

## IS LEATHER YOUR BAG?

If you have worked with soft, stretchy cowhides and then with firm elk and molding leathers, you have perhaps wondered how the same animal can produce such different products. Of course, the poor animal could care less how the leather is finished. In fact, you might say it's no skin off his hide! The condition of the leather is controlled by the ingenuity of the tanner.

Our common elk leathers are tanned in a process called Chrome Tanning. The hides, as they come to the tannery, are in stiff, dirty, smelly bundles. The first steps are to make them soft and pliable and to remove the hair and dirt. This is done by soaking in a lime solution. When you approach a tannery you can smell this part of the process from some distance away!

After soaking, the hide must be sliced to take off any flesh and surplus thickness. It is then sliced down the back, so that from each hide we get a left and a right side. Perhaps you have held up a side of leather and noticed the neck, legs, and tail end of the animal—you are seeing only the left or right side.

The next step, after washing again in a chrome salt solution, is drying the hides on racks that pass through a huge dryer. From here the sides are smoothed, a color finish is sprayed on, and then each side goes through a plating machine to give a smooth glossy finish.

Good, firm, jacket leather is more expensive than strap leather or soft cowhides because the tanner must spend more time and effort to make it firm. Jacket, or molding, leather is made by a process called vegetable tanning. The hides are suspended in a solution made of bark, wood, and chemicals until each side has been well soaked. The hide is passed through several successive vats, each containing a little stronger solution than that contained in the preceding vat. After each side is well impregnated with the solution, the hides are then put out to one side to mature. This is a long, slow process that gives excellent results; but, because of the extra time

and handling, it is more expensive than other methods of tanning.

Soft, stretchy cowhides are made by a combination of tanning methods. The soft hides are put in tumblers containing dye and are spun until the dye has completely penetrated the hide. They are then stretched on frames to dry.

Leather is as old as man himself. Primitive man used hides to protect his feet, to power his slingshot, and to keep him warm. Today we have improved leather to make it soft or firm, but in all cases strong, long-lasting, and a thing of beauty.

Ray Bentley  
C. N. Waterhouse Leather Co.  
Boston, Mass. 02110

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir:

I have just read the comments of Dudley S. Childress in the December 1973 Journal regarding the use of the word "stump" to which I say Amen. For the past three years of my practice I have not used the word "stump" with the patient, but refer to the amputated limb as his limb. The patient is well aware of which limb I am talking.

In correspondence I have used the word "remaining limb" in lieu of stump. This is very similar to Mr. LeBlanc's "residual limb" and I am sure that either would suffice.

Sincerely,  
Loren B. Ceder, C.P.O.  
TACOMA BRACE & LIMB CO.