



A small cloth patch is carefully positioned behind the tear.



The leather glue is then used to fix the patch in place.



Imperfections are 'filled' with 'Repair Compound' and coloured. The colour is first 'dabbed' on with a sponge, working into creases (below).



These splits had been repaired previously, with poor results.



The splits have been repaired with patches glued behind the damage, filled with 'Repair Compound', and recoloured (below).



# Save That Old Leather

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This issue contains an article from Clayton Spear regarding the excellent talk given at the DLOC Spring Conference by our guest speaker Aline Angus, by coincidence I had just effected some badly needed repairs to the leather seats in a Barker Special Sports. I am a great believer in conservation and would rather preserve than replace any item, but as Aline mentioned in her write up there comes a time when the product is no longer fit for purpose and will require replacement. I thought it had reached this point with the seats in this car but decided that I would have one last attempt at repair, the method described by Aline was similar to the one I adopted.

I carried out some 'on line' research and settled on a repair method described by 'The Furniture Clinic' ([www.furnitureclinic.co.uk](http://www.furnitureclinic.co.uk)). Their website was very informative, and even better, a follow up phone call (0191 482 6112) produced more helpful advice. I purchased a leather repair kit from them and a large full colouring kit, I wanted to restore the colour of my seats to a deep maroon rather than the existing blotchy brown and red, which had been brought about by them being previously re-coloured. The upholstery had also been the subject of many mostly unsuccessful repairs, some carried out by me.

The products were ordered by telephone and arrived the next day, I always appreciate prompt despatch, even if I do not wish to tackle the job straight away, it is nice to be able to study the instructions and examine the product before rushing into the job.

The method of operation is described in an excellent instruction sheet with a helpline number clearly listed, I was very glad of this as I had a question regarding a large tear which I was able to discuss in detail. (I will come back to this later).

One feature which particularly appealed to me about this particular method is that the seat is not stripped down, the repairs are made with the seat covers on the frames from the surface of the leather, this is a huge bonus to anyone with only rudimentary trimming skills.

The first task is to clean the leather, this alone makes a huge difference, the repair area is then lightly abraded with a scourer dampened with 'leather prep' solution. The kit comes with everything you need to effect repairs to rips, holes, cigarette burns or scuffs and is very simple to use, as with any task of this type, the more time you take over it, the better the end result will be. Those of you with more patience than I have, will certainly get better results than mine!

The tear is glued into place using a backing cloth cut to size and the adhesive which is provided, I applied this with an old paint brush which I kept close by in a jar of thinners, after a little practice I found my method worked well. Very deep creases should be gently cut open and treated as a split or tear, this sounds drastic, but the crease will surely split open if it is not repaired, do it now and save yourself having to repeat the process later on! The glue is then allowed to dry (I left mine overnight), the leather may be 'worked' together to ensure a good fit or in the case of a split caused by the leather stressing and stretching, left a little 'open' to prevent it splitting again, the gap in the repair will be filled with what I thought was the best part of the kit a 'repair compound'.

The compound, which is creamy in consistency is simply smoothed onto the repair, using a spatula, to fill back to the surface of the surrounding leather, several light coats may be required, and each coat must be left to dry before re-applying. Just as you would with a stone chip on your car's paint-work, you then flat the compound back with Wet'N'Dry paper (supplied). Rather than using the compound straight from the jar, I transferred a useable amount onto a small dish, thus preventing the product from drying out in the jar and stopping dirt and grit from contaminating the unused compound. This part of the job should certainly not be hurried, I took extra time on some of the smaller damaged areas and was delighted with almost invisible repairs, however my seats were very bad and towards the end I started to move the job along (partly because the larger repairs are very much 'experimental'). Once satisfied with my repairs I got the colouring kit out. If you are just repairing a split or tear and not re-colouring the entire seat you need to simply, 'dab' some colouring on to the repair. With practice, invisible repairs are possible, I

found with the method I adopted, the repairs took on the appearance of a crease, in my opinion this effect is perfect for well used leather.

As my seats required full re-colouring, I also purchased a full colour kit, (again the product supplied was first class). I have previously used a chemical based pigment which gave good results but was very smelly and came with a hazard warning, in fact it made me feel quite nauseous when I used it. This product is water based, the smell is almost non-existent, and I found it very 'user friendly'.

Once the repairs had been made, all of the leather was gently rubbed with a scourer and a cotton bud soaked with the leather prep solution, and then wiped over with a cloth dampened with the product, a second solution is used to remove any waxes and silicone that might be contaminating the leather. Using the sponge provided, I then 'dabbed' the colour onto the leather, paying close attention to the seams and creases. The product was then left to dry and a repeat application added, the appearance at this point is awful, it looks blotchy and uneven, however the instructions explain that at this stage the intention is to give a background colour and to get pigment into the seams. The next step is to add a couple of coats of colour with an airbrush, the colouring kit comes with one, along with several compressed air canisters. These work very well but are a little slow to use, I preferred my 'spotting gun' attached to a small compressor, 'The Furniture Clinic' will actually loan you a compressor free of charge!

Once the colour had been applied and a good even finish achieved, I sprayed on the top coat sealant, this is an important part of the process and provides the final satin surface which is apparently 'breathable' but prevents the colour from rubbing off. It looked so good that I had to resist the temptation to touch it! The next day I finished with a light application of my favourite hide food. (see also "Hell For Leather on Page 21")

My leather was at the point where it needed replacement, several people had commented that it spoilt an otherwise nice car, it really did look awful. The drivers seat base had many splits and tears, and some areas had worn into holes, the seat back top sections were horrible, the drivers seat had three distinct gaping tears between 3 and 4 inches long, the huge split on the passenger seat had what I can best describe as a large 'W' shaped rip (see photograph opposite page top r/h col), was well over a foot long and ran just above the piping. I was advised by 'The Furniture Clinic' that their repair method was only suitable for splits of up to about 4 inches, and that this damage would probably require professional attention. However as I progressed with my smaller repairs (and there were literally dozens of them), I became confident that this split could be tackled. Using a long strip of linen (sourced from the scrap bin at a fabric shop), I cut a suitable patch and glued it to the back of the piping, I left it to set overnight then carefully glued the damaged leather onto it, the large split was then filled with the compound as earlier described and later the entire seat was coloured. The repairs have not brought the leather back to a brand new appearance, but it is now very tidy, looking used but presentable, rather like an antique chesterfield sofa should look. I think the photographs on the opposite page speak for themselves and the entire effect is so pleasing, that the critical eye is no longer drawn to the defects.

As a satisfied customer I would recommend this product, I had set a budget of several thousands of pounds to replace this leather, in the event I spent only a very small fraction of this sum, the repair kit in particular I thought excellent value for money. 'The Furniture Clinic' have a range of stock colours which are ideal if you plan to re-colour the entire interior, but I imagine a colour matched to your own leather will give a far better result, especially if you are only making a localised repair. A sample of your leather needs to be sent and the colour will be closely matched (I have not tried this service).

I am assured by 'The Furniture Clinic' that the repairs will stand up to wear and tear, I have now used the car on dozens of occasions and so far none of the new repairs have failed, this contrasts with previous repair attempts; several splits on the drivers seat, repaired using leather patches and super glue, failed almost as soon as the car was put back into use!