

928 Seat Leather Refurbishment

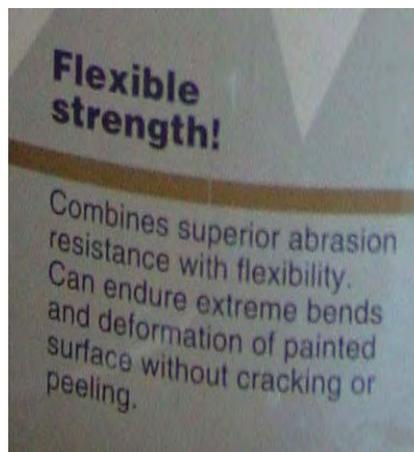
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My 928 driver's seat was suffering from the too-common bolster rash. That's the pattern of literally wear and tear damage that seems to afflict a lot of 928's these days. It seems to be caused by wearing clothes when entering and leaving the car. There's one good way to avoid this damage, but the judge told me not to use it again except in the privacy of my own garage. Since I actually drive the car in public, the damage occurred.

Normal options for repair include replacement of the damaged leather section, replacement of the whole seat cover, or replacement of the whole seat. None of those were very appealing, mostly because of cost and schedule issues. I drive the car as my regular getting-around car, so taking a few weeks to get repairs or a whole cover replacement just isn't in the cards right now. Replacement seats tend to be used and in worse shape than the one's I have already.

I had been following a Rennlist 928 group thread started by user JPTL on the east coast. See <http://forums.renntlist.com/rennforums/showthread.php?t=271245> for history and background on this project. In that discussion, J.P. uses a locally-available Duron-branded interior acrylic latex paint in semi-gloss, color matched to his leather sample, as part of a repair to a deteriorating steering wheel cover. The usual discussions followed, including questions about durability and application. I archived the whole discussion for later reference.

It seems that Duron paint is not sold here on the west coast, so I invested some time in a visit to my local specialty paint store (Jill's Paint, on Largo Ave. in the Atwater Village section of Los Angeles.) They don't carry Duron paint and had not heard of it, so I described the application so they could make a recommendation. The paint guru there immediately recommended "Break Through" latex. They had used it to successfully recolor canvas awnings on storefronts, where the wind causes the canvas to flex and flap constantly.



Sounded like the ideal product, especially the part where it's also tough enough to use on concrete floors.

The paint store spent a bit of time trimming and tuning the tint recommendation that the computer made from my leather color sample, to get the paint color just right. The only downside to this paint is that it only sells in gallons, so whatever color you choose, you'll have a lifetime supply of that color. Were I to do this again, I'd have them break the gallon into quarts right away, and only tint one of the quarts at a time for different projects.

The driver's seatback was worn to the point where there were several pretty serious cracks in the bolster already, including a couple gashes that went through the leather face and seriously into the backing. The bolster on the bottom had some cracking, but not nearly as serious as the damage to the seatback bolster.



The first step after removing the seat from the car was a very thorough cleaning of all the leather surfaces. I started off with a mild soap solution and leather cleaner, but needed some stronger pH-neutral detergent in a few places where there were more serious dirt and skin oil deposits. Once the leather was clean and dry, it was time to go to work on the damage area to get it ready for paint. A little 220-grit sandpaper was used to soften the edges of the cracks. I used a small scissors to trim the frayed fiber backing that was sticking through from the larger crack, and followed that with a little bit of the sandpaper.

Then it was on to putting a little paint on the damaged areas. The first coats were applied after the paint was thinned about 10% with water. A foam brush was used to help avoid brush marks, and the surface was immediately dry-brushed with a clean foam brush to even out the finish texture. The thinning and the dry brushing conspired to cause the color to lighten more towards gold as it dried, but still the color was very close.

After the first two very thin and very dry coats, the voids from the larger cracks were still obvious.



I had thoroughly read the instructions for the Leatherique repair system, including the use of their filler paste. Then I thought more about the duty, and decided that a flexible acrylic filler, one that will stay flexible, is really the product I was looking for. I found some in my own painting supply box, disguised as a tube of acrylic painter's caulk. The caulk comes in a few colors, including white, dark brown, and gold/bronze. This is "Alex" brand painter's caulk available at Home Depot and Lowes, if you need to go buy some. This stuff grows old on the shelf at home, so don't risk project success because you might be too frugal to spend a couple dollars on a fresh tube. I tried mixing white and bronze a few times to get the bronze lighter, but it was never as even in color as I thought would be necessary so I used the white color only.

Application of the 'filler' is quite simple. Squeeze a bit on your finger and push it into the void you are filling. I applied three thin coats of the stuff, with a very light 220-grit sanding between coats to knock down the edges a little. The last coat was applied so that it barely laps over the edge of the void, hopefully protecting and securing the raw edges of the leather surrounding the void. The whole area was very lightly sanded, and the final coat of paint was applied. This time, no thinning and no wet- or dry-brushing after the last coat of paint is applied and spread.

The results are fairly impressive. The price for leaving the edges of the filler a little higher than the edges of the surrounding leather is small, once the final color coat is applied. However, unless you go looking for them, those repairs disappear.



The big test is durability. I only used maybe an ounce of paint out of that gallon, so if it needs a little touch-up every once in a while, I think I can cover that.

If anyone in the Los Angeles area needs a few ounces to do repairs on their Cashmere leather 928 seats, you are welcome to some. My car is a December 1988 build, 1989 S4 model. I don't know how much color variation there is from batch to batch on the seat leathers, so of course you do this at your own risk.

This document describes a repair or maintenance task for my own personal car. It does not suggest that you should try the described repair or maintenance on your car. Individual cars vary, owner skills vary, working conditions vary, and available products vary. In other words, you are on your own.

I am interesting in hearing about experiences gained after using this method, as well as suggestions on possible ways to improve either the method or the description. Please e-mail your suggestions and responses to me at dr.bobf@att.net. I'd be happy to include the appropriate updates and improvements in future versions of this description.

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