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## Caring for New Tack

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By Jim Robeson

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Do you look at the bloom on some new tack--the whitish haze saddlers call "talc"--and think you have to get it off? No, you don't; it's not bad for the leather. In fact, it's meant to be there.

Tanning, the process that turns cowhide into leather, dries the leather. Then, to restore moisture and pliability, the leather is "curried" with a mixture of tallow and cod-liver oil, leaving a clear residue that turns whitish as it dries; to see it, look closely at the grain of the saddle (top left photo).

Bloom rubs off so it'll disappear as you ride. To speed the process, just rub with a dry cloth. (Not all new tack arrives at the shop with bloom on it these days. More and more saddles, especially, are rubbed down before they're shipped from the manufacturers.) The usual way to darken new tack and help it break in is by oiling. Stop before you do too much--which probably means before you think you've done enough!

With a little piece of terrycloth or sponge or a small paintbrush, apply a very fine, very light coat of oil--preferably on the underside of flaps and skirts, as shown in the middle photo above. The leather won't darken as much, but the oil won't ooze out on your clothes. Neatsfoot oil is the traditional choice, but there are other good products for oiling tack, many based on neatsfoot oil, that are a little lighter and thinner, such as Lexol Neatsfoot Formula.

Don't oil leather that's soft already (saddle seats, for example), or subject to stretching (such as billets, stirrup leathers, and reins). And, because oil destroys glue's ability to stick, don't oil knee rolls (the foam will separate from the leather, which will wrinkle) or laminated strap goods.

Never "strip" your tack. Anything harsh just ruins the leather. Saddle and bridle leather is made to suit the job it has to do, so don't take out what the currying process put in. Lather tack well with a leather cleaner. Then rinse thoroughly, and condition.

One other pointer: Check the weather forecast before you ride. Water is harder on new tack than on older, conditioned tack, so you don't want to be caught out in the rain.

Excerpted from an article by expert saddler Jim Robeson that appeared in *Practical Horseman*

magazine.

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