

My comment in the last issue that there appeared to be some confusion over actual leather colours produced a very long and detailed response from Henk van Lith of HVL Exclusive Italian Interiors. Below, I have produced a short summary of his response which I hope you will find helpful. Henk has kindly permitted me to illustrate this piece with photos from his archive. [Ed]

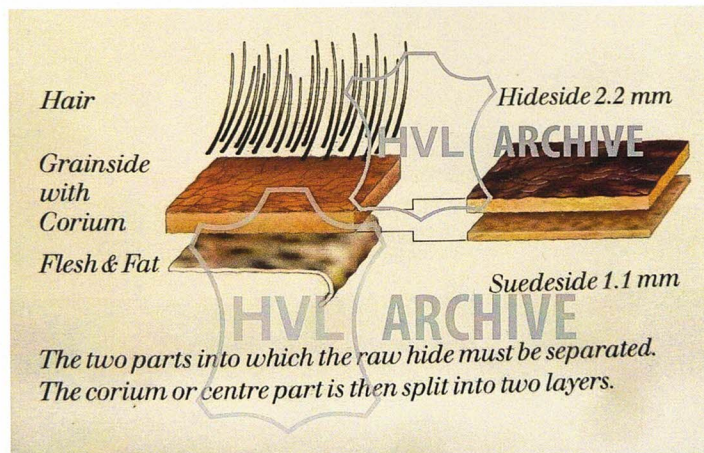
Connolly Leather Ltd was founded towards the end of the 19th Century and built up a highly respected reputation for supplying high quality leather, particularly in the world of prestige automobiles. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the period we are interested in, they supplied materials to most UK vehicle manufacturers and also to Ferrari and Maserati. Unfortunately, the company went into liquidation in 2002 following a disastrous attempt to expand into the US market. The situation post 2002 need not concern us here. What is important, however, is that HVL in the Netherlands acquired all the archives, samples and unused leather hides from the liquidators.

All classic Ferraris had interiors finished in pure natural leather which was manufactured by Connolly and also to a lesser extent by Arbo Tan, Roser, Bridge of Weir, Cogolo and Franzi. Hides are taken from the animals after slaughter and separated into two parts – the hide side and sued side. Hair openings on the hide are important as these allow the leather to breathe and nutrients from care products to be absorbed. The outer skin is then skived to the right thickness, to allow the leather to be worked. This thickness was about 1.0 to 1.2 mm for furniture applications but between 1.3 and 1.7 mm for Ferrari interiors. As a natural product the hides do show imperfections, described in Connolly's brochures as the "Charm of Nature". Quality control inspections were carried out before the hides left the factory: imperfections were expected but open wounds were marked as defects.

The imperfections can range from wrinkles resulting from the animal's movements and light scratches from foliage to deeper scratches from barbed wire and mosquito and other insect bites. Some installers reserved these pieces for covering panels or dashboards as a mark of authenticity. Not all customers wanted to see these imperfections on their beautiful car interiors, however and the Connolly trimmers would often have to waste over a third of each hide in order to maintain the desired quality.

Below: insect bites show up as imperfections.

Below right: wrinkles in the hide also appear as imperfections.



Top: part of the stock of HVL's original Connolly leathers.

Above: sectional drawings of a typical raw hide.

Right: using only the best pieces from the centre section of the hide can lead to much material being discarded.



LEATHER COLOURS

Every few years or so natural leather suppliers upgraded the products they supplied to car manufacturers. This meant that the method of manufacture could change and while the colour codes remained the same the colour and colour names could change as a result. The cattle feed could also affect the final result and therefore large quantities of the same colour were typically produced for each batch of hides. Also, when a new herd was introduced a formula adjustment would often be required to produce the same finished colour. All this meant that only the supplying factory knew how the leather was made and dyed in each batch. Therefore any replacements or repairs subsequently required could only be obtained from the manufacturer's stock of period correct leathers.

In 1978, Connolly introduced a new type of leather called Autolux which was thinner and softer but production of the original natural Vaumol leather continued until 1984. Most but not all 250 GTEs and 330 Americas were fitted with Connolly leather (there were perhaps 20 with Franzini and other leathers). These would have originally had the natural Vaumol leather and not the later Autolux type. It's also important to note that all 12 cylinder Ferraris had surface dyed leather up until 1984. It was not until the introduction of the 8 cylinder cars that the leather was vat dyed. Over the years, Ferrari issued many different sample books and in each period the colour name and method of production and texture changed.

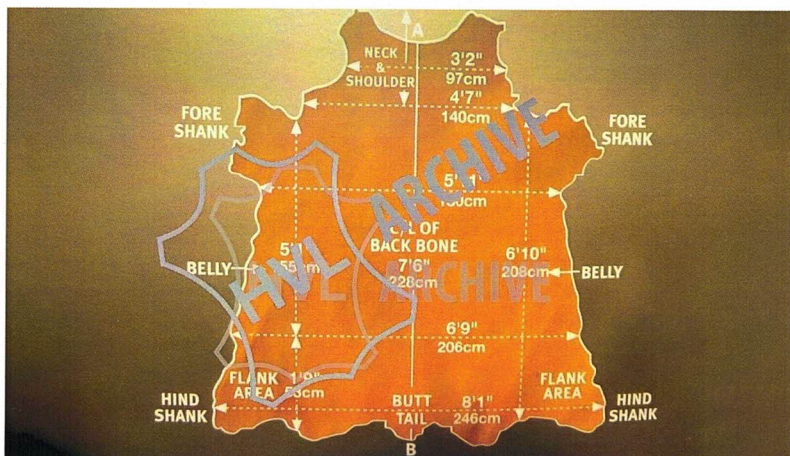
An extreme example of name changes is shown in the case of VM 3234 which started as String, then became Avorio (as on a few GTEs) then Beige, then Sand and finally Sabbia. Just quoting the name of a colour can produce very different results. Testa Di Moro is another good example of this since it appears in several different shades of dark brown. The challenge for restorers is to find the correct samples for 1960 to 1963, the period in which we are interested.

Fortunately, Henk van Lith has acquired all the Connolly archives and historical samples and can therefore advise on the right leather for each restoration. That is, the same leather colour, specification and texture as was fitted to the car originally.

Top right: some of the many sample swatches in the HVL archive.

Middle right: the different colours described as VM 3234.

Lower right: examples of the various shades described as Testa di Moro.



Below: the correct colour swatches for leather used to trim Ferraris between 1960 and 1964, including our GTEs and 330 Americas. Note that it is surface dyed.

