

# TECH: DETAILING

## DETAILING SCIENCE: PART FIFTEEN

# LEATHER REPAIR

TIME REQUIRED: 1.5HR PER AREA TREATED

Of all the areas that experience wear and tear, it's your Porsche's interior that suffers most, particularly the deep bolstered leather sports style seats. Fortunately even the most worn leather can be repaired. Simon Walters of Cambridge Concours shows us how

**P**orsches get used more than other supercars – we regularly see vehicles with six-figure mileages in fine fettle. This is in contrast to other more delicate and less practical marques in this elite category, and as a consequence the interiors can take a battering, particularly the leather. Following on from last month's article on paint-chip repair (another danger for daily drivers), for this issue we have spent the day with PVD member Simon Walters of Cambridge Concours who, though an all-round detailer, is particularly renowned for his skills with hide and has even brought out his own products for the home user.

Leather repair is often seen as a 'dark art' practised by chronologically enhanced gentlemen, often sporting half-moon spectacles and with a beard thick enough to nest a moderately proportioned Condor. In reality, though not easy for the inexperienced, the principles are straight forward. Equally, even severely damaged leather can be repaired. The seats pictured are examples. None were re-trimmed, they were all repaired in-situ by Simon.

The first step is to clean the seats thoroughly. This is a two-stage process, initially using a detergent cleaner to get the surface detritus off, followed by an alcohol-based cleaner to remove the ingrained grease and grime. It is really important to get between the crevices of the bolsters, and to clean all the surrounding areas to reduce the chance of contamination during the next steps.

Once clean, the seats are sanded, starting with P400 and going up to P800 using conventional sand paper. This might seem to go against the grain (ahem), but it is perfectly legitimate practice. Once again it is back to cleaning, using compressed air (from a can or compressor) to blow out the dust, a vacuum cleaner to extract it, and finally another wipe down with the alcohol-based cleaner.

The next step is dependant on the type of repair. If there is a large rip, an old-fashioned needle and thread is used to heal the wound. Bear in mind that leather is essentially skin, albeit bovine and rather tougher than our human coating. For holes, a gauze is put down first, which

prevents the filler from bonding with the stuffing. The gauze is polymer weave, similar to a Teflon sheet, and available from specialist stores like Cambridge Concours.

Once the substantial repairs have been completed, the next step is to use fillers. In the case of cigarette burns, or heavily grained leather, Simon uses a heat-cure filler; whereas for everything else, an elastine-based filler is more suited. The fillers should not be mixed with a colour as it weakens their primary filling properties. Simon uses a domestic hair-dryer to accelerate the curing process as commercial heat guns are a little too hot and more difficult to control. Under constant heat from a hair-dryer held about a foot away, the filler cures in about fifteen minutes, as opposed to the multiple hours it would take if left to air-dry.

The next step is where experience counts the most – colour matching. Simon has a huge book of swatches, covering just about every colour imaginable. He finds the nearest match, though rarely is it 100% as leather changes colour over time, and even from new there is sometimes noticeable variation depending on which lucky ruminant was peeled to coat each car. Once the best match is found, Simon mixes the different dyes to formula, and then tweaks it to get an ideal match. A single colour can sometimes take four hours to match and take ten different pigments.

Once mixed, the dye is sprayed onto the leather – obviously the surrounding area has been masked in preparation, allowing the seat to remain mounted to the car rather than faffing about under the car with bolts and the nerve-tingling process of unplugging airbags. The water-based paint is layered on thickly, and is designed to be flexible once dry to avoid cracking. Lacquer is sprayed atop the colour coat, again using custom products that offer a durable finish thanks to rather expensive hardeners. After another fifteen minutes with the hair dryer, the seat is ready for inspection. Once it has passed muster, the masking is removed and the job is done.

If you would like to have a go yourself, Simon offers a range of kits and training to help you pick up the basics, though for serious repairs it's a good idea to leave it to a professional. PW



Left: The bolsters on Porsche seats suffer the most as clothing rubs against them as driver and passenger clamber in and out. Even splits can be repaired and leather can be restored to its former glory, with a process of cleaning and feeding, painting and finally lacquering the leather

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