

Removing Ink from Your Leather

Written by Administrator

Monday, 26 October 2009 23:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 18 February 2010 14:57

Here is another article by Kevin Gillan of Advanced Leather Solutions in San Francisco, Ca. Thanks Kevin, you do great work. [Here is a link to his fine professional leather care product line.](#)

Ink on leather – Did the two year-old get a little artistic? Is the tot a budding Picasso perhaps? Or, is it a simple errant ink stripe from that pesky ball point pen? In either case ink on leather is a common problem and completely solvable. The only question is if it requires professional attention or, can you resolve the issue yourself.

Here are the basics:

1. Ink is primarily a dye. As such the ink has re-colored the leather. It is not harmful to the leather. So the problem is strictly aesthetic.
2. If you can get to it quickly, then using a damp cloth, attempt to transfer as much ink off the leather as you can before it sets in the leather. Gently wipe or blot. In a short period of time, the ink travels into the leather. Don't rub. The heat from the friction generated by rubbing can cause the ink to migrate more quickly into the leather, and possibly disturb or eliminate the leather's grain pattern. Keep in mind that once ink penetrates into the leather it essentially has re-colored the leather. No amount of aggressive rubbing will change that fact. You might also try a soft artist eraser, gently tracing the ink line. The objective is to pull the ink out before it has a chance to set.
3. Once it is set, removing ink from the leather is NOT a cleaning issue. In almost all cases, any cleaner used that is strong enough to pull out the ink, won't know the difference between the color of the ink and the color of the leather. Aggressive cleaning may remove the ink, but will also remove the leather color as well. And, aggressive cleaning chemicals will do more harm (pH damage) to the leather than the ink.
4. The use of ink sticks or other products advertised to remove ink is risky business. The active ingredient is a solvent intended to neutralize the ink. Its success depends on how sensitive your leather is to chemical intervention. If the finish on your leather is chemically

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resistant it may work, but then again, it may pull the color out of the leather, may simply smear the ink around, may pull the protective top coat from the leather, or may not do anything at all. Ink sticks and the like are clearly a "Buyer Beware" issue. Be careful.

5. Consider this - one attribute of ink is that it migrates. That is to say the ink moves. This means that an accidental ink stripe may be absorbed into the leather and present a gradually fading reference that dissipates within a few weeks. So, a minor ink stripe may disappear of its own accord. Therefore, as time is not critical, leave it alone for a few weeks and see what happens. It may disappear altogether or become faint enough as to no longer be an issue. However, if there is a high concentration of dye (i.e. permanent marker like a Sharpie pen) or a larger volume (ink spill) then what you see will be there for a long, long time.

6. There is a two-step process to resolve it:

- A solvent, (e.g. denatured alcohol) is used to neutralize the ink, knowing that it will in all likelihood affect the color of the leather. If you want to try this step yourself, then use a Q-Tip or like device moistened with alcohol and trail down the ink line. Keep turning the Q-Tip to a clean area so that you don't transfer the ink that has been absorbed by the Q-Tip back on the leather. If the ink has been neutralized, and you haven't disturbed the color, you're very lucky.

- If the color has been affected, then it's on to step # 2. Using an airbrush, and the properly mixed leather color, the offended area is airbrushed and viola - the problem disappears. The final step is to apply a top coat with the air brush. The top coat is the primary protection on the leather and it also dictates the sheen.

- It is important to note that simply coloring over the ink is likely not effective. Remember, one of ink's attributes is migration. If you simply color over, then the ink will migrate up through the color coating and present itself all over again

- If you do have set in ink, then let me know and I will help you. [Click here to contact Chris in the Baltimore/Washington area.](#)