

# BOOT HILL

*The hypocrite's guide to cleaning boots by the staff of Dirt Bike who really didn't know how to do it properly and in the end had to ring up Murray's mum to find out.*

*Ten years ago we wouldn't have even contemplated writing an article like this. In those days one half of the dirt riding population didn't value their feet enough to wear proper boots, and the other half couldn't care less about cleaning them even if they did. Yes, we were stupid and tough back then.*

*Today's rider values his feet more. Not only is protective gear in but so is squeaky-clean colour co-ordinated clothing. You'll definitely lose points if you turn up wearing — **gasp!** scungy old boots.*

*We received so many letters from trend-conscious worried riders (well, one letter actually) that we decided we'd let you in on the secrets of how to keep your boots looking as if you've got a factory mechanic cleaning them for you.*



## LEATHER TAKES A HIDING

**M**ario Gucci would probably go away and have a good cry if he saw the torture that dirt boots have to endure.

We get them soaking wet, covered in mud and we singe ten dollars worth off them every time a hot crankcase makes contact with our shins. That's more than enough to fill a leather artisan with anguish.

But if Gucci then found out that most riders' concept of leathercare

meant throwing those same dirty wet boots into a dark damp shed until the next weekend he'd probably slash his wrists in a frenzy of Latin remorse.

We all know we shouldn't really do it, especially when you can pay up to \$200 for boots. Even top quality hide boots will turn into smelly rotten cardboard surprisingly quickly without basic care.

What we're going to do is give you some hot tips on how to break in new boots and how to revive old boots, so that you can stave off the

day when your boots finally crumple and rot and you have to swallow another \$200.

## THE FIRST STEP

If you bought a brand new pair of boots yesterday you're really in luck because we're about to reveal the secret of painless breaking in. If you follow our procedure you won't have to stumble around for a month missing gears, tripping over and feeling as though someone has nailed a plank to the bottom of each boot.

Our patented break-in secret was discovered by accident when one of our editors, who was wearing a brand new pair of boots, fell into the Colo River and spent ten minutes floundering round in thigh-deep water trying to get his bike onto dry land.

The new boots were saturated but during the day as they dried out the leather stretched, shrank and finished up conforming perfectly to the shape of his feet, making them, he swears, the most comfortable pair of boots he's ever owned.



We've refined the technique slightly. You can go and stand in the Colo River if you want to but we suggest you try our method in the comfort of your own home first.

First thing in the morning put on your usual riding socks under your never-worn-before boots. Then fill a couple of buckets with tepid water (no substitutes please, not even V8 juice) and then stand in the buckets until the water penetrates the boots and your toes are all horrible and wet. Then all you do is wear the boots all day. Walk around a lot. Go clean the bike in the garden, put on the new Metzlers, clean the car, anything, but keep the boots on as they slowly conform to the shape of your feet.

When the boots dry out they'll be as comfortable as your old ones — guaranteed.

**But, since water damages leather, your new boots must be treated before you use them in the dirt.**

Since we don't have any leather artisans on our staff and nobody really had a clue about treatments, we talked to Mrs Ray Wilkinson of Monza Imports (the people who distribute Alpine Star boots) and she turned out to be a genuine motorcycle rider who knew all about muddy boots because she cleans her own.

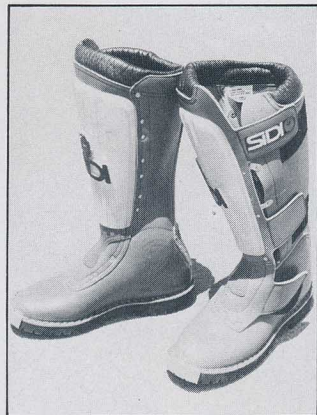
Before you do anything to leather boots, she told us, they must be dry. Resist the Impatient Person's solution of roasting the boots in front of a heater because extreme heat will damage them. Instead, scrunch up some newspaper and stuff it down into the feet, then put the boots behind a sunny window. In the summer it's fine to leave the boots in the garden to dry, but in wintertime moisture will rise up from the ground, penetrate the leather and they'll never dry out.

There are two ways of treating new and old boots that will make them supple, water resistant and protect them from dirt.

### NEATSFOOT OIL

Buy a can of disgusting, evil-smelling Neatsfoot Oil that they make by some ancient devil worship ritual. Get a pastry brush

and then coat the boots **thoroughly** with the oil. The first application will soak in very quickly. Leave the boots for an hour or so then give them another good going over.



The idea is that the oil will penetrate the leather until it's so full of oil that water can't get in. Keep on applying the oil at intervals until you've used up almost the entire tin. You can even pour a little inside the feet if you want. Then leave the boots overnight.

The disadvantage with this method is that your boots end up smelling vaguely like an abattoir and strange dogs will follow you around.

The advantage is that the leather will become soft and supple and the boots will be protected from mud and water, and dirt won't stick so easily. In fact all you do after a muddy ride is stamp your feet and the dirt will fall off.

### DUBBIN

The other hot tip treatment is a vaseline type product called DUBBIN which is made by the same company which makes Neatsfoot Oil.

For all we know DUBBIN is also made from sweet baby animals, but it doesn't smell half as bad as the oil.

Apply the DUBBIN liberally over the boots, letting them "stand" between coats. The theory's the same as for the oil — encourage the leather to soak up as much of

the vaseline as it will take.

Both these treatments will give a couple of months' protection, then all you do is repeat the process.

### CLIPS AND HINGES

A couple of other good tips from Ray Wilkinson of Monza Imports are to get hold of some sewing machine oil and lubricate the clip hinges with it. Apparently sewing machine oil is so light that it won't dribble down the boots and make a blobby mess. And if you want to keep the clips looking like new, paint them with clear varnish.

### CUFFS, SEAMS AND SOLES

Keep an eye on the top cuffs of your boots and get them stitched up immediately if they start to fray.

Watch the main stitching carefully. You can buy seam sealers which will stop the stitching from rotting and falling apart. And, lastly, get your soles repaired the instant you notice thinning or chewing up in the footpeg/insole area.

### NEW BOOTS FOR OLD

There's still time to revive your neglected old boots if you act fast.

Get some stiff brushes and brush off all that caked-in dirt. Then wipe the boots clean with a damp rag. Let the boots dry out and then give them the DUBBIN/NEATSFOOT OIL treatment described earlier. You'll almost hear the leather sighing with relief.

### BOOT POLISHES

You can get "waterproof" type boot polishes like "WET-PRUF" that are quite good and can be used in between proper treatment to keep the boots looking nice. Even ordinary boot polish is better than nothing and you can get neutral ones for two-tone flashy boots.

### TO SUM UP

After a ride stamp your feet to get most of the mud and dirt off. At home, and ideally as soon as possible after your ride, brush off the dirt and wipe the boots clean. Shove newspaper inside the feet and let them stand in a warm airy place to dry out. Re-apply DUBBIN

or NEATSFOOT OIL or polish and if you do all that you could get four or five years out of a pair of boots. Honest.

See, and you thought we were just going to suggest you go out and buy a pair of those trendy boot savers didn't you?

### PLASTIC VS LEATHER

Next to the two-stroke/four-stroke debate the plastic versus leather boot argument generates quite a bit of heat. We won't buy into that here except to say that there's no getting away from the fact that plastic boots are easier to clean and to care for.



Geoff Eldridge, our Dedicated Plastic Man, did a lot of smirking while we prepared this article. All he does is brush the mud off the boots, squirt Spray 'N' Wipe all over them, wipe them off, throw the liners into the wash and oil the hinges occasionally. Sickening.

### WHERE DO YOU GET IT?

NEATSFOOT OIL and DUBBIN can sometimes be hard to track down. We buy ours from the local horseriding/saddlery shop. You can also get them from genuine cobblers — those tiny shops that still repair shoes for you. Failing that, soccer players found out about Dubbin years ago and you could try the sports stores for the magic stuff.



# PLASTIC BOOTS

By a plastic boot wearer

## THE ARGUMENT

Far as I can see, there's no real argument. Plastic boots are so superior it's not funny. But on occasions I've been noted to exhibit the odd bit of bias, so if you're a leather boot freak feel free to skip this section.

But I can't see the point in wearing protective gear if it doesn't protect you, and that's the only reason you wear boots. Quite a bit of the

protection afforded by boots is lost, in my humble opinion, by all the lengths you must go to in getting them comfortable (or at least just below your agony threshold).

All this rubbing in of Neatsfoot Oil (urk!) and slathering on of Dubbin (purky!) might make your boots "conform to your feet" but it also makes them soft. And supple. And useless.

Go up to a brick wall. Place your nice comfortable soft supple leather boot against the wall, your toe resting on the wall about three or four inches above ground level.

Then press firmly downwards with the ball of your foot. Bet you ten to one that the tip of the boot folds upwards and allows most of your sole to come to rest flat on the ground.

What the hell protection is that for

your toes? Picture the wall as a tree stump, the ground as your footpeg, and imagine your foot slamming into that stump at 80 km/hr. Instant bend-a-rooney. Instant broken toes. Instant pain.

Plastic boots won't do it. No way. And in seven years of using plastic boots on legs with the weakest knees in the known universe, they don't rip knees to bits either, like the old wives' tales say they do.

But like they say, you get more feeling in leather boots. Sure. More feeling if you go barefoot, too. Nice soft leather is only one step removed from barefoot, in my biased books. No thanks. I'll stick with plastic.

## CARING FOR PLASTIC

Who cares for plastic boots? Not

me. Shove 'em in the shed till next time. Maybe spray 'em with Nifti or whatever and hose them off, wash the inners in the washing machine, but that's it.

It doesn't even worry me when they squeak like hell as I walk around before a ride, because at least I know for sure I'll still be walking around after the ride. What I'll be walking around doing is thinking of ways to spend the \$80 I saved.

## GETTING USED TO THEM

Sure, you have to get used to using plastic boots — changing gear, using the brake, sliding your foot around corners

But English riders had to get used to bikes with left hand gearshifting and they survived OK.

— Geoff Eldridge