

# Custom Auto Interiors

Don Taylor and Ron "The Stitcher" Mangus

**Planning • Seats • Door Panels • Armrests  
Trunks • Carpets • Dune Buggies  
Reveal Moldings • Convertible Tops • Modesty Panels**



# 18 • Vinyl and Leather Repair



**Photo 1.** Meet Catherine Barley, “The Vinyl Lady.” She arrives in her station wagon, loaded with vinyl dyes and repair materials. She’s even equipped with all the power tools she needs to get the job done quickly.



**Photos 2 & 3.** The process turns out to be very simple. On the very small scratches she applies a drop or two of instant glue. Next, with 400-grit wet-or-dry sand paper, she gently sands over the scratch and glue. This closes the scratch and sands away any fibers or bits of material left standing. It works with both leather and vinyl.



**Photo 4.** Catherine goes around the car, repairing each scratch. To repair about 10 scratches took less than 10 minutes.

Every trimmer has had the terrible misfortune of somehow damaging the leather or vinyl of a newly upholstered piece of interior. The most common is jumping into a car, plopping your behind into the seat, and discovering you have a pair of shears in your back pocket! The second most common problem is to drag a finished seat or panel over a sharp object on the bench. In the past, the only resolution to the problem was to replace the damaged panel. The wonderful world of science has come to our rescue in the form of a new skill we call vinyl repair.

This trick has been around since the mid-sixties but is only now a real solution to some of these problems. In the early days, the repair was long, involved and usually more visible than the original problem. Now, minor scratches can easily be removed in only a matter of minutes. Larger repairs take only a little longer. Of course, great tears still require the old-fashioned repair: replacement.

While working on the book at his shop, Ron got a call from one of his customers to tell him he wished to sell his car and would like a few repairs made to freshen the interior. Among the needed repairs were a few scratches in the leather. To solve this part of the problem, Ron called on Catherine Barley, affectionately known as “The Vinyl Lady” to make the necessary repairs. She arrived in a few hours, ready to perform her magic.



**Photos 5 & 6.** The second step is to clean the leather around all the repairs. In the photo, she sprays the leather with a non-detergent cleaner and wipes away the excess. This removes any oils from skin, cleaners, waxes and even mold-release agent. This prepares the leather to be dyed.



**Photo 7.** Before she can spray any dye, the material must be perfectly dry. She uses a heat gun to rid the leather of any remaining moisture.



**Photo 8.** Here begins the artistic part of the job. Catherine must now mix her vinyl dyes to match the color of the leather (or vinyl) exactly. She tried hard to explain how she did it, but neither Don or Ron thought they could jump right in and mix the colors—even after her excellent explanation.

After three or four attempts, she hit it dead on. In the photo she's matching her test (on a piece of chipboard) to the seat. When she has it just right, she sprays a coat of dye over the recently repaired area. Any minor scratches left by the 400-grit sand paper will be filled in with the dye.



**Photo 9.** To speed the drying process, Catherine uses the heat gun again. In less than 20 minutes she had all the scratches repaired.

During our discussions, Catherine explained she could also repair things like cigarette burns and minor tears. On the tears, she asks the trim shop to cement a patch to the back of it. This closes the tear and supports it, then, it can be handled in the same way as a burn.

Catherine has bottles of clear vinyl she can use to fill voids. She also has small sheets of vinyl with grain embossed into them. On a burn, she sands away any ash and raised vinyl. Then, she applies a few drops of liquid vinyl to the remaining hole or void in the tear. When the vinyl has dried for a couple of minutes, she applies the embossed side of her vinyl patch to the repair. The embossing is transferred to the semi-wet vinyl, reproducing the grain pattern around it. The repair is finished by spraying the repair with vinyl dye.

We asked Catherine if there were others like her and where could they be found. She replied there were none like her, but there were many who could do this type

of work. She suggested any trimmer needing this type of help should call a local new-car dealership that sells their used cars from their own lot. The used-car dealer requires the services of a vinyl-repair expert on a frequent and ongoing basis. He or she will direct you to them.



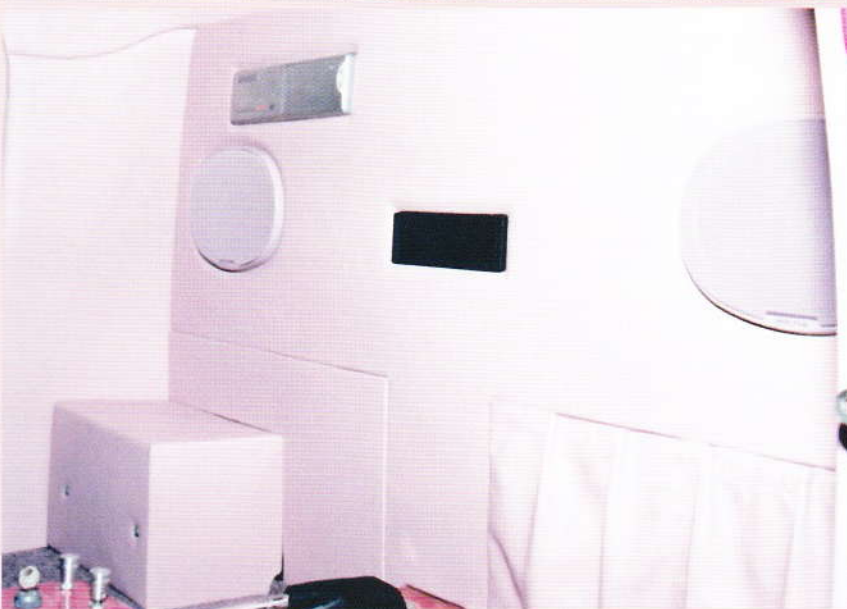
**Photos 10 & 11.** Ron wanted Catherine to dye some of the parts of the Willys to match the leather. Here, she has matched the color of the leather exactly and has begun to spray the speaker grills and door-opener reveal moldings. Check the photo of the finished speaker panel on page 50 to see how well she did her job.



**Photo 17.** This is the exit area of the elastic. Frank will pull it snug then staple it to the panel. Don't make the elastic too tight. It will overstretch when the pocket is opened and tear away from the panel.



**Photo 18.** The project is finished by stapling the two sides to the big panel. Be careful stapling the bottom of the pleats to be sure they retain their correct shape and position.



**Photos 19 & 20.** The finished panel and pocket. You can better understand now how the elastic works within the pocket. Notice also, the two speaker grills. These two grills have been vinyl-dyed to match the leather.

will fold the material together to make the pleat. Let's watch as he puts it all together.

Frank made a decision to make each pleat 1 inch tall. He therefore made his pleat lines 2 inches apart. He then cut a slit about  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch long to accommodate  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch elastic. Each line then has a  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch slit in it, centered between the fold line and the edge of the material. This can be seen in photo 10. Here, Frank folded the material along line number two and sewed a seam as close to the edge of the fold as possible. In photo 11 he's threading the elastic through the slits in the edge. For another look at how the elastic is threaded through, look at the drawing on page 55.

Leaving a little elastic at each end, Frank now sews the second seam that forms the placket through which the elastic passes. Finishing the top of the pocket, Frank turns to the bottom.

Each pleat is folded, as shown in the drawing on page 55 and is sewn in place along the previous laid out line. The fabrication of the pocket is now finished and it can be fastened to the panel. Before it's attached to the main panel, it must be fastened to its own backing panel. Because our demonstration panel has only one finished edge (the others are part of the main panel) it is the one to which we've stapled the pocket. This can be seen in the photo of the finished job at left.

To finish the ends of the elastic, Frank cuts a small hole in the main panel and passes the elastic through. Note photo 16. He'll staple this to the back of the panel. Next, he cements the pocket panel to the main panel, stretches the elastic until it just starts to snug up and anchors the remaining end. He finishes by stapling the bottom and side to the main panel. The finished product is seen at left.

This type of panel can be placed anywhere. Some of the