

*An intrepid tester bastes the fiberglass test panels in grease and grime.*



# Grease is the Word

*Krud Kutter and Mary Kate Grease Away tackle engine compartment grime the best.*

Grease surrounds us, it penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together. No, wait—that’s The Force. But grease *is* everywhere. It’s in our galley, our grill, our engine rooms—not to mention our garages and motor equipment at home. While ordinary boat soap can help loosen surface grease, there comes a point when you need a degreaser, which, as the name implies, is a cleaner specifically tasked with removing grease.

When a reader mentioned his upcoming plans to clean his grimy engine pan liner this winter, we checked our files and what was on the market. Finding two shelves of degreasers at our hardware store, and no recent data of our own, we were irresistibly drawn (by The Force?) into a head-to-head test.

The process behind cleaning surface grease is fairly straightforward. Grease is acidic, so an alkaline formula will usually do the trick, penetrating and breaking down the grease. Ammonia, commonly used in oven cleaners, is highly alkaline, but its potentially harmful fumes make it less desirable for use in enclosed spaces on board. It

will also remove any wax on gelcoat exteriors. Although we are routinely exposed to low levels of ammonia that naturally occur in the environment, high levels, particularly the fumes, can be hazardous. Ammonia should always be used in a well-ventilated area, and never mixed with chlorine, which can form poisonous chloramine gas.

Not surprisingly, many of the cleaners in this test used citrus-based alkaline for cleaning instead of ammonia. These cleaners should also be used in a well-ventilated area, but they are generally less harmful. Despite the environmental claims of some of these cleaners, we do not advise pumping oily waste water overboard, which is against the law.

## WHAT WE TESTED

Several types of degreasers are on the market—aerosol sprays, gels, foams, and liquid products. *PS* chose the latter, which come in bottles with trigger sprays. The liquid degreaser seems to be the most logical all-around grease cleaner for a sailor. The aerosols

are used mostly to clean tools and machinery, while the gels and foams are not as easy to work with as the trigger-spray cleaners.

*PS* picked up just about any product we could find at the local marine chandleries and hardware stores that claimed to clean grease. Initially, we came up with close to 30 products. For the sake of project containment, we weeded out the general-purpose cleaners that ranked grease-fighting low among their superpowers. These were set aside for a multi-stain cleaning test later this year.

After culling the generalists (anachronisms, some might say) from the herd, *PS* came away with 11 specialized products, many with “degreaser” in their monikers. Among the most interesting names: Holy Cow Heavy Duty Degreaser and Krud Kutter Degreaser/Stain Remover.

All of the products were labeled as “biodegradable,” although none carry the Environmental Protection Agency’s Design for the Environment logo, indicating a product meets defined environment-friendly standards. A few of them made specific claims about being

environmentally friendly, including the two we tested from Star Brite—Sea Safe Cleaner/Degreaser and All Purpose Citrus Cleaner Degreaser—and Spray Nine’s Earth Soap Cleaner Degreaser. The latter is made from “renewable agricultural material.” Chomp Multi Purpose Oil Eating Cleaner says it uses “naturally occurring single celled microbes—Nature’s Janitors.”

Some cleaners list their ingredients on the labels—other don’t. *PS* prefers the products that do.

Even though they are sold in a trigger-spray bottle, four of the tested degreasers are marketed as concentrates that can be diluted with water for easier jobs. They are Kafko Oil Eater Cleaner Degreaser, Spray Nine Earth Soap



PS VALUE GUIDE		SPRAY-BOTTLE LIQUID DEGREASERS			
PRODUCT	SIZE	PRICE	PRICE PER OUNCE	CLEANING RATING	
Chomp Multi Purpose Oil Eating Cleaner ✓	32 oz.	\$9.99	31 cents	Excellent	
Holy Cow Heavy Duty Degreaser \$	32 oz.	\$5.29	17 cents	Good	
Kafko Oil Eater Cleaner Degreaser ✓	32 oz.	\$6.19	19 cents	Excellent	
Krud Kutter Degreaser/Stain Remover ★	32 oz.	\$5.98	19 cents	Excellent	
Mary Kate Grease Away ✓	32 oz.	\$7.99	25 cents	Excellent	
MDR Krazy Clean	24 oz.	\$12.95	54 cents	Good	
Simple Green Motorsports Cleaner & Degreaser	32 oz.	\$5.99	19 cents	Fair	
Spray Nine Earth Soap Cleaner Degreaser	32 oz.	\$5.99	19 cents	Good	
Spray Nine Marine Grez-Off	25 oz.	\$7.99	32 cents	Good	
Star brite All Purpose Citrus Cleaner Degreaser ✓	22 oz.	\$10.95	50 cents	Excellent	
Star brite Sea Safe Cleaner/Degreaser ✓	22 oz.	\$10.99	50 cents	Excellent	
T-Greaser	32 oz.	NA	NA	Good	

★ Best Choice ✓ Recommended \$ Budget Buy



Cleaner Degreaser, T-Greaser, and Holy Cow Heavy Duty Degreaser. The cleaners come in bottles ranging from 22 to 32 ounces. The three least expensive are Holy Cow, Simple Green, and Spray Nine Earth Soap, all coming in at less than 20 cents per ounce. The priciest are Kafko Oil Eater Cleaner Degreaser (93 cents per ounce), MDR Krazy Clean (75 cents per ounce), and Star brite Sea Safe (68 cents per ounce).

Now for the nasty stuff: toxicity. The majority of the products instruct you to flush with water if the cleaner gets in the eyes. None of them produced especially strong fumes during tests.

**HOW WE TESTED**

These were all your standard spray-and-wipe products. Some labels instructed the user to wait 30 seconds after applying, others



instructed the user to immediately wipe the surface. One cleaner—Spray Nine Grez-Off—warned the user to make sure not to let the product dry.

For controlled panel testing, PS used two 4-foot by 2-foot fiberglass deck hatch lids off an old sailboat. We utilized the underside of each panel, sectioning off the gelcoat surface in 7-inch-wide strips. The panels were liberally coated with a blend of grease, dirty engine oil, soot, and dirt (in stain-fighting parlance, this is known as greasy grime). The panels were allowed to ferment outside for a few days.

The second test platform was a 12-cylinder diesel engine at a vegetable farm near Practical Sailor's home office in Sarasota, Fla. The engine was one of several powering irrigation pumps serving fields of watercress and arugula. Testers sectioned off the engine's grease-coated engine bed into 3-inch by 3-inch squares and went to work. (No grease or oil was allowed to escape the high catch basin beneath the engine.)

For each of the cleaning tests, the evaluators applied the product as directed, then cleaned the area as best as possible, applying even pressure with a clean rag. Each section was checked for remaining dirt or grease by passing a clean, white cloth over the cleaned area, a variation of the butler's white glove test. The more grease on the snippet of cloth, the lower the score. The greasy engine beds were cleaned first, the greasy fiberglass panels a few days later.

Each test was repeated several times, and each time, the sample rags were later compared side by side to see which cleaner was most effective. The field was gradually whittled down to two cleaners, and finally an overall winner.

In addition to the effectiveness of the cleaner, price and ease of use helped determine the final recommendations.

**TEST ON FIBERGLASS**

In the fiberglass panel test, five cleaners scored Excellent, leaving their sections squeaky clean, and in the "white glove" test, their respective pieces of rag appeared to be clean.

Those five were Star brite Sea Safe Cleaner/Degreaser, Chomp Multi Purpose Oil Eating Cleaner, Krud Kutter Degreaser/Stain Remover, Mary Kate Grease Away Engine Degreaser, and Spray Nine Earth Soap Cleaner Degreaser. The majority of the remaining products were given Good ratings, which meant they left a thin film on the panel and their wipe rag was dirty. They were MDR Krazy Klean, Spray Nine Marine Grez-Off, Holy Cow Heavy Duty Degreaser, T-Greaser, and Kafko Oil Eater Cleaner Degreaser. The only Fair was Extreme Simple Green Motor Sports Cleaner and Degreaser, which left slightly more grease than those products with Good ratings.

The farm machinery presented a more difficult test for our fleet of grease fighters. The grease on the water-pump



engine was hard, thick, and caked with soot.

After the first round of engine cleaning, four products stood out from the rest with commendable cleaning jobs: Krud Kutter Degreaser/Stain Remover, Holy Cow Heavy Duty Degreaser, T-Greaser, and Mary Kate Grease Away Engine Degreaser. The test was repeated again on a different sections of the engine, finally yielding two clear winners: Krud Kutter Degreaser/Stain Remover and Mary Kate Grease Away Engine Degreaser.



or ammonia.” The Mary Kate product contains “butoxyethanol, sodium metasilicate, sodium xylenesulfonate and potassium hydroxide.” The label says it doesn’t contain petroleum solvents or phosphates.

Another consideration was price. Not surprisingly, the cheaper products were generally those we picked up at the local hardware. At 25 cents per ounce, the Mary Kate Grease Away Engine Degreaser costs about \$1.50 more than the Krud Kutter Degreaser/Stain Remover (19 cents per ounce).

So, the aptly named Krud Kutter walks away with the Best Choice honors. The Mary Kate product works really well, and we recommend it, along with all the other products that scored Excellent overall. Budget Buy honors go to Holy Cow Heavy Duty Degreaser, which was among the top four finishers in the farm water-pump-engine test. It’s only 17 cents per ounce—the least expensive of the lot. ▲

**CONCLUSIONS**

Two products shined in both tests: Krud Kutter Degreaser/Stain Remover and Mary Kate Grease Away Engine Degreaser. *PS* generally prefers products that avoid petroleum solvents, and both these products claim none. The Krud Kutter contains “a proprietary blend of biodegradable surfactants, detergents and emulsifiers in a water-based solution. No petroleum solvents, bleach

**CONTACTS**

**CHOMP**, 888/406-5318, [www.chompsolutions.com](http://www.chompsolutions.com)

**HOLY COW**, 916/625-0694 [www.holycowproducts.com](http://www.holycowproducts.com)

**OIL EATER**, 800/528-0334 [www.oileater.com](http://www.oileater.com)

**KRUD KUTTER**, 800/466-7126 [www.krudkutter.com](http://www.krudkutter.com)

**MK GREASE AWAY**, 800/272-8693 [www.crcindustries.com](http://www.crcindustries.com)

**MDR KRAZY KLEAN**, 973/754-7087 [www.mdramazon.com](http://www.mdramazon.com)

**SIMPLE GREEN**, 800/228-0709 [www.simplegreen.com](http://www.simplegreen.com)

**SPRAY NINE**, 800/477-7299 [www.spraynine.com](http://www.spraynine.com)

**STAR BRITE**, 954/587-6280 [www.starbrite.com](http://www.starbrite.com)

**T-GREASER**, 954/987-2722 [www.trac-online.com](http://www.trac-online.com)

**Can a Cheap, Homemade Grease-cutter Compete?**

**S**ailors—cruising sailors in particular—are famously thrifty. When each saved dollar translates to another mile voyaging, the incentive to save is pressing.

In the spirit of maritime thrift (if there isn’t such a term, there should be), *Practical Sailor* editors did a little research and decided to concoct our own homemade grease cleaner. Recipes for homemade degreasers abound, and most of them have two key ingredients mixed in water, a surfactant to loosen surface tension between the water and oil (dishwashing detergent will work), and a high-alkaline solution to loosen the grease (ammonia is the most common choice for this). Many recipes suggest boosting cleaning power with hot water, no surprise since this is an element in nearly all commercial degreasing processes.

The recipe we settled on was one of several we found on [www.tipnut.com](http://www.tipnut.com): lemon-scented ammonia, hot water, and Dawn dishwashing liquid. We filled an empty liquid detergent bottle half full with household cleaning ammonia, then topped it off with hot water. We then added a few squirts of Dawn dishwashing detergent.

A half-gallon of lemon-scented ammonia set us back \$1.89, the Dawn was borrowed from the galley. We didn’t have a spray top like the degreasers in our test, but we could have

bought one for less than the money we saved.

*PS* matched the homemade remedy against the top two performers in the grease testing—Krud Kutter Degreaser/Stain Remover and Mary Kate Grease Away Engine Degreaser. *PS* tried the trio of cleaners on a variety of greasy surfaces, ranging from windows, stoves, and grills, to our fiberglass test panels. The tester followed the same general procedure as he did for the degreaser test, using small clean rags and comparing the amount of grease each picked up.

In the first test, all three cleaners did a decent job of removing the thin layers of grease from smooth surfaces (windows and countertops). When it came to cleaning grills and other tough grease stains, the homemade cleaner also did a very good job—as good as the Mary Kate Grease Away Engine Degreaser. However, it was obvious that Krud Kutter worked faster than both the Mary Kate and the homemade blend. The stuff works really well.

**Bottom line:** The ammonia-water-Dawn cleaner was effective (the ammonia was 3 cents per ounce) but was very difficult to work with due to the high ammonia content. If you can stand the eye- and throat-burning ammonia, go for it. If you’ve got a really tough job on your hands, *PS*’s Best Choice is still the Krud Kutter.