



An Inside Job

By Mark Bollman

Vinyl and leather upholstery repair evolve

Chocolate-covered fingertips, muddy sneakers and just plain old age can leave nasty marks on vehicle upholstery, seriously depreciating the value and appearance of any vehicle.

For the successful professional detailer, offering services such as dyeing, restoration and repair of interiors is a must; however, it is not always the easiest profession to learn. Vinyl and leather are commonly used in vehicle interiors, and it is important that professional detailers offer these services to their customers. Outsourcing interior restoration can help full-service carwashes and detail shops provide additional services without huge additional costs.

Vinyl and leather

Vinyl is a type of plastic that can be made to be flexible. This is why vinyl is commonly used for door panels and arm rests. It is soft enough to be stamped with designs, textures and mock seams, and it is flexible enough to be stretched over foam and is often used for center arm rests. Thicker grades of vinyl are often used on the steering wheel and column.

The three main types of leather most commonly used in auto interiors include Aniline, Nubuck and protected leather. All leather is first treated with an aniline dye. This dye is translucent, therefore, the original character of the leather can be seen through the new color. Generally, only the finest hides with the fewest defects and markings are aniline dyed. Nubuck and protected leather each have an additional defining characteristic. Nubuck leather is buffed to create a nap, also known as buckskin. Protected leather has an additional coat of colored pigment, like paint.

The service

Professional carwashes and detail shops are the first places car owners turn when a seat is ripped or torn, the carpeting becomes stained or a door panel is gashed. If a carwash or detail shop is ill-equipped to provide these services, there are reputable

companies that provide these services, typically on-site and on an as-needed basis.

When selecting a company to provide these add-on services, be careful to check references and ask for several demonstrations. The company you choose should be fully trained and certified to perform the repairs. In essence, every part of auto interior can be repaired, except metal or glass. Adding interior repair services to a detailing package is an excellent way to increase profits, attract new customers and keep loyal customers.

Most interior repairs and restorations take about 30 minutes from start to finish, depending on the extent of damage or area to be cleaned and protected. Typical costs range from \$25 to \$150.

Most of the time, a customer will point out a tear or burn and ask if it can be fixed. However, it is important to train employees to keep an eye out for any damaged areas and then point them out to customers.

After a repair or restoration service is requested, an appointment is then made with the customer, and the repair company is scheduled to make the repair. At this point, the leather and vinyl repairer bills the wash or detail shop and, in turn, the customer is

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billed with a small markup to cover the costs. Sometimes employees damage the car interior and having an on-site repairer is quite handy, especially if the repairer is equipped with a mobile repair unit and is available for emergencies.

One might think that it is easier to simply replace a ripped seat or worn dash, but this is usually not the case. In addition to saving money, repairing worn upholstery has several advantages over costly replacement. The advantages include:

Time. Typically, most repair orders are received and serviced on the same day. Moreover, if a customer chooses to replace an item, it takes time to order the new part, remove the old part and pay for installation of the new part when it arrives. This process can take days, even weeks, and is very costly. Most repairers do not charge an hourly rate. Instead, repairers use a fee schedule based on

the difficulty of the task. This protects consumers from cost overruns and simplifies any repair estimates.

Environment. Ever wonder where the old part goes after it's removed? The answer is simple—the landfill. When a customer chooses to repair a rip, tear or discoloration, it prevents waste. New parts are usually shipped from a manufacturing facility far from the final destination. Either by boat, plane or automobile, resources are wasted during the shipping process, not to mention additional money. When a new part arrives, it is usually wrapped in protective plastic and secured inside a cardboard box. This produces more waste.

A uniform look. Replacing one seat because it's ripped or torn will cause the other seats, the dash and any other materials to appear old and faded. By repairing a rip or tear, no discoloration is visibly apparent.



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Technicians are specially trained to use exact-color matching techniques, essentially eliminating any visible residue or color from the repair.

To retain its beauty and other desirable qualities, leather requires frequent conditioning to replace the natural lubricants lost during normal use. With the proper care, leather can be protected from excessive dryness that can cause it to crack, and from moisture that may cause it to swell or mildew.

Because unprotected leather is susceptible to spotting from water and other liquids, a

newly purchased leather item should be treated immediately to help prevent permanent stains from occurring. Be sure to use only the proper protection for your particular type of leather.

Tips for leather care

1. The use of too much oil or wax can clog pores, causing leather to lose its ability to allow air in and moisture out. For the best protection, use a mild dishwashing soap. Ivory liquid dishwashing soap is an excellent way to keep leather clean and

looking new. Use one part Ivory to 10 parts water.

2. Dairy products spilled on darker dyed leather will leave a spot. After cleaning, the oils in the dairy products will eventually rise back up to the surface.

3. Lighter-colored leather needs to be cleaned often. Dirt, dust and clothing will leave traces on leather. Especially, black and dark-blue dyed jeans.

4. Never use preparations made for smooth leather on suede or "rough out" leather. Use only cleaners or preparations made specifically for suede.

5. The best way to keep leather protected from the sun and other elements is to clean and condition on a regular basis, at least twice a year. The conditioner puts a protective layer on the surface, which will help protect from sun damage.

6. Vinyl repairs can be cleaned the same way, minus the conditioner.

It's important that all leather goods, including seats, arm rests, dashboards and everything in between, receive proper care, which will enhance and extend the life of any leather good. ☞

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