases, you're dealing with products that people have an incredible attachment to. Like the car owners who use our products, musicians love their instruments and want to baby them. It doesn't matter whether it's a high-end or entry-level guitar. If you love your instrument, you're a potential Zymöl customer." [www.zymolmusic.com](http://www.zymolmusic.com)