

Cleaning the leather seats of a Bentley

by *Chris Howarth*

The leather, which those of you with really good memories will recall was one of the reasons for getting the Bentley in the first place, has been something that I've spent quite a lot of time on. Whilst Penny's fur is easy to remove, her paw prints are much more obvious on the magnolia leather than on the black fabric of both the MG B and our Peugeot 206!

Over the last year I've tried a range of lotions & potions on the leather, with varying degrees of success. Expense seems to be no measure of effectiveness...

The instructions on most leather cleaners run along the lines of "put a small quantity onto the leather & rub it gently with a damp cloth. Leave for at least ten minutes, or up to 24 hours if significantly soiled, then rub with a dry cloth". This is OK, sort of, but there is a significant problem when the leather has the sort of creases that are part of the character of leather, because the aforementioned damp cloth does not get down into them, so, whilst the smooth highlands become quite clean, the lowlands are left as dark lines, which means that the leather just doesn't look clean.

One of the potions that I tried was a "leather balm", which was about the consistency of Utterly Butterly. I worked a fairly generous coating in & left it for a couple of days and gave it a rub over. After a few days I felt that, rather than cleaning the leather, the balm had left a coating that had attracted dirt, although it had probably soaked into the leather too.

Not quite back to the drawing board, but I needed to give this some thought.

The problem being getting into the creases so, something like a brush seemed to be indicated. I went round to Buxton Discount Centre and found a soft scrubbing brush, probably as stiff as a nail brush, but bigger - £1 - and I asked whether they had leather cleaner - yes, a spray bottle - £1! Can't be bitten at that.

Aimée, my daughter in law, who knows about these things, looked at the ingredients & told me that it contains soaps & lanolin - sounds OK. So I took pictures of the seats and armrests and gingerly sprayed the driver's seat, which tends to suffer most as not only do I use it more than any other seat, but Penny feels that is where she should be if I am not. Getting it just wet, I gently scrubbed with a circular motion and the results were DRAMATIC. I was really pleased and set to and did a seat each evening for a few days. There is a lot of leather - if it ain't wood trim or carpet it is leather! The only bit I haven't yet done is the headlining, which doesn't seem to get dirty!

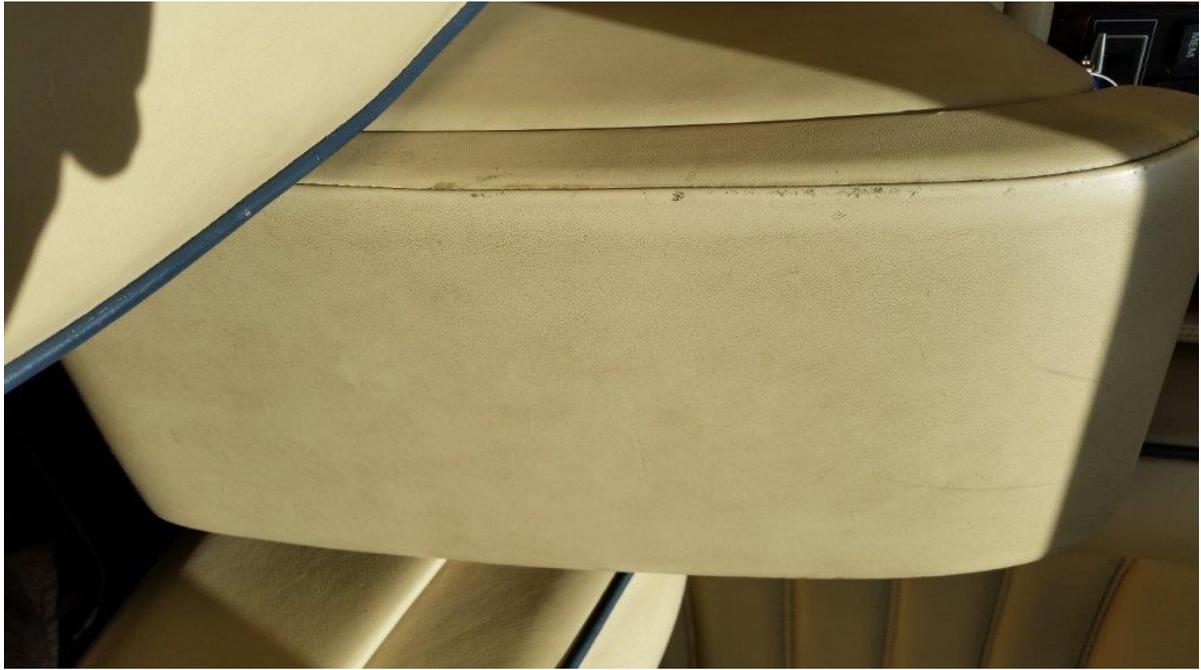
The photographs are really quite impressive:-



Arm rest before



Arm rest after



Before



After



Seat – cleaned on left – original on right

The only slight downside is that because the majority of the leather looks so much better, the small number of places where the leather finish had cracked was more noticeable.

Mike and I were admiring a Bentley at Didsbury Show which looked really good inside, partly which inspired me to put the effort into trying to clean the leather. Talking to the owner he told us that the finish on leather is a type of paint and he had repainted all of his seats. You live and learn – I had always thought that leather was dyed. This could be a way of sorting the cracks.

I spoke to Colourtone, one of the advertisers in our magazine who have supported us for a fair number of years, and asked them about leather paint. Certainly they can do it but they have to make a small test mix and let it dry to match it. I took the armrest off and left it with them. At the second mix we agreed that it was as close a match as possible and they mixed a pint – not an old fashioned Imperial pint, but a US pint! Apparently the product is American and so the formulations are for US pints.

Having got it I have touched in some of the affected areas and I am waiting with interest to see how it settles down as it really dries.