

Ask Ronny

by Ronny Shaver @ Ronny's Garage

Answering Your Questions About Classic Car Care Service And Restoration

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How Do I Take Care Of My Leather Interior?

by Ronny Shaver

Over the years, I've had many customers and club members ask me how to take care of their leather interiors. The interiors of these cars are quite expensive to replace so it makes sense to take care of them to extend their life and keep them looking good as long as possible. With proper care the leather can retain its supple feel and vibrant color. I'm not an expert on this subject but will share some easy basic methods I have used to take care of my own cars.

Simple is my favorite word when it comes to car care. I prefer products that are easy to use and do not require many steps. My favorite products will have two steps, clean then condition. Three brands of leather products I've used and been happy with the results are Meguiars, Mothers and Lexol. They all have separate cleaner and conditioner products that come in spray and liquid form. Most auto supply stores will have at least one of these brands in stock.

Leather care is similar to skin care. Cleanliness is very important. Any spills or scuff marks should be cleaned as soon as possible to prevent them being ground into the surface and becoming permanent stains. It is important to use only specific leather cleaners to clean so as not to ruin the leather and coloring. Large spills should be wiped with a damp soft towel and dried immediately. Then use the leather cleaner afterward. Never use harsh chemicals on the leather, would you wash your hands with them? On deep dirt in seams and creases, use a soft fingernail brush then wipe with a towel. Be sure to get all the residue out before it dries up. After cleaning the leather allow it to dry before the next step.

Once the leather is good and clean it is time to condition the leather. I've found that several light conditions work best for me. In the past I have tried putting heavy coats of conditioner and letting it soak in for days or hours but usually spend a lot more time trying to wipe off the residue. On cars with older leather it is important to remember that the "skin" is no longer "alive" and will not necessarily rejuvenate to its original condition. I've seen a number of cars that clients have coated their leather with "hide food" or other products and let them sit so long on the leather that it became permanently sticky and or very shiny. I bought one car that the leather felt like cardboard in areas so I soaked it with conditioner so much that it started splitting as soon as any pressure was applied to it. So remember the old saying "less is more" and use moderate coats of conditioner, let it soak for the time stated in the product directions, then thoroughly wipe it off. Repeat according to the condition of the leather. It is also important to remember that many of the older cars have been "dyed" (painted!) with the old lacquer based products with made the leather thicker and more brittle. Ah, the good old days!!!

For me the leather maintenance of my cars can be a bit intimidating if I attempt to do the entire interior in a single day. I prefer to take one section at a time like a seat or dashboard and complete it thoroughly spreading out the work over a few days. That way I can focus on doing the job right with optimum results.

How often one cleans and conditions their car interior depends on many factors: initial condition of leather, climate, exposure to sun and how often the car is used. Obviously an interior that is nearly new will not need as much as one that is old and has been neglected. Dry climates and extended sun exposure are very hard on leather and will require more frequent applications. If the car is used often then it is

important to keep the leather clean, even if the complete process is skipped. All the products I mentioned have some emollients in the cleaner to prevent it from drying out the leather. In my opinion for most conditions a complete clean and condition of an interior once or twice a year is sufficient.

As always, read the directions for any product you choose completely before using. Another important tip is to test the product in a discreet place of your interior to make sure it has no adverse effects on the leather. One last tidbit, does your interior creak and groan as you drive down the road? Remember to clean and condition between cushions and any places where two surfaces meet each other including the wind-lacing around the door frames. I hope these tips will help everyone enjoy and be proud of their PMCs.

Thank you for the questions and keep them coming. Please send your questions to Ronny at ronnyshaver@ronnysgarage.com.

Happy Motoring!
Ronny