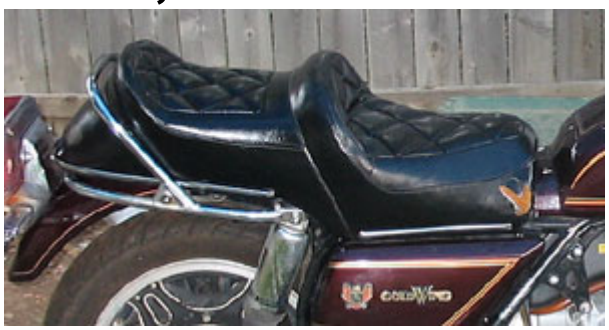
Stock Seat becomes Custom, GL1100



My stock seat was not in bad shape, yeah, it had a torn part on the right front and a half-inch tear on the lower left side ... not too bad overall. But, seams were starting to come apart a bit and it was really too low and not set back enough for my 38-inch inseam. A new Corbin is definitely not in my current toy budget and there's no sugar mama so I decided to take care of it on the last two days of my vacation.

Off to Hancock Fabrics to make my biggest investment in this project. Nice, marine grade, pliable Naugahyde type fabric was selling for $12 a yard. I need about a yard. But hey, what's that on the bargain table? It's heavy, rough-textured vinyl for $6!? I'll go with that! Wish I knew then what I know now. Total bill with upholstery needles, thread and foam pad: $16.45.

The seat was off because I pulled the carbs last week so I removed the chrome trim and pulled all the staples. Off with what's left of the clear plastic cover and into the shop.

A fine-tooth hacksaw blade took care of the passenger backrest in a snap. This was the best tool for this trimming job. I wanted a lower curve on the rear part but there's a hump in the pan for the passenger backrest. I cut it down to about a quarter-inch of that hump and then smoothed the rest into it.

Then I cut off the forward backrest so I could move it toward the rear. I trimmed the outside edges of the seat to blend into the rear. The lower portion of the backrest was then trimmed back about two inches and the upper part was glued on with contact cement. In the pic you can see the marks on the upper part where I'll cut it to blend in.

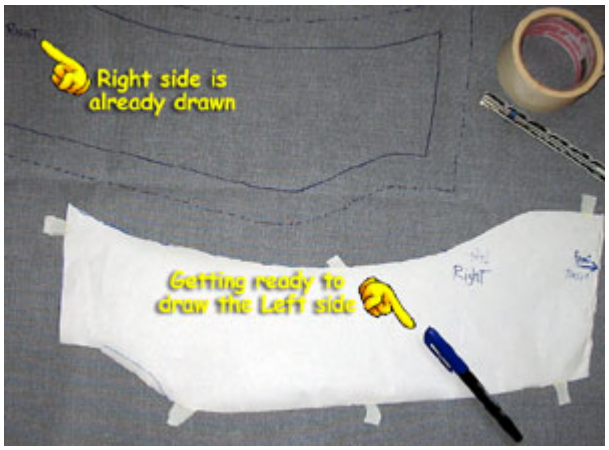
I slipped a one inch pad of dense foam between the seat pan and old foam because I always felt that it wasn't tall enough for me and was much too soft. Some of the exposed, newly cut parts have been “painted” with contact cement as I was afraid that, with use, the foam would break down quickly. The contact cement dries and is not tacky after about an hour when applied to the foam. The last step here was to wrap the whole thing in clear plastic “Saran” wrap.

Into the sewing room, which is actually the dining room where I setup the wife's machine.

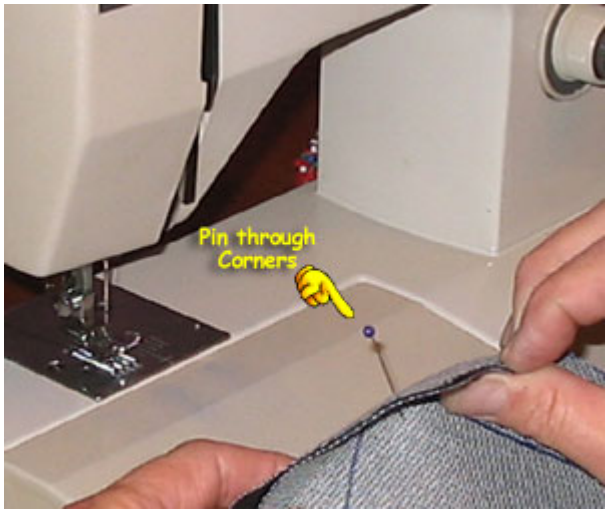
Define the pattern by marking and cutting thin paper to the exact “sewn” size of the pieces. Try to avoid too may seams meeting in the same place, I failed on this one and paid for it later. If too many corners come together the machine won't go through them and you end up doing a lot of hand stitching. That ain't fun. Pin and tape the pattern pieces to the seat. This helps to see if you'll have bad wrinkles that will be hard to pull out. I should have seen it coming on that backrest.

To get symmetrical pieces, I would trace it, fold it in half and tape it on the window. No light table so this filled the bill. Then decide on the best lines, mark and cut. Fit the paper back on the seat to make sure you done good. Don't like it, do it again. For the two sides of the front, I made one pattern and marked one side for right and the other for left.

With all the pattern pieces looking good when taped and pinned to the seat, move on to cutting out the pieces. Lay the vinyl, face-down, on the floor (or a huge table you won't mind scratching) and arrange the pattern pieces. Allow for extra material on all edges, I added 1-1/4 inch to the outside of all my edges. Sewn seams really only need about 3/4 inch but it would help to have 2 inches at the bottom where you'll be pulling it over and stapling.



Tape the pattern, face down, to the back of the vinyl. You're looking at the back of the pattern pieces now. In the pic, I've already drawn the right side piece and am getting ready to do the left. See, it says “Right” on the pattern. That's because the left side is face down. Not too confusing is it? After carefully sketching around the pattern, remove the tape and complete the lines. What we've just drawn are “sew” lines. Now, measure out, all the way around and mark the cut lines. These should be even on all pieces because you will be putting the vinyl face-to-face and will need to rely on the edges to get your seams straight.



Align the pieces and put a pin through the corners of your sew lines. Then you'll know exactly how the two pieces fit together.

Hold the two face-to-face pieces firmly and slide them into the machine. Put the foot down and start sewing. Most sewing machines can easily handle the pliable vinyl that you get at most fabric stores. This stuff I got was a bit too thick and stiff so I fought with it and the machine for far too long. I'm not much of a hand with sewing and have only done one other upholstery job in my life. That was a VW in the mid-70's so I really don't remember much of that. But I got through it, learned a lot and know that next time it will be better.

Back to the project. I moved the cover into the yard so the vinyl would heat up and be easier to work with.

Trim off all of the excess seam material to within about a quarter inch of the stitching. Hand sew any corners that didn't quite come together. See where the 3 seams meet at both ends of the scissors? Those corners were a royal pain in the pattootie. Hand stitching helped pull them in but they ended up very lumpy. Avoid this kind of seam battle at all costs. Catch it in the pattern stage before you get here.

I laid the cover in the sun for an hour to warm it up and make the next phase easier. The grill wasn't on but it probably would have helped with this stuff.

The backrest was the worst part of this job. I saw it coming when I was making the pattern, when I was test fitting and it was hard to sew and had too many small pieces. I should have hacked it off and trashed it while I had the chance.

Again, next time.

On with the stretching, stapling, stretching, stapling, stretching, un-stapling, re-stretching, cramping and more stretching and stapling.

You need a decent staple gun, the one I have is just about the least powerful one that will pull off this job. The staples to use are 1/4 inch. I also had a hair dryer handy to spot-heat trouble spots. This helped some with this material but would make a big difference when working with some of the more pliable vinyls. Be careful that you don't overheat, it will come apart on you.

Shown here is the stretching sequence that I used. Pull it over firm at the first mark and put in 3 or four closely spaced staples. Then directly opposite of that at 2, pull like the dickens and put in 3 or 4. Then pull like crazy at the front edge, #3 and put in 3 on each side of the mounting tab. Closely spaced. Here's where I had to pull out 1, 2 and 3 and start over. It was crooked. Anyway, you see the pattern. Just anchor and then stretch. Work the rest of the sides by angling toward the front. Then do the rear seat.

I am disappointed with the backrest, the wrinkles just won't come out of it. The cover doesn't fit the foam right. I added a small aluminum bar at the base in the front to pull it in some. It's attached through the seat and into the pan but even that didn't smooth it out. Ah, well, K-Sara, Sara, whatever will be will be.

Below is a comparison of the foam before and after cutting.

Now, I've got to fix those carbs so I can try this out. Overall I'm pleased with the results and happy that I did it. -- *Roady, 29 May 2008*