

When your RV is not a vacation toy but your mailing address, the grime hits differently. Road film is not just cosmetic, it is grit that wears clearcoat and seals. Bug acids etch into gelcoat. Hard water bakes on ladders and solar panels. Inside, desert dust and campground pollen drift into vents and fabrics, and they stay until you move them out. A full-time rig lives outdoors and works for a living, so its detailing plan needs to be as deliberate as your route planning.

I have spent years maintaining coaches in heat, salt, and high plateau sun. A few things are predictable. UV wins if you do not block it. Oxidation starts at the roof and creeps down. Black streaks are gravity painting your wash habits. And the jobs that most owners dislike, roof cleaning and ladder work, often save the most money in the long run.

The surfaces you are actually dealing with

RVs are not finished like cars. A diesel pusher's gloss may look automotive, but you are often working with gelcoat on fiberglass, aluminum panels with a baked finish, or thin automotive clear on a large surface area. Each material wants different chemistry and hand pressure.

On fiberglass gelcoat, oxidation shows up as chalky residue and a dulling of depth. Light to medium oxidation often responds to a dedicated gelcoat cleaner and a dual action polisher with a wool pad, but heavy oxidation can take compound and several passes. This is where techniques from Marine Detailing transfer well. A boat's hull fights the same UV and mineral load as an RV's cap, so the compounds and pad choices that pull a hull back to gloss usually serve a fifth wheel's front cap too.

Aluminum panels and riveted seams demand gentler work. On airstream-style aluminum, mirror polishing can turn into wave-making if you get aggressive. The nuance here leans closer to Airplane Detailing than to Auto Detailing. You are keeping rivet lines clean, watching for dissimilar metal corrosion, and being careful not to load residue under lap joints.



For painted and clearcoated sections, treat the process more like high-end Auto Detailing, but keep in mind that RV panels flex and heat more than a car door. Long, thin panels can haze if you sit with a rotary at high speed. A dual action polisher with controlled passes, good working lights, and temperature awareness keeps you honest.

Wash cadence for people who live in their rigs

Frequency beats heroics! If you work a regular wash-and-protect cycle, you avoid big correction jobs and keep the rig feeling like a home. Location drives the cadence. Inland desert with hard water and dust needs more frequent rinses, coastal air stacks salt crystals that pit metal fittings, northern woods drop tannins that stain roofs and awnings.

Here is a simple schedule we have refined while supporting full-timers parked month after month in mixed climates:

- Quick rinse and contact wash every 2 to 3 weeks, with deionized or softened water if you can get it.
- Roof inspection and light cleaning monthly, top down, including slide toppers and awning tubes.
- Decontamination wash with iron remover and spot clay every 3 to 4 months on painted surfaces.
- Sealant refresh on high-sun faces every 3 to 6 months, earlier if you see water flattening out instead of beading.
- Full correction check annually, addressing any new oxidation, water spot etching, and chalking before it spreads.

That two-to-three week wash interval may feel ambitious on travel days, but skipping it means bugs etch into the clear and minerals bake in. If you have to choose, at least rinse the front cap, windshield, mirrors, and any flat horizontal areas like slide roofs and solar panels the same week you arrive.

Water management and soap choices that actually help

Hard water is the quiet destroyer. Water spots are mineral deposits fused by sun. Once those minerals etch, no wax, sealant, or Ceramic Coating hides them. The best trick is to filter on fill and wash with deionized water when you can. If that is not available at a campground, move in the shade, wash small sections, and blow dry with a cordless blower to move water out of seams and off awnings.

For soaps, skip household detergents. On protected surfaces, a pH-neutral shampoo preserves the last layer you applied. When decontaminating, raise the pH and use an iron remover to pull embedded rail dust and brake particles from the lower third of the rig. RV roofs vary. EPDM and TPO rubber like gentle, roof-rated cleaners and soft-bristle brushes. Gelcoat roofs handle a bit more bite, but treat skylight seals and caulked seams gently, cleaning by hand.

One detail that separates a pleasant wash from a painful one: ladders. Use standoff arms so your ladder rests on studs, not flimsy aluminum trim. Pad the contact points. Tie off hoses so they do not drag across paint. And always clean from the top down. Every roof rinse you skip becomes the black streaks you will chase later.

Paint Correction without chasing your tail

Paint Correction on an RV is about triage. You have far more square footage than a car. Chasing perfection across 300 to 600 square feet of sidewalls is a trap for both time and material. Identify the high-visibility zones and the places where damage compounds if ignored. The front cap, lower sides near wheel wells, entry door grab areas, and the rear cap's leading edge usually deserve the most attention. Those are also the places where past owners left buffer trails and holograms that telegraph in bright sun.

Map your defects in daylight. Put painter's tape squares around worse sections and run test spots before committing to a cut-and-polish across an entire panel. On crowned panels, lighten pressure toward the edges. Heat builds on panel edges quicker than you think, and RV clearcoat does not forgive the way thick automotive clear does.

A practical rhythm we use is a one-stage enhancement on good panels, paired with two-stage correction only where needed. You restore overall gloss, then chase isolated defects deliberately. That balance keeps you sane and preserves clear for the long run.

Ceramic Coating on a moving house - when it shines and when it disappoints

Ceramic Coating has earned a reputation for deep gloss and easier cleaning. Done correctly on a full-time rig, it also slows UV oxidation and makes bugs and black streaks release faster. The catch is in prep and expectations. A coating locks in whatever is under it. If you skip proper correction on the front cap and just coat, the etched bug marks and water spots will be preserved under a hard layer.

On gelcoat, coatings work well, but you have to be realistic about porous surfaces. Gelcoat can drink product, so choose coatings designed for marine substrates or at least for porous finishes. Expect more product and a bit less slickness than on clearcoat. On painted, clearcoated [Airplane Detailing](#) sections, application mirrors high-end automotive work, but watch your working time in heat, and keep ladders steady when chasing high panels.

The real win for full-timers is maintenance. Coated rigs rinse cleaner and gather less dust. You still need a topper or ceramic-safe spray sealant every couple of months to keep slickness and hydrophobics alive, especially on high-sun faces. When someone tells you a single Ceramic Coating application means five years of zero work, that optimism does not match what we see on the road.



Where Paint Protection Film makes sense on RVs

Paint Protection Film is not for the whole coach. The square footage cost and the panel shapes make full coverage unnecessary. But targeted PPF on the front cap, generator door, and around the entry handle saves paint and saves sanity. Those spots see repeated contact and the nastiest road debris. The trick is choosing edges that hide well and stay put as panels flex.

Heat-cycling and expansion on large RV panels are more aggressive than on a car hood. Professional-grade films handle this better, but even then, use rounded templates and avoid running film tight into a panel seam that

moves in the wind. Keep in mind that coatings and film can be layered. You can coat over film to make cleaning easier, you just need to adjust your prep and respect the film's adhesive edges.

Glass, Window Tinting, and managing heat

Full-timers feel solar gain every afternoon. Quality Window Tinting reduces heat load, protects interior fabrics, and cuts eye strain when you work at the dinette. The first constraint is law. States vary on legal visible light transmission for front windows, and RVs pass through many states. We usually aim for a balanced setup that keeps driver visibility safe and legal while using higher heat-rejecting, lighter tints where allowed. Ceramic tints block heat without going too dark. For the windshield, a legal, light ceramic film can still drop cabin temperature several degrees.

Cleaning RV glass is simple if you do it before the sun hits the glass. Use lint-free towels and a dedicated glass cleaner, then do a final buff with a separate towel. For water spot prevention, a silica spray or a dedicated glass coating makes rain blow off and slows mineral adhesion. Wiper blades on large windshields chew into coatings, so be prepared to reapply more often in the wiper sweep.

Borrowing from boats and planes

The problems RVs face are familiar to Marine Detailing pros. Salt spray and UV are twin enemies, and gelcoat is unforgiving if you let oxidation go. Using boat-grade oxidizers and sealants on RV gelcoat often works better than automotive counterparts. Likewise, techniques from Airplane Detailing inform how we treat rivet lines, ladder-safe access, and the need for light pressure over large areas with thin finishes. Airframes taught us to protect data plates and avoid filling drain holes with polish residue. Those tiny details carry over to slide drains and window weep holes on a coach.

A realistic wash workflow that respects your time

Here is a compact exterior wash sequence that balances thoroughness with limited water and campground etiquette:

- Blow loose dust with a cordless blower, then pre-rinse top down. If DI water is available, use it.
- Foam the rig with a pH-neutral soap, allow dwell, then two-bucket wash from the roof down using separate mitts for upper and lower thirds.
- Use a dedicated bug remover on the front cap and mirrors while the foam dwells. Agitate with a soft bug sponge.
- Rinse in sections and sheet water off large panels to minimize spotting. Blow dry seams, awning tubes, and around markers.
- Apply a ceramic-safe drying aid or spray sealant as you towel dry, panel by panel, to lock in gloss and add protection.

That last step pays dividends. Even on a coated rig, a light topper makes future washes easier, which encourages you to keep the cadence.

Interior detailing that stands up to daily living

Full-timers cook, work, and shower in the same footprint. Interior surfaces need products that clean effectively without leaving heavy fragrance or residue. For vinyl and faux leather, a pH-balanced interior cleaner and a UV

dressings that leaves a satin finish keep things fresh without the greasy feel that attracts dust. On cabinets, avoid water-heavy cleaners that swell wood edges. Use a damp microfiber and a wood-safe cleaner, then dry immediately.

RV bathrooms collect minerals quickly. A squeegee habit after each shower cuts your deep clean time in half. For hard water, a mild acid cleaner removes deposits, but rinse fast and protect metal fixtures with a light sealant. Fabrics trap campground life. A small, heated carpet extractor pays for itself, especially if you travel with pets. Vent filters and return grilles clog quickly in dusty parks. Check and clean them monthly.

What we have learned in the field at Xtreme Detailing and Ceramic Coatings

At Xtreme Detailing and Ceramic Coatings, we have seen the same pattern across rigs that live on the road. The owners who keep a modest wash rhythm, protect the front cap, and do a short roof walk monthly spend less on correction and repair. One couple we support migrated between the Sonoran desert and the Oregon coast each year. They kept a folding DI tank in a storage bay and washed in shade with a battery blower for drying. Their four-year-old fifth wheel still reads glossy because they never let minerals sit and they protected the most abused surfaces with PPF and a marine-grade Ceramic Coating on the cap.

We have also learned to match products to substrates. A coach with a gelcoat roof and painted sides got a marine coating up top and an automotive ceramic on the sides. Different chemistry, consistent result. And on aluminum rigs, gentle polishes paired with a sealant kept the look clean without chasing mirror perfection that would have required aggressive, risky cuts.

Xtreme Detailing and Ceramic Coatings - how we approach full-time rigs

Process matters more than brand labels. Our approach starts with inspection. We look for failing sealant lines, chalking on roof edges, ladder mount corrosion, awning tube grime, and any early signs of water intrusion. Then we build a plan that fits the owner's travel schedule. If you are stationary for two weeks, we will correct, coat, and cure panels in the right order so you do not lose mobility. When you move every few days, we split work into wash and protect sessions that fit a half day.

One practical change that helps full-timers is portable water quality control. If a client does not have DI access, we bring spot-free water for the final rinse, then train the owner to blow dry and apply a drying aid between professional visits. Another is slide maintenance. We clean slide toppers and treat seals with a conditioner that does not attract dust. The result is fewer streaks down sidewalls and less dirt wicking into seams.

Black streaks, bug damage, and other stubborn headaches

Those black streaks are usually run-off from dirty roof edges, awning tubes, and window weeps. The fix is not just a magic bottle. Keep the top clean, protect the roof edge with a sealant, and clean awning tubes. When streaks do appear, a dedicated black streak remover works, but test it on an inconspicuous spot first and follow with a rinse and protection. For bugs, do not scrub dry. Pre-soak with a bug remover or citrus-based cleaner, then use a purpose-made bug sponge with light pressure. If you see ghosting after removal, that is early etching. Correct that area before you coat or seal it.

Water spots earn their own mention. In the Southwest, we have measured total dissolved solids in campground water well above 500 ppm. That is spot city. Rinse in shade, section by section, and never let water sit on glass or

the front cap. If you inherit etched spots, a dedicated water spot remover or a mild acid will clear many glass deposits, followed by polish. On paint and gelcoat, you will often need a light cut. Protect immediately after.

Slide rooms, awnings, and the overlooked areas

Slide rooms create valleys and ledges that collect grime. Clean slide roofs with a soft brush and roof-safe cleaner. Treat slide seals with a silicone-safe conditioner that does not swell rubber. Wipe the inside edges of slide walls where the seals contact. This reduces black stripes and keeps seals happy. Awnings trap mildew. Open and dry them after rain. Wash with a fabric-safe cleaner and a soft brush. Rinse until runoff is clear. Avoid heavy bleach on stitching.

Underbellies and wheel wells deserve periodic attention. Road film and winter road salts cake in there. A pressure rinse, followed by a rubber dressing on fender liners, restores a clean look and helps you spot leaks and hardware issues early.

Seasonal realities - when storage or wrapping makes sense

Many full-timers chase 70-degree weather and never store long term. For those who do winter over or park for a season, consider protection that fits the pause. Boat Shrink Wrapping works on vessels because frames and wraps are designed for moisture control and airflow. On an RV, full-wrap shrink can trap moisture against paint and seals if not engineered carefully. We prefer breathable covers sized for the coach, with pool noodles or foam to prevent chafe at corners, and we always leave ventilation paths. If you do choose a shrink solution, plan for periodic checks and moisture management. The same logic we apply in Marine Detailing, airflow and chafe control, applies on land.

Tying exterior protection to travel style

A constantly moving rig benefits from a Ceramic Coating on the front cap and windshield surround, PPF in the highest-impact zones, and a reliable wash-and-topper habit. A stationary rig exposed to trees needs roof vigilance, gutter guards, and frequent rinses to prevent tannin staining. If you boondock and manage water, adopt waterless or rinseless wash techniques on light dust days, and save the full wash for the next full hookup. Keep a dedicated rinseless wash bucket, plush towels, and a pump sprayer in a bay. With good technique, you can safely manage dust without scouring the paint.

An owner's toolkit that actually earns its space

You do not need a shop on board, but a tight kit covers 90 percent of care. Carry a pH-neutral shampoo, a rinseless wash concentrate, a ceramic-safe spray sealant, bug remover, a gentle all-purpose cleaner, glass cleaner, a rubber seal conditioner, a handful of high-pile microfibers, a drying towel, a bug sponge, a soft wheel brush, a telescoping pole with a soft head, and nitrile gloves. Add a compact cordless blower for drying. If you polish, a dual action machine with a light cut pad and polish handles small corrections on the road. Store chemicals upright in bins, and never let polish sling land on hot panels. It bakes fast.

At Xtreme Detailing and Ceramic Coatings, we standardize these kits for clients who want to bridge the gaps between professional services. The consistency shows. When owners use the same chemistry we used to coat or seal the rig, maintenance cleans become faster and safer, and the line between pro visit and owner care blurs in a good way.



Common mistakes we see at Xtreme Detailing and Ceramic Coatings

We see well-intentioned owners create work for themselves. The big three are harsh cleaners on rubber roofs, unfiltered hard water allowed to dry in sun, and rotary polishers used aggressively on thin, hot panels. Another frequent miss is forgetting the roof-to-gutter transition. That lip catches dirt and feeds black streaks. Clean it with a gloved hand and a microfiber wrapped around a plastic card to reach the seam, then seal it. On interiors, shiny dressings on steering wheels and pedals are unsafe. Keep those surfaces clean and matte.

What to expect when you finally need correction

If you keep a good wash rhythm and protection layers, a yearly correction becomes small and focused. The front cap might need a two-stage to remove etched bug marks, the lower skirt a light pass to remove micro-marring, and the roof edge a deep clean and reseal. If you inherit a neglected rig, plan for more. Gelcoat that is chalky across large panels takes hours with wool pads and compounds, followed by finishing passes and protection. Be patient and measure progress in square feet, not minutes. Push too hard and you create heat haze and pad trails you have to chase again.

The payoff - a cleaner home that feels like yours

A well-detailed RV is not just pretty. Door seals close without grit. Slides move smoothly. Awnings retract clean. The front cap wipes bug-free in a few minutes on a travel day. Inside, the air feels lighter without dust in vents and carpets. You buy time between repairs, you spend fewer Saturdays wrestling oxidation, and you keep resale value when you eventually change rigs.

Full-time RV life rewards steady habits more than occasional heroics. Keep water quality in mind, clean top down, protect high-impact zones, and use products that match your substrates. Borrow what works from Auto Detailing, Marine Detailing, and Airplane Detailing, and skip what does not fit a rolling house. With a measured plan, your coach stays proud, your workdays feel cleaner, and the road remains a pleasant part of the home you carry with you.

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FAQs About Car Detailing Services

How much should I spend on car detailing?

The cost of car detailing can range from \$100 to \$300 for standard services, while premium packages like paint correction or ceramic coating can cost several hundred to over a thousand dollars. The right budget depends on your vehicle's condition and the level of protection you want.

Is detailing worth the money?

Yes, professional detailing is a worthwhile investment. It helps protect your vehicle's paint, maintains the interior, and preserves resale value. In areas like Fontana, CA, where sun exposure and dust are common, regular detailing can significantly extend your car's lifespan.

How often should you fully detail your car?

A full detailing service is typically recommended every 4 to 6 months. However, this can vary depending on driving habits, weather conditions, and whether your vehicle has protective treatments like ceramic coating.

What time of year is best for car detailing?

Spring and fall are ideal times for car detailing. Spring helps remove winter buildup, while fall prepares your vehicle for harsher weather conditions. In Southern California, detailing year-round is beneficial due to constant sun exposure and environmental contaminants.

How long does car detailing last?

The results of detailing can last anywhere from a few weeks to several months, depending on the services performed and how well the vehicle is maintained. Protective options like ceramic coating can extend these results significantly.

Do I need ceramic coating after detailing?

While not required, ceramic coating is highly recommended after detailing. It adds a durable layer of protection, enhances shine, and makes future cleaning much easier, especially in high-heat environments like Fontana.