

Leather Care 101

A Very Abbreviated Guide

to the Care and Feeding of Your Leather Gear

...most of which is probably pretty obvious, but just in case ...

Submitted by Sgt Jones

Recently, many people have asked me for advice regarding leather care. Though I am by no means an authority on the topic, I do feel an obligation to be able to provide some form of answer since I have begun manufacturing and selling leather gear.

If you are starting out with good equipment, your leather items need only a modest amount of attention to keep them in good shape. Most problems people encounter are the result of either *not enough* or *too much* attention. There are certain actions which may seem reasonable at the time, but the results of which can be so devastating that it may ruin your equipment. As a result, I propose the two following rules regarding leather care. If you've heard these before, bear with me, they're worth repeating.

First, NEVER dry your wet boots by the fire or any other source of high heat. It can split and crack and warp your gear so much that it can ruin it beyond repair. Drying soaked leather should be done slowly, avoiding heat. The best is to leave it in a dry location out of direct sunlight with a good flow of air, and let it dry slowly. In a camp situation, simulate these conditions as best as you can.

Second, be cautious of how much "care" you give your leather gear. I'm referring to all the different oils and conditioners that are available. I still have not found that "secret" formula that is the best lotion for all my equipment – until I do, my advice is simply to use what you like ... in moderation. Oil (like cod, neat's-foot) softens leather by changing the direction of the fibers. Too much of it will weaken the leather making it susceptible to stretching and breakage. Additionally, if it is applied too thickly, it can over-saturate the leather, and can become gummy and sticky (learned this one the hard way).

Well, these are my two big rules. Of course, these are not the only rules, and other folks with more experience may add or delete from what I have said. However, as a general practice, if you allow your wet leather to dry slowly, and are sparing in your application of oil or other preservatives, you'll be doing your gear a great service.

Another important point is to keep your leather clean, especially items that are subjected to movement, stress and friction (like brogans). I'll delve into that a bit more in a future article. If you have any questions in the meantime, feel free to contact me, and I'll do what I can to help.