

TESTING 1-2-3



See spot run

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When it comes to food and drink stains, we put ourselves in the line of fire on a daily basis. Usually water and an old napkin are the only handy cleaning tools — and that's if we're lucky.

It's a good thing that manufacturers realized that the more accident-prone among us need help with cleanup. Now consumers have access to pocket-sized pens and sprays that promise to wipe away mustard dribbles, coffee sloshes and even fruit juice.

We tested three such products — Gonzo Take-Me-Along stain remover spray, Tide to Go and the Stain Pen. Want to know which ones cut the mustard?

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Each week “Testing 1-2-3” road-tests a wide range of products. It's not scientific testing — we use the items just as consumers do, checking to see if they deliver as promised. The tests can help you make buying decisions.

Give stains the brushoff

By **SABINE MORROW** / smorrow@ajc.com

We tested three such products — Gonzo Take-Me-Along stain remover spray, Tide to Go and Stain Pen. Our results follow:

Stain Pen

\$5.99 for two .25 ounce pens at Bed, Bath & Beyond stores

First look: The small white-and-blue tube looks as if it might hold lip balm.

The rundown: Stain Pen consist of a liquid stain remover that's dispensed with a roller applicator. Roll the Stain Pen on a stain and, ideally, let the spot dry before wiping it with a wet towel or, if possible, rinsing with water.

Upside: The Stain Pen almost completely removed dark lipstick from white cotton, and it performed the best on all-day foundation. It was the only stain remover we tested that almost completely removed those stains.

Downside: Getting liquid out of the hard plastic applicator required a lot of muscle power. The Stain Pen did an exemplary job on lipstick and a pretty good job on foundation, but it failed dismally with other stains. Coffee, mustard, ketchup and fruit juices were transformed to various shades of yellow. And since Stain Pen is a roll-on, bits of food got stuck in the applicator, making it kind of gross after a few uses.

Bottom line: If lipstick is a hazard for you, then Stain Pen might be worth the effort; otherwise, forget it.



Gonzo Take-Me-Along stain remover

\$2.99 at Bed Bath & Beyond

First look: Gonzo comes in a flat, red-and-white plastic spray bottle that's about 4 inches tall and features a flip cap.

The rundown: Just flip the cap, spray Gonzo, blot with a clean towel and stains disappear like magic, according to the label. Gonzo is multipurpose and can be used to remove stains from carpets and other surfaces as well.

Upside: It's easy to use, and plenty of the cleanser hits the spot with one spray. Gonzo effectively removed fresh black coffee stains with a little effort and made pomegranate juice disappear. It attacked ketchup better than the other stain removers we tested. While the ketchup didn't disappear, it was nearly gone. As with all of the stain removers we tested, several scrubblings with a clean towel were required for it to be really effective. Make sure to blot out as



Tide to Go

\$2.99 for one 10 ml pen at most grocery stores and mass merchandisers

First look: It looks like a Magic Marker emblazoned with the vibrant orange, yellow and blue Tide logo.

The rundown: The white pen tip dispenses spot remover when it's pressed against material. Then you can use the tip to rub the stain. According to the label, Tide to Go is for fresh food and drink stains but not to be used as a pretreater.

Upside: It's convenient to stash in a purse, backpack or the glove box. It

much of the stain as possible before applying any spot remover. Since it's a spray, there's no part of the product that gets "contaminated" from touching food. The applicator remains pristine.

Downside: It faded mustard stains but didn't remove them completely. Lipstick and all-day faded slightly but still obvious.

Bottom line: Take it with you for certain spills.



Photos by CHRIS HUNT / Staff

easily and completely removed black coffee spills from white cotton. It also turned pomegranate juice invisible and did a pretty good job of making a ketchup drip look like a faint memory.

Downside: A mustard spill was still visible, but, in all fairness, none of the spot removers completely removed mustard. Removing lipstick was a disaster. Tide to Go made it look even darker. It had little effect on foundation smears as well. The white tip easily becomes discolored, and the product has an unpleasant odor.

Bottom line: Very effective for juice and coffee, but if you've got lipstick on your collar, beware.

Got a product for a pro to test? Let us know at ajc.com/buyersedge