

# TAN YOUR HIDE AND SAVE A FORTUNE

*It's amazing just how many classic car enthusiasts rush to replace interior leather when all that is often required is a little tender loving care, says Robert Couldwell*

If the interior is complete and the hide is not cracked to the point of major tears it can usually be brought back to life. Properly cared for and fed, leather will last for centuries and I am constantly surprised to see gleaming classics with dried out, cracked leather that regular feeding with hide food would have prevented.

There are several excellent leather (and vinyl) restoration kits and 'washes' on the market to suit all pockets (see our ads for full details-ed) but the one used here is from Woolies based in Market Deeping near Peterborough.

The first step is to tease a piece of unsoiled, unfaded leather from underneath a seat and send it off to Woolies together with £39 for a two/three-seater kit and £50 for four/five seats. A week or so later you will receive a bottle of liquid cleaner, a bottle of dye matched to your

sample, a pot of sealing paste and a quantity of soft cotton cloth. The dye is designed for leather but it does work on some leathercloth and vinyl as well but that is a matter of experimentation. I have certainly used it successfully for plastics on Alvis, Bristol, Lotus, MG and Jaguar. The cleaner is useful here as it will tend to de-gaze the vinyl giving a key for the dye.

The interior can be renovated without dismantling but it does make it easier and more effective if seats, panels etc are removed.

## Cleaning

The seats and carpets should be vacuumed before using the cleaner. This liquid penetrates deep into the hide and apparently softens, feeds and strengthens the leather. It should be applied using a cloth and small brush to remove ingrained dirt from the crevices. In the case of very smooth-surfaced hide it is a good idea to also use fine grade wire wool which will 'disturb' the surface and give a good key. This is probably the longest and most tedious part of the process and flooding of the surface must be avoided. Once the seats and door panels are completely clean to the point that no dirt shows on a white cloth (dampened by cleaner) wiped over the surface, everything should be wiped down with a water-dampened cloth to remove any excess-build-up of cleaner.



Woolies kit has all you need - apart from your effort!

E-Type seat shows just how effective a re-dye of the leather can be and possibly save you some £500 to recover just one seat! Also helps keep old car patina



## Feeding

There are many effective hide foods available but I used Connolly's and it should be applied to the cleaned leather (has no effect on vinyl in case you were wondering...). It should be applied evenly and tends to sit on the surface and absorbed over 48 hours. After that time any excess can be carefully removed with the cleaner.

In many cases, this treatment is enough and dye is not necessary which was my experience with the back seat of a Bristol 411 which had obviously been the home of a small dog whose claws had badly scratched the surface of the hide. After cleaning and feeding, the squab looked as good as new.

## Repairing tears and re-stitching

At this stage it is wise to deal with any tears or rotten stitching. Some tears can be simply repaired by putting another piece of leather or even canvas behind the tear and sticking the slivers of torn leather to it with a proper adhesive. Later in the process the dye will help to cover the 'joins'. Where stitches holding seat pleats together have worn or rotted the original holes can be used to re-stitch (having removed the seat cover from the seat) using a semi circular needle and special thread, both available from Woolies or other good trim equipment suppliers.

## Dyeing

Unlike the cellulose based dye used by professional leather restorers, Woolies dye is water soluble. This is so that it can be sent through the post. The benefit, however is that if carefully applied in several light coats, the upholstery does not look 'painted' which is often the case with such kits if done incorrectly. Woolies supplies a small supply of lint-free cotton cloth with the dye but I have never found it sufficient. Once exhausted I have always used ordinary mutton cloth with excellent results. While it is water based, once it dries on the skin it takes a bit of removing so surgical gloves are a good idea.

From this point on the results are directly proportional to your patience! Light coats should be rubbed well in with the cloth using a soft nail brush for any pleats and a toothbrush for any piping, wiping away any excess. At least 30 minutes should be left between coats and as many as five coats might be required particularly in those areas where the surface of the leather is worn to a 'suede-like appearance'. Dark colours cover better than light and in the case of magnolia and off-white, Woolies can supply a special base coat which will improve coverage here.

## Sealing

Once a satisfactory colour finish is achieved the next stage is sealing which is necessary because the dye is water based. It is simply a matter of applying the supplied sealing paste sparingly over all seats and buffing with a soft cloth to give a natural water-resistant sheen. Too much elbow grease will tend to remove some of the dye - so don't go mad.

## Carpets

There is a temptation to use one of the many domestic aerosol carpet cleaners around but I find a liquid type such as 1001 dissolved in water is much better for anything but spot cleaning. Carpets take a hammering so it may take several applications to get them really clean.

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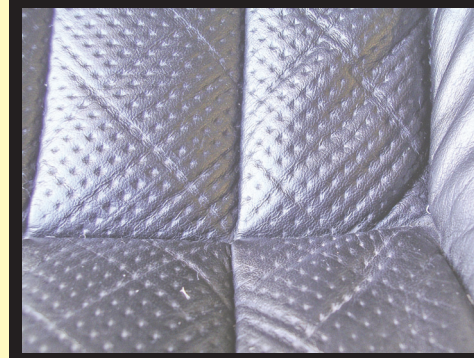
Remember details such as restoring reclining levers



For a top job, de-rust and paint frames, runners etc



Works well but you may need many light coats of dye



To get it right, work dye into all nooks and crannies