

Caring For Your Riding Apparel

by Patricia Bosley

Whether you buy your clothes ready-made or have them created for you by a custom tailor, you can take a few simple steps to insure their longevity. Given the hectic pace of today's life, it can be tempting to send everything to the cleaners each time you wear them, but this can lead to premature aging or disintegration. A few precautionary measures can add years of useful life to all your garments.

A Few Tools

- A quality clothes brush, preferably with real hair bristles that are stiff enough to loosen up any dirt or mud that might set up on the surface of the fabric of your coats.

- A steamer, which you can use to remove wrinkles and the occasional dirt or stain that has worked its way into the weave of your fabric. These are now readily available at local stores and are reasonably priced.

- Properly sized clothes hangers, preferably of wood, make all the difference in maintaining the correct shape of the shoulders in jackets and the drape of pants and trousers. The frame of a good hanger should stop at the top of the sleeve head where the sleeve joins the shoulder of the jacket, and it should have a slightly bowed or wishbone shape to accommodate the natural drape of the jacket or shirt.

Some Habits of Care

This is simply a matter of getting into a few basic routines each time you wear any garment.

- At the end of the day hang your jacket on its hanger where air can circulate freely around the garment (often the shower rod works nicely). Do not hang it in the closet until it is fully aired out.

- Trousers and skirts should be treated the same way. Hang them from a hanger that has clips to hold the trouser either from the waist or hem; skirts should be hung from the waist.

- Drape sweaters across a shower rod or the back of a wooden chair – wherever air is able to circulate through the fibers, allowing odors picked up from the body and the

environment to be released.

- The next day, brush or shake the garment to loosen any remaining dirt. Use the steamer to freshen and release any lasting odors and wrinkles in the fabric.

Storing Clothes

- When hanging jackets, leave them unbuttoned and, when it's necessary to cover them, try to use cloth covers. Plastic and vinyl bags are great to use when traveling because they keep any liquids from reaching the clothes, but for longer-term storage, they are not as desirable. If you have to use them, leave them open or unzipped to ensure as much air circulation as possible.

- Cotton shirts, especially if you don't want to wash and iron them yourself, are best laundered without starch. Fine cloth will age and disintegrate at an accelerated rate when its pores are filled with starch. One of the beauties of cotton and linen is how they breathe, keeping the wearer cool in hot weather.

- Silk blouses and shirts should be hand washed or dry cleaned only when they require more attention than a steamer is able to do.

- Gentlemen's neckties should only go to the cleaners as a last resort; there are establishments that hand wash ties, but you can make most spots and stains disappear yourself using your steamer and/or some careful cold water "blotting" techniques.

Tailored Garments and Dry-Cleaning

Most better-quality men's and women's jackets are constructed by attaching the jacket fabric to an interfacing (either a canvas or other woven fabric) that gives shape and body to the garment. In some garments, this is done by fusing the two materials together by using high pressure

and high temperature. In other garments the two materials are actually attached to each other by stitching them together.

When these garments are "dry-cleaned," the heat and solvents that are used may cause the interfacing to come away from the jacket fabric and create a puckering effect. This usually happens when the cleaner either uses too much solvent in the cleaning process or too much heat in drying the garment.

With a garment from a mass manufacturer, this puckering problem can almost never be corrected. On the other hand, while most custom made jackets do not have this problem, the tailor can fix it if it occurs – one of the "hidden" benefits of custom-made clothing.



A Word on Feet

Or, more precisely, footwear. Leather footwear requires its own special maintenance to keep it healthy, especially the boots that traipse through manure and urine. It is important to clean leather as soon as possible after your activity. It is equally important to let the boots dry at normal room temperatures.

Clean the leather with a pH neutral product. This limits the damage from urine and sweat. Be especially careful to clean along the area where the leather "upper" joins the sole of the boot. Once the boot has dried overnight, you should apply whatever combination of conditioner, polish and oil that your bootmaker – or your own experience – suggest.

If you are not riding regularly, it is a good idea to use a conditioner followed by a paste wax polish approximately once a month, depending on the amount and conditions of wear. If using a creme polish, it is not necessary to use a conditioner, since it is part of the polish. When boots are new, rub mink

oil into all of the leather and then more frequently along the joining of the sole and the boot.

For those who ride in the elements and those who want to achieve the highest possible "gleam" in the show ring or dressage competitions, wax-based polish provides the dual benefit of protection from damp conditions and a relatively high shine. But the key to longevity for all of your leather footwear is to keep the underlying leather properly conditioned and shaped.

Wherever possible, use wooden "trees" for all of your boots and shoes. There are many types of trees available. Some bootmakers still supply wood trees at the same time they make a pair of boots, but this is becoming increasingly uncommon. So, even if you have to resort to commercially available trees, they are still far superior to plastic trees or the rolled newspaper solutions we have all seen. Newspaper causes mold by absorbing the moisture, creating a wet environment inside the leg of the boot. Plastic trees are spring-loaded and can cause the leather to be pushed out of shape.

The relationship between wood and leather is symbiotic. Wood absorbs the excess moisture from the leather keeping the wood from drying out and allowing the leather to release the proper amount of moisture to keep it healthy.

Perhaps even more than with your clothes, quality footwear is an investment. If you purchase high-quality boots and take reasonable care of them, they can last for many years. But, just as with your clothes, they will serve your needs best if you give them the kind of care they need.

About the Author:

Patricia (Trish) Bosley is the President of Bosley Brangier Custom Hand Tailored Apparel located in St. Michaels, Maryland. Founded over 12 years ago, Bosley Brangier specializes in custom-made business and equestrian clothing for both men and women. In addition, Trish provides individual wardrobe consulting advice to business professionals throughout the Mid-Atlantic region.