Guidelines for care of your asphalt driveway

Congratulations on having chosen a Debmat drive

Your new drive is made from asphalt, a mixture of hard aggregate bound together with bitumen, a flexible, black, waterproof substance derived from crude oil. There are many different types of asphalt surfacing that are used on driveways, the more common being Close-Graded Bituminous Macadam (DBM), Stone Mastic Asphalt (SMA) and Hot Rolled Asphalt (HRA). Some of these are stronger and more durable than others, but the same principles apply to looking after all of them.

Properly cared for it should give you many years of service. These aftercare guidelines have been drawn up to help you look after your drive and to help you address problems if they arise.

Precautions in Hot Weather

During hot weather (and especially throughout your driveway's first summer) the new black asphalt surface can absorb heat with the result that the bitumen 'glue' binding the asphalt together becomes softer. In such circumstances the surface becomes more prone to scuffing from tyres as well as indentation caused by point loading from ladders, and other sharp, heavy objects.

By taking care not to overstress the surface in hot weather, particularly by using power steering whilst your vehicle is stationary, you will reduce the risk of damage to the surface. This is especially important if your driveway is being used by heavier vehicles such as a people carrier, 4x4 or van.

As the asphalt ages and the black bitumen wears off to expose the natural stone surface beneath, its appearance will lighten and as a result it will absorb less heat. In addition, over time the surface will harden and the risk of damage will further reduce.

Whilst surface damage through scuffing may cause concern, it is usually only superficial and will largely disappear as the surface has only been temporarily 'turned' to reveal new black bitumen. Exposure to the elements will blend these areas back into a uniform appearance with the rest of the drive.

This guidance is particularly appropriate to south facing drives where surfaces are exposed to the sun for longer periods.

Avoiding Damage from Point-Loading

If you are storing a caravan on your driveway or are likely to be using ladders for DIY, you must be aware of the risk of point loading damage from the jockey wheel or ladder feet. Both of these concentrate a large load over a small area and can give rise to indentation of the driveway surface.

As stated above, newly laid driveways and south-facing driveways are particularly prone to this kind of damage.

If you are storing a caravan (even for short periods) or using a ladder you are advised to use a suitably sized piece of hard wood or a paving slab to spread the load over the surface.

NOTE: Exercise extreme care when placing ladders on any of the items mentioned above.

Dealing with Oil and Chemical Spillages

Bitumen bound surfacings are resistant to occasional oil droppings but can be softened and damaged by significant oil spillages.

If left in contact with the asphalt, any oil product will dissolve the bitumen binder and soften it. Where oil spillages have occurred the best course of action is to soak up the oil before it has time to damage the asphalt. Use the best available material close to hand to do this such as cat litter, sawdust, dry sand, paper or cloth.

If the oil has already penetrated the asphalt, you should protect the the surface from stress – keep traffic off where possible – and give the contaminant time to evaporate away. With petrol this will be very rapid, whereas diesel fuel will take several months to evaporate, but the condition of the surface should eventually return to normal. In both cases, such spillages will leave marks but these should diminish over time.

Great care should be taken trying to wash away spillages as this could damage the asphalt surface. Where appropriate, it is recommended that you wash the asphalt surface with luke-warm water and brush. Alternative cleaning products are available from DIY stores but it should be noted that water-based solutions are preferred. Always test a small, discrete area before treating larger areas.

If chemicals such as gardening products spill onto your driveway surface, please follow the appropriate guidelines on the product packaging with regards to dilution to help disperse the chemical from the asphalt as quickly as possible. In many cases simply washing the driveway with copious amounts of clean water is recommended.

Treating Weeds, Vegetation and Soil Debris

Driveways can be prone to growth of vegetation through the asphalt. In such circumstances the best course of action is to first use a leaf-acting weed killer. Carefully remove the dead foliage by scraping, but do not attempt to pull out roots as this could disturb the asphalt. If further growth is apparent treat the area again with an appropriate root weed killer.

If soil or similar gardening products are to be placed onto an asphalt driveway use of a plastic sheet to protect the surface is recommended. This will prevent clay and soil getting embedded in the surface of the driveway which will often be difficult to remove. In some cases, clay on macadam surface can cause damage by shrinkage when it dries.

Soils and sand deposited directly on to an asphalt driveway should be carefully brushed from the surface when dry and the remainder removed with water and a stiff brush.