

Leather Harness Maintenance and Detailing

Clean Leather – Murphy's Oil Soap, Baking Soda, or Mr. Clean

Mix three parts warm water with one part of one of the above cleaning solutions. Clean entire plain leather part of the harness, using a toothbrush to get into tight areas. (See below for cleaning patent leather and metal.) Dismantle and unbuckle each piece of the harness as you go. If dirt has built up on the underside of the harness, use a gentle scrub pad to remove the dirt. Wipe the buckles with a soft rag, removing the green "gunk" that accumulates where the metal meets the leather. Check for excessive wear, broken keepers, cracked leather, bent buckle tongues, broken stitching, and worn buckles. Get any broken parts fixed.



Clean bit – mild liquid dish soap & water

Remove bit from the bridle. SOAK it with soapy water while cleaning the rest of the bridle. Wipe with a soft rag. Do not use a scrub pad on the bit, as it will scratch it. Rinse well and dry.



Re-dye – Fiebing's Leather Dye* in the color of the harness

Do this step only if your harness has areas that are faded and will not hold the color from the following "polishing" step. Follow the directions on the leather dye.

Condition the Leather – Product that lets the leather breathe, Leather Honey*, Leather Therapy* etc. No Neatsfoot or linseed oil which will rot the stitching.

Leather needs to be "fed" to keep the moisture and avoid cracking. Good conditioned leather should be supple. Apply the conditioner when the harness is slightly damp, as the pores are open and the conditioner can be absorbed fully. Depending upon conditions of storage, harness should be conditioned at least once a year. If the harness is used in the rain, it should be conditioned as soon as possible after use (ironically, water will "dry out" the leather). If you have conditioned your harness, it may be necessary to wait for the conditioner to penetrate before you can go on to the next step of polishing the leather.



Polish the Leather – Kiwi Shoe Polish paste in color of harness; Leather Sheen*

Using a small brush or rag, dip into the shoe polish sparingly and then dip the brush/rag and the polish in cold water before applying it to the leather. Allow the paste to dry. Using a soft rag or a shoeshine brush, buff the leather until it shines. If the leather won't shine, apply Leather Sheen first.



Polish the Metal – Flitz Metal Polish* (the best polish we have found!)

Follow directions on the package. Avoid getting the polish on the leather. Well-polished brass should be bright, and have more "gleam" than "gold tones". Plan on lots of time to do this step, because it will take time to do well! Brass will tarnish in twelve hours, so it needs to be polished again (at least gone over with a cloth) before classes. Stainless or chrome-plated harness can be polished with metal polish as well.



Clean Patent Leather – Pledge or Endust wipes or on a cloth. No Armor All or Vaseline. Spray the dusting spray on the cloth and immediately apply it to the patent leather.



Shine the Leather – Fiebing's Instant Shine*

Right before the class, go over the plain leather with the Fiebing's Instant Shine sponge in the color of the harness. (Also remember to go over your shoes or boots.)

Hang Your Harness – IVC Harness Racks*

Any harness stored for a long time should be taken apart and hung on a harness rack(s) to maintain its shape. Cover with clean fabric. Old sheets or towels work well.



Sources

Cuffey, Robyn and Winkel, Jaye-Allison, "Buying and Caring for Harness." CarriageDriving.net. Spring 2002
Freedman, David. "Harness Maintenance." [Driving Digest](http://DrivingDigest.com). March/April 2004: DD3
"Harness Detailing with Lynna Spence." [The Whip](http://TheWhip.com). March 2003: 24.

* Product carried by [Iowa Valley Carriage](http://IowaValleyCarriage.com)

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