

Machine Washing Leather Chaps

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OLDWICK, NJ--Leather chaps become one of your most personal garments. When new, they can be stiff, ornery, too tight in some spots, not tight enough in others. They wrinkle and bite flesh in some places, cut off the circulation in others. Over time, however, they stretch and soften. They mould to your unique anatomy and become so individual that no one else can wear them.

Over time, they also accumulate a patina of grime. Chaps are working garments. They get splattered with mud, marinate in sweat, and rub up against their share of manure, dust, chaff, and other dirty debris commonly found around barns.

Riders might be scrupulous about wearing clean jeans and shirts, but until recently, there wasn't much they could do about their chaps. Some have tried washing chaps but the only laundry products available for leather to date have been detergent-type cleaners which remove dirt but do not replace the lubricating oils in the leather's inner corium. The leather dries stiff and is actually weakened by the cleaning process. The only alternative has been to let the chaps become starched with sweat and grunge until the accumulated dirt destroyed the leather from the inside out. Then you just had to grit your teeth and go through the expense and agony of breaking in a new pair.

Thanks to the molecular synergy between two recently developed companion leather care products from Leather Therapy Products, however, riders can now safely wash suede or smooth-leather chaps in their home washing machine and recondition the leather at the same time. The cleaner works during the wash cycle to deep clean dirt and leave leather fibres with a negative ionic charge that attracts the more positively charged conditioning dressing during the rinse cycle. Riders can now throw grungy, hard-working leathers like chaps, half chaps, leather-seated breeches, and sheepskin saddle pads in their washing machine and pull them out cleaned, softened and supple.

Here are three easy steps for cleaning chaps:

PREPARATION: Brush off surface dirt. Close zippers to protect both leather surfaces and the washing machine tub finish from scratches. Turn smooth leather chaps inside out to protect their outer surface from abrasion by the washing machine's agitator. As with other garments, the stability of dyes can vary from manufacturer to manufacturer. Wash light and dark chaps separately. If you are washing two-toned chaps or mixing colours, test dye colour fastness in an inconspicuous spot.

WASHING: For lighter colours, set the washing machine for a small load on the permanent press cycle (cool water wash, cold water rinse). For darker colours, use the delicate cycle (cold water wash and rinse). Swish in the cleaner while the tub is filling with water. Put the dressing in your washing machine's rinse cycle dispenser. Then dunk those chaps in.

DRYING: Remove the damp chaps, unzip zippers, and lay the chaps flat to air dry away from heat or direct sun which can shrink leather fibres. On smooth leather apply a good amount of Leather Therapy's Laundry Rinse & Dressing to maintain flexibility while drying. Suede leathers actually soften up considerably when tossed for a few minutes in the Air Dry (NO heat) cycle of a dryer.

Working cowboys may view a pair of stained, beat up chaps as a status symbol to be preserved in their current state. For the rest of us, however, there's no more excuse for grungy chaps, mud-encrusted half chaps, or matted sheepskin pads. Modern chemistry now makes throwing them in the machine as easy as washing your jeans.