

CAR WASH OWNERS

Touchless or friction: should you replace your old in bay automatic?

By Ayodele Olasiji, Optimax Commercial · Updated October 18, 2026 · 2 min read · Online at [optimaxdeals.com/guides/touchless-vs-friction-car-wash](https://www.optimaxdeals.com/guides/touchless-vs-friction-car-wash)

SHORT ANSWER

Touchless in bay automatics clean with high pressure water and chemistry, and nothing touches the car. Friction, or soft touch, machines use foam or cloth that contacts the car and usually remove heavy dirt better. Many drivers choose touchless because they worry about scratches. If your old machine breaks down often or your car counts are falling, compare total cost per car, not only the price of the machine.

How to, at a glance

1. Check the signs your machine costs you: repairs, downtime, slow sales
2. Compare touchless and friction on cleaning, damage risk and upkeep
3. Upgrade how customers pay at the same time
4. Get installer quotes that cover your area

Questions owners ask**Is touchless or friction better?**

Neither wins everywhere. Touchless appeals to drivers worried about paint; friction usually cleans heavy dirt better. Owners usually decide by their customers and climate.

How long does an in bay automatic last?

It depends on the model, wash volume and maintenance. Ask the supplier for the expected service life and parts support for the model you are considering.

Does Optimax sell car wash equipment?

No. Optimax introduces you to an independent supplier, which pays Optimax a referral fee if you buy. You pay Optimax nothing for the introduction.

Touchless and friction side by side

	Touchless	Friction (soft touch)
How it cleans	High pressure water and stronger chemistry	Foam or cloth contact, plus water and chemistry
Heavy dirt	Can leave a film on very dirty cars	Usually cleans heavy dirt better
What drivers think	Seen as safer for paint	Some drivers avoid brushes, especially on new cars
Chemical use	Usually higher, because chemistry does the work	Usually lower
Parts that wear	Pumps, nozzles, arms	Cloth and brushes and their motors, plus pumps

General differences only. Results depend on the model, the chemistry, water quality and upkeep.

Signs your old machine is costing you

- It is down more than a day or two a month.
- Parts are hard to find, or the maker no longer supports it.
- Customers complain about missed spots or damage.
- Car counts are falling while washes nearby are busy.
- Repair bills climb every year.

Fix how customers pay at the same time

A new machine is a good moment to fix payment. Is the wash tied to the pumps so drivers can buy a wash at the pump? Is there a kiosk or pay station that takes cards and phones? Do you sell wash packages or a monthly plan? Each one changes how many cars come through.

What to ask before you buy

1. The full installed price, including removing the old machine, electrical, plumbing and permits.
2. Financing options and the monthly payment.
3. The warranty, and what it covers.
4. Service response time in your area, and where parts ship from.
5. Chemistry supply and cost per car.
6. Training for you or your staff.
7. References from owners running the same model.

How Optimax helps

We introduce car wash owners to a touchless in bay automatic supplier and installer we work with. Tell us where your wash is and what you run today, and we confirm coverage before anyone calls you. If you buy through our introduction, the supplier pays Optimax a referral fee. You pay Optimax nothing for the introduction.

Replace your old automatic with touchless.

Tell us what you run today and where. We introduce you to a touchless supplier and installer and confirm they cover your area. No cost to you for the introduction.

Get a private call back

www.optimaxdeals.com/car-wash-owners/touchless

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