

“Leather Specialist Reveals 8 Little-Known Leather Care Tips!”



(For Top Finished Leathers Only)

By Paul Ford

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Introduction

Have you ever wondered if it's possible to care and repair your leather upholstery ... *without having to hire a professional leather restorer?*



First of all, let me introduce myself ...

My name is Paul Ford and I've been professionally restoring and repairing leather in New Zealand, since 1982.

How Did I Get Into The Leather Restoration Business?

It all started way back in 1980, when I bought a franchise for repairing and recolouring vinyl. You'll remember, back in those days, vinyl was used in cars. The bulk of my customers at that time were car dealers.

One day, a dealer said to me, *"If you can find a way to recolour leather, just like the original, you'll make a fortune"*.

Now, to put you in the picture, at that time, all sorts of brews were being used to tart up leather such as: lacquer and linseed oil, boot polish, wood stain, and in fact, one guy even used watered down acrylic house paint!

So, the idea of a professional leather restoration system was born!

My first port of call ... the tanneries. After all, if they made the leather in the first place, they'd be happy to help me find a finishing system ...right?

Wrong!

That's when I realised, the leather industry was a closed and very secretive institution ... that door was DEFINITELY closed!

So I Created My Own Leather Finishing System!

However, not one to give up, I decided to create a system using the materials I *did* have . . . vinyl spray.

I called in the expertise of an industrial chemist who agreed to work with me. By using different additives to make the finish softer and improve the adhesion, we eventually perfected a system, which made leather look *exactly like the*

original.

Using this vinyl system, my reputation grew very quickly and I was refinishing the interiors of a wide range of exotic cars.

This was in the mid-'80's when Jaguars, Daimlers, Rolls Royce's, BMW's and other European cars being imported into NZ around that time.

Many of these cars had faded leather upholstery which devalued them quite considerably. The reason being, the pigments being used in leather, back then, were not fade resistant like they are today.

So as you can imagine, my finishing system added tremendous value to these cars, making them very saleable.

Now, The Tanneries Took Notice!

Some time later, I received a phone call from one of the tanneries. Apparently, they had seen and tested some of my work and found it performed as good as the original!

The reason they called, was, leather furniture was really on the increase and they were desperate to find someone up to standard, to carry out warranty work.

"Okay, But Here Are MY Terms!"

So, as you can imagine, I found myself in a very good bargaining position. I agreed to help them, provided they met the following conditions:

- ◆ I wanted access to their top finishing technician;
- ◆ I wanted to learn how leather was made from start to finish
- ◆ I wanted to be able to buy the proper leather finishing products at cost
- ◆ I wanted to be kept up to date with all the latest technology!

Sounds reasonable ... doesn't it?

The Business Grew At A Phenomenal Rate!

Well, the rest is history. From there I built the business to the point where I was employing several staff.

We were restoring everything from leather lounge suites, yacht interiors, car

upholstery, colour matching and finishing hides for furniture designers and architects, warranty work for furniture retailers, manufacturers . . . and of course the tanneries.

There you have it ... that's enough about me.

Now let's get into my leather care tips!

Tip #1 ...

“You Need To Know What Type Of Leather You Have”

This is a question that trips up a lot of people.

So, the first thing I want to do is unravel the confusion and uncertainty over the many different types of leathers used in upholstery.

Now, without boring you with needless technical detail, let me show you, in simple, everyday language, what the differences are between the seemingly endless types of leathers out there.

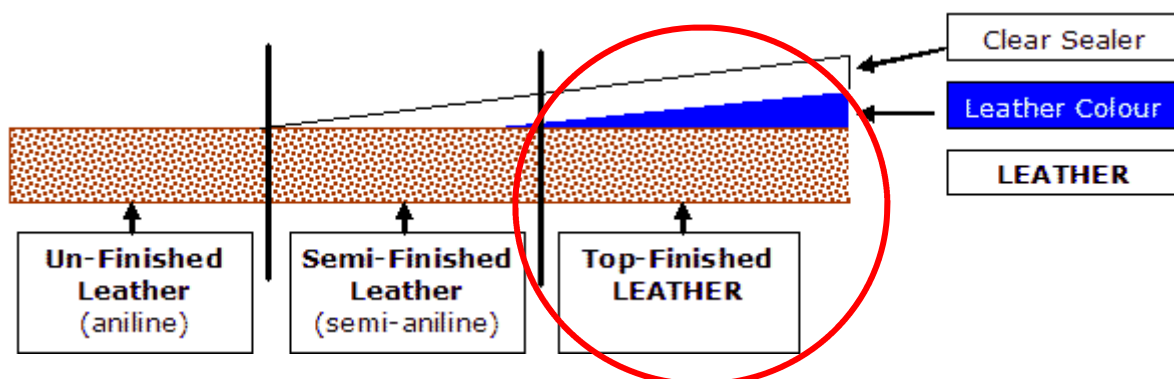
Upholstery leather can be divided into 3 main categories:

- 1. Top Finished Leather**
- 2. Semi-Finished Leather**
- 3. Un-Finished Leather**

If you take a look at this diagram below, you'll see how the 3 are divided.

You'll also notice the varying degrees of COLOUR and CLEAR SEALER being used in each category.

NOTE: I've circled Top Finished Leather in red because that is the focus of this report.



Let's take a closer look at each category.

UNFINISHED LEATHER (Aniline):

Also referred to as aniline leather. This leather is usually dyed; has NO leather colour on the surface; has NO clear sealer. So, in other words, this leather is very porous.

- PROS Feels warm, soft and buttery
 Looks very natural
- CONS: Prone to staining and soiling . . . very much like cloth
 The dye is NOT UV resistant so it will fade easily
 Shows scratches very easily



SEMI-FINISHED LEATHER (Semi Aniline):

Also referred to as semi-aniline leather. This type of leather is also dyed like unfinished or aniline leather, but can have anything from a very light to a heavier clear sealer for added protection.

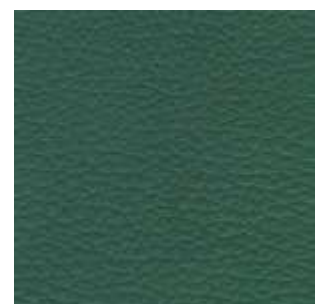
- PROS Feels warm and soft
 Looks very natural
 Less prone to soiling or staining
- CONS: The dye is NOT UV resistant so it will fade easily



TOP FINISHED LEATHER:

Top finished leather, however has a pigmented colour over the surface and is finished with a clear sealer.

- PROS Hard wearing
 Easy to clean
 Less likely to stain
 More fade resistant
- CONS: Doesn't feel as soft or warm as the above leathers
 Feels slightly firmer than the above leathers



Top Finished Leather is by far the most serviceable and durable of the 3 leather types.

As a general rule, the leather in cars, boats, and a large proportion of leather used for furniture is **top finished leather**. And that's what we will be focusing on . . . *TOP FINISHED LEATHER*.

Here's A Simple Test ...

If you're not sure what type of leather you have, here's a quick and easy way to find out:

- ◆ **Find an area NOT subject to wear and tear, such as behind a seat cushion**
- ◆ **Wet your finger and press firmly into the leather for about 15 seconds.**

If after removing your finger, the leather has turned dark, then you have unfinished or aniline leather. On the other hand, if your leather has NOT changed colour, then it is either semi-finished or top finished leather.

But remember, if you are unsure . . . always ASK.

Well, that's a quick overview on the different leather types. Hopefully I've explained it well enough for you. At this point, you will know more about the different leather types than many retailers!

A Trap To Avoid

Here's a story illustrating a very common situation I hear a lot ... one that you can now avoid:

"A few weeks ago, I bought a beautiful leather suite from XYZ store. On the show room floor it looked magnificent. It was covered in aniline leather and we were told that it was the best, and most durable leather you can get. We were very excited when it arrived at our home . . . it looked absolutely stunning. We carefully positioned it in our lounge which is very warm and gets the sun most of the day. However, the other day, something TERRIBLE happened. One of my kids smeared chocolate over the seat cushions and to top it off, spilt his soft drink as well. I tried to wipe it off, but I can't get rid of the stain!!"

Not Being Informed Is Costly!

The problem, of course, is the type of leather purchased was NOT suitable for the environment intended it for.

If TOP FINISHED Leather had been purchased, the chocolate and the drink could have easily been cleaned off without any staining.

So you see, by understanding the different types of leathers, you are in a position of power when it comes to choosing the RIGHT leather for your home.

Now, don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with the aniline or semi aniline leathers . . . as long as you know their limitations.

Okay. So far, we've looked at the 3 different types of leathers used in leather upholstery.

It's very important you understand what I'm showing you because each concept presented, builds on the previous one, or in other words, lays a solid foundation for what is coming up.

Tip #2 ...

“Understand What Most People Don't Know About Top Finished Leather!”

When people look at leather upholstery, they generally assume the colour of the leather is a solid colour all the way through, from the top of the leather through to the underside.

Now, this may come as a bit of a surprise but the colour you are looking at is in fact **SPRAYED ON** and is a very thin film on the surface of the leather.

Let me explain ...

BEFORE the colour is sprayed onto the surface of the leather, it is first of all, dyed or stained to a similar colour to the finished colour. (see examples on the right)

For example, royal blue leather will have been dyed blue, chocolate brown leather will have been dyed brown.

You get the idea.

If you want to see the dyed colour of your leather, turn it upside down and there it is.



Why Is Leather Dyed?

There are 2 main reasons:

- 1.** The furniture manufacturers stitch the leather panels together with sewing machines. When the needles pass through the leather, the last thing they want is to see a clashing colour in the stitching holes.
- 2.** It acts like a colour-matched primer. Because the leather is stained to a *related colour*, the finishers in the tannery don't need to apply as many colour coats to get coverage, which of course, is a cost saving.

Now, if you have leather more than 20 years old and you happen to see the underside, you'll notice the dyed colour may NOT related to the finished colour.

Why? Because back in the 'good o'l days', tanneries had a very limited range of dyes available to them. Today, technology has raced ahead, and so has the colour range of dyes.

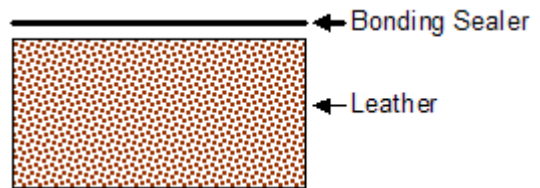
Once dyed, leather is then sprayed or top finished.

How Leather Gets To Be TOP FINISHED

Here's what happens ...

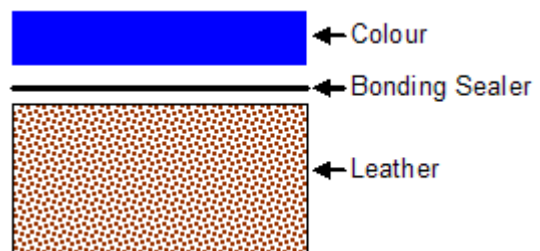
STEP 1:-

A clear bonding sealer is wiped over the leather to provide maximum adhesion for the following processes.



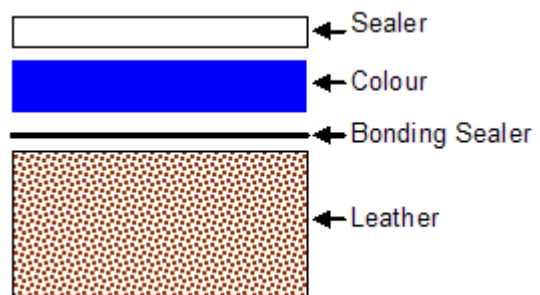
STEP 2:-

The colour is sprayed on. This is a mixture of acrylic and urethane resins with pigment added. Usually 6 to 7 coats are applied.



STEP 3:-

A high performance clear sealer is sprayed on. This gives the leather good wearing properties. The sealer also contains special waxes and silicones to give it a certain 'feel'.



So that's a very simple overview of how leather gets to be Top Finished. Drilling down a little deeper, under the umbrella of Top Finished Leather, there are 3 different types of Top Finished Leathers ...

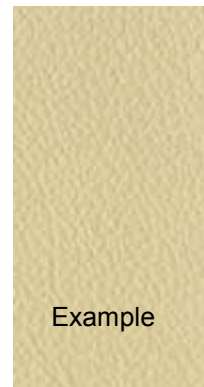
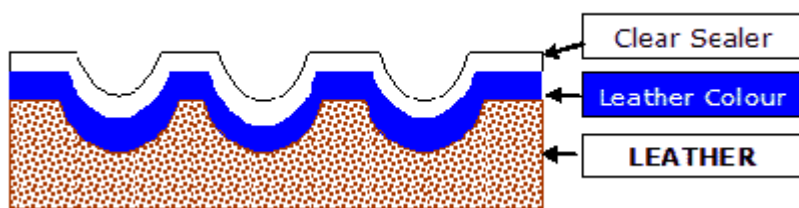
Tip #3 ...

“Know What Type Of Leather Finish You Have”

There are 3 basic types of finishes on Top Finished Leathers

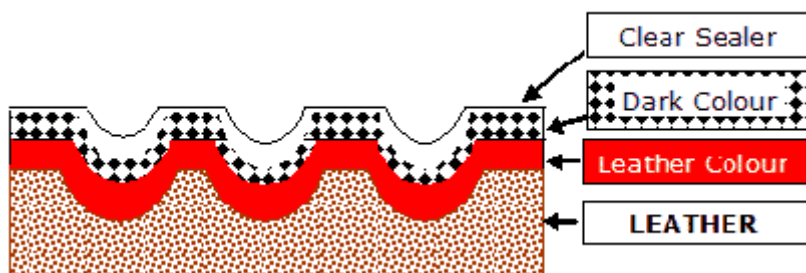
The following drawings are MAGNIFIED cross-sections of leather, showing the highs and lows of the grain.

1:- FULLY PIGMENTED LEATHER



This is the most HARD WEARING and the most popular of all the leather finishes. It is produced by the process we've just talked about. It consists of several coats of colour followed by a clear sealer.

2:- ANTIQUE LEATHER



The antique effect is achieved by first applying several coats of a base colour, for example: light red or tan. Then, a fine mist coat of a darker colour, such as black, is sprayed over the surface to give the leather a 2-tone mottled effect.

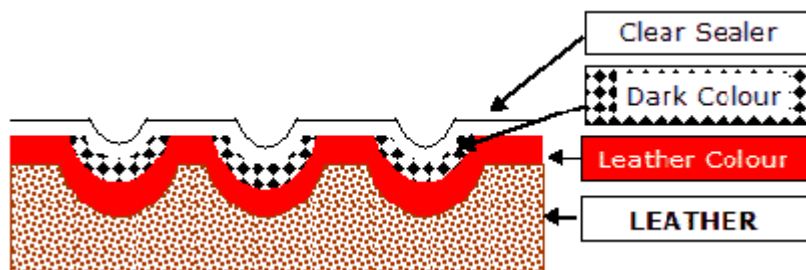
The darker colour is semitransparent allowing the base colour to show through. A clear sealer completes the process.

If you have antique leather and you notice a bright colour strangely appearing on seat cushions, arms or other higher wearing areas, this is because the clear sealer and the darker over-sprayed colour have worn away exposing the base colour.



Antiqued leathers are more difficult to maintain so if you are in the market to buy new leather furniture, this is something you need to be aware of.

3:- WYPER LEATHER



The wyper process is similar to the antique process except the darker colour is wiped off once the upholstery is put together, using a special solvent.

This exposes the lighter colour on the peaks of the leather grain, leaving the darker colour sitting in the troughs of the grain.

Once again, a clear sealer completes the process. This type of effect is very popular in rolled armed, deep buttoned furniture giving it a traditional, time-worn look.

So remember ...

The colour of your leather is a very thin film over the top and is NOT bullet proof, despite what you may have been told.

Tip #4 ...

“It’s Easier To Keep Your Leather In Top Condition ... If You Know What Destroys It!”

We’ve just talked about Top Finished Leather and how the colour is a **very thin film over the surface**. You only need to scuff your leather to see how thin it really is.

So now you know how thin the leather finish is, it makes a whole lot of sense to find out how to keep it in top condition, right?

Many people who buy leather upholstery are told by the retailer, leather is very durable and hard wearing, needing very little care and will last a lifetime!

Absolute rubbish! Nothing will last a life time without proper care and maintenance!

If you don't believe me, have a look at these photos. None of these made it to 10 years!



Pretty ugly huh? As you can see, expecting leather, with a very thin finish to be virtually bullet-proof is total fantasy.



If you would like to prevent your leather looking like these, then you're about to find out how to **SAVE** thousands of dollars in replacement and restoration fees.

What Ruins Leather Upholstery?

Well, the short answer is, **LACK** of maintenance and/or exposure to **HARMFULL** products.

Extensive testing has been carried out by independent leather testing authorities to find out what destroys leather.

The results showed that many **household chemicals** dramatically reduced it’s life expectancy.

Some of these are:

- **Sunscreen lotion**
- **Skin moisturiser—**
- **Fly spray**
- **Air freshener**
- **Hair gel**
- **Detergents etc.**

Furthermore . . . it was also discovered that many leather products sold to consumers, *actually caused leather to wear out FASTER!*

Why?

Because, many of these products contain **bees wax , silicone and other surfactants** that will ETCH INTO the leather finish, undoing the binders which hold the finish resins together , causing the finish to wear off pre-maturely and . . . severely reducing the life expectancy of leather!

Furthermore, **direct sunlight, intense heat** and anything else that **heats or dries out the air in your room**, such as a dehumidifier, will eventually cause the moisture content in your leather to evaporate . . . *Drying out your leather, resulting in cracking, shrinkage and loss of flexibility.*

Now, I completely understand if you're feeling a little anxious at this point, especially if you've been using some of these products, or your leather has been getting a beating by the sun..

Here's The GOOD News ...

If leather testing authorities can easily detect products that DESTROY leather, then obviously their testing will reveal products that IMPROVE the life of leather, right?

Well, this brings me to my next tip ...

Tip #5 ...

“Never Use Any Leather Products Which Have NOT Been Tested And Approved By An Independent Leather Testing Authority!”

The testing which I talked about in the last tip, were carried out by LASRA (Leather And Shoe Research Association) based in Wanganui, New Zealand. LASRA is highly respected in the leather industry worldwide and all of their testing is done to the internationally recognised ISO standards.



I want to introduce you to LASRA, so you know that what I'm showing you are not my personal opinions ... but facts based on scientific proof.

From my perspective, being a specialist in the leather industry, I have to be EXTREMELY careful which products I recommend, because my reputation is on the line.

Which is the reason why I DON'T use or recommend any products that have NOT been tested and approved by LASRA ... PERIOD!

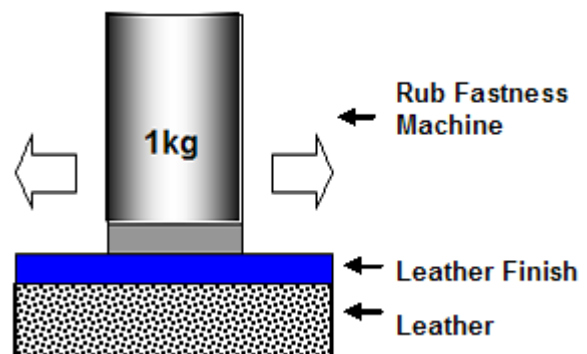
The Rub Fastness Test

I want to bring your attention to one of the tests performed by LASRA, called the **RUB FASTNESS TEST**. This test simulates normal wear and tear leather is subject to. Here's how it works:

A sample of leather to be tested, is placed into a machine, where a felt block weighing 1kg is mechanically rubbed back and forth over the surface of the leather.

The number of times the felt block passes over the leather is counted.

The machine is kept running until the leather finish starts to wear off.



Now, to put you in the picture, normal top finished upholstery leather should be able to withstand **500 rubs** before the colour starts to wear through ... 500 is the required industry standard.

Did you know that virtually ALL of the leather care products tested by LASRA **actually FAILED?**

In fact, just recently, a manufacturer of household products produced a leather care product claiming to substantially increase the wear-ability of leather upholstery. It was marketed by a large retail chain. Someone bought some and had it tested by LASRA. LASRA concluded this particular product ACCELERATED the deterioration of leather ... because it contained silicone ... a **known destroyer of leather finishes!** Ouch!

So you see, just because the label says so, doesn't mean a thing!

Next, I'd like to show you a leather care system (leather cleaner, conditioner and protector) which DID received LASRA's stamp of approval.

Tip #6 ...

“Here’s A Leather Care System, Scientifically Proven To DOUBLE The Wear-Ability Of Leather!”

The leather care system (cleaner, conditioner and protector) approved by LASRA is the PELLE brand. In fact, the testing resulted in some unexpected findings. Let me explain:

We’ve just talking about the rub fastness test, right?

Well, LASRA tested 2 pieces of leather. One had been treated with Pelle, the other hadn’t.

The machine was run up to 500 rubs where the *untreated* leather started to break down.

At 500 rubs, the Pelle treated leather showed no signs of wear.

The machine was then taken up to 1,000 rubs and the Pelle treated leather still showed no signs of wear.

At this point, LASRA concluded that 1,000 rubs was a significant achievement and no further rub testing was necessary.

Here’s an extract from their report:

“When used as directed, the Pelle Leather Care Products improved the wear life of the leather significantly. When pre-treated with the Conditioner/Protector and allowed to dry, the wear life increased and progressively **built up a resistance that would be measured by a 100% increase**”

Here’s How The Pelle System Works

Pelle produce a leather care system called the "Pelle Master Kit" consisting of 2 main products:

- A leather cleaner
- A leather protector/conditioner

Here's how it works . . .

First, the leather is thoroughly cleaned with the **leather cleaner** which has been specially formulated to remove all the dirt, contamination and other foreign chemicals, without harming your leather finish in any way.



Next, the **conditioner/protector** is applied. (These were originally 2 separate products: conditioner, and protector but now they are combined into one, making them a lot more effective) This is a combination of special tanners waxes, oils and conditioners designed to do 2 very important things:

- Slowly release special tanners oil into the pores of your leather to help keep it soft and supple.
- Form an invisible, sacrificial, wax barrier over your leather. In effect, it provides a protective shield. It's job is to stop dirt and other foreign bodies from touching your leather finish . . . in other words, it keeps the bad stuff suspended in the wax.

Now, it's important to realise, this protection will last for between 4 to 6 months, because it will eventually wear off . . . *and that's the whole point* . . . because when you clean your leather again (it should be cleaned every 4 to 6 months), the leather cleaner will strip off the protective film with all the contamination embedded in it . . . leaving your original leather untouched!

Brilliant! So, every time you clean your leather, you **MUST** reapply the conditioner/protector for maximum benefit.

These 2 products work hand-in-glove and they're simple to use.

So, as you can see, this is a simple yet extremely effect way to keep your leather in top condition ... and have the peace of mind of using a system independently tested **AND HIGHLY RECOMMENDED** by an international leather testing authority.

Tip #7 ...

“Here’s A Quick And Easy Way To Soften Leather!”

If your leather is losing its suppleness, especially in areas exposed to direct sunlight, then here’s what you can do about it.

When leather is made in the tannery, special tanners oils are impregnated into the leather to maintain a certain percentage of moisture.

Now, what happens is, once the leather has been made up into upholstery and exposed to heat and sunlight, this **moisture level drops, reducing the flexibility of the leather, causing it to become firmer and less supple.**

In extreme cases, the leather becomes hard and shrinks, *causing the upholstery to tear along the stitching!*

The Pelle Leather Softener contains the **exact same oils used in new leather**, so you can use it to soften your own leather, quickly and easily.



Yes, the Pelle Conditioner/Protector replenishes the lost moisture content but the leather softener is that multiplied by 10! In other words, it’s the original conditioner on STEROIDS! It is used in ADDITION to the Pelle Master Kit.

The steps are very simple ...

1. Thoroughly clean your leather with the **Pelle Leather Cleaner**
2. Spray the **Pelle Leather Softener** onto the areas you would like to soften. Spread the Leather Softener evenly and leave for about 1 hour to soak into the leather.
3. Repeat step 2, several times, then leave overnight to soak in.
4. Lightly wipe off the residue with **Pelle Leather Cleaner**
5. Apply the **Pelle Condition/Protector**

Tip #8 ...

“How To Repair Minor Scuffs In Leather Upholstery !”

So far, we’ve talked about how you can care for your leather with a system proven to significantly improve its wear-ability.

Now, here’s how you can quickly and easily repair minor leather damage such as:

- Scratches
- Scuffs
- Abrasions

... without having to replace panels or hire a leather restorer to do it for you.

As you know, the leather, with constant use, can show worn and grazed patches as shown in the first picture.

Normally, to get this fixed, requires money to be spent on one of the following: an upholsterer to replace the offending panel or a leather restoration expert to work his magic.

Not any more! Here’s a simple DIY system that will save you a fortune!

It’s called the ...

DIY Leather Repair Kit

This kit contains the products you will need to repair your own minor leather damage, without any specialised equipment.

It contains:

- leather prep



- leather glue
- filler
- a tube of leather resin called '**scratch repair**'

As we've already talked about, when leather is made, it has the colour sprayed over the surface followed by a clear sealer for durability.



Well, in this '**scratch repair**' resin, the **colour AND the sealer are combined** into ONE product for easy application and is custom colour matched to a small sample of leather which you'll need to provide.

The other benefits are ...

- All of the products are **water soluble**.
- **Colour-fast** ... won't come off on your clothes.
- **No special equipment** needed.
- You don't have to worry about colour matching because this kit is **professionally colour matched** to *your leather sample*.
- The repair products have been tested and approved by LASRA

So there you have it ... 8 tips to help you keep your leather in pristine condition. I hope you enjoyed this little report and have found it helpful.

On the next page I have compiled a list of resources.

Yours Sincerely

Paul Ford

www.leatherhelp.co.nz

Helpful Resources

- **Where To Purchase The Pelle Products**

You can order any of these products directly from my website via credit card and have them delivered to your door ... anywhere worldwide. Here's the link:

<http://www.leatherhelp.co.nz/leather-shop.htm>

By the way, if you are worried about the products being from New Zealand, the cost of postage is insignificant when you consider the currency exchange and the quality of the products you'll be getting. And as we say here in NZ ... "*Get over it!*"

- **List Of Video Tutorials**

You can watch over my shoulder as I show you how to clean, condition, protect and repair leather.

<http://www.leatherhelp.co.nz/leather-tutorials.htm>

- **More Information Pages**

For more detailed information, check out:

<http://www.leatherhelp.co.nz>

- **Leather Restoration Workshop Manual**

This is a workshop manual and set of tutorials I've created which contains my simple, step-by-step leather restoration method I've been using for over 26 years. If you are interested in starting your own leather business, then this could be of interest to you.

<http://www.leatherhelp.co.nz/workshop-manual-trade.htm>