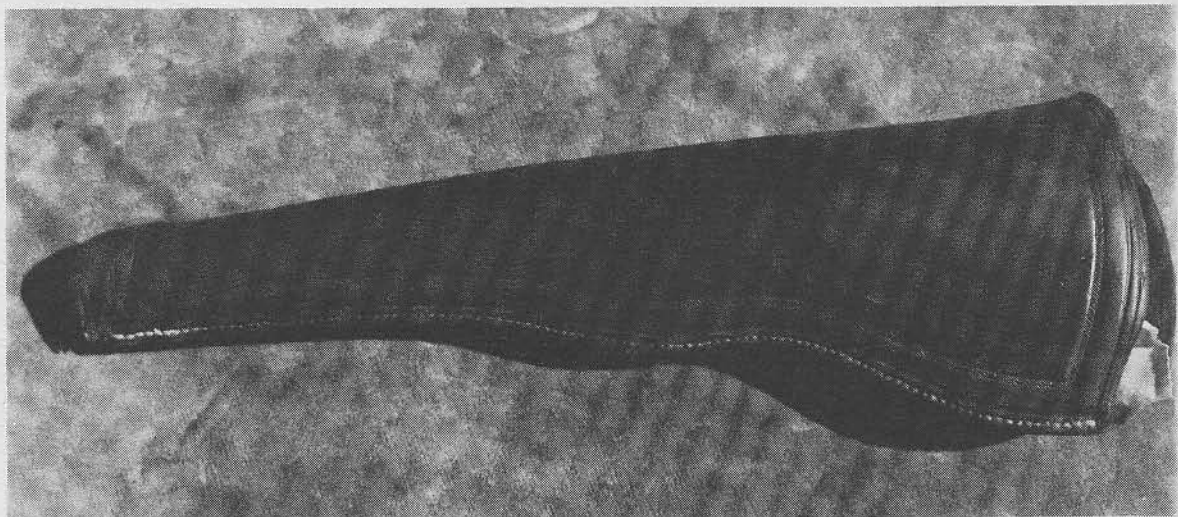




Chapter 21

LATHER YOUR LEATHER

*You Can Form-Fit Your Holsters And Sheaths For
Comfort, Cleaning Them At The Same Time*



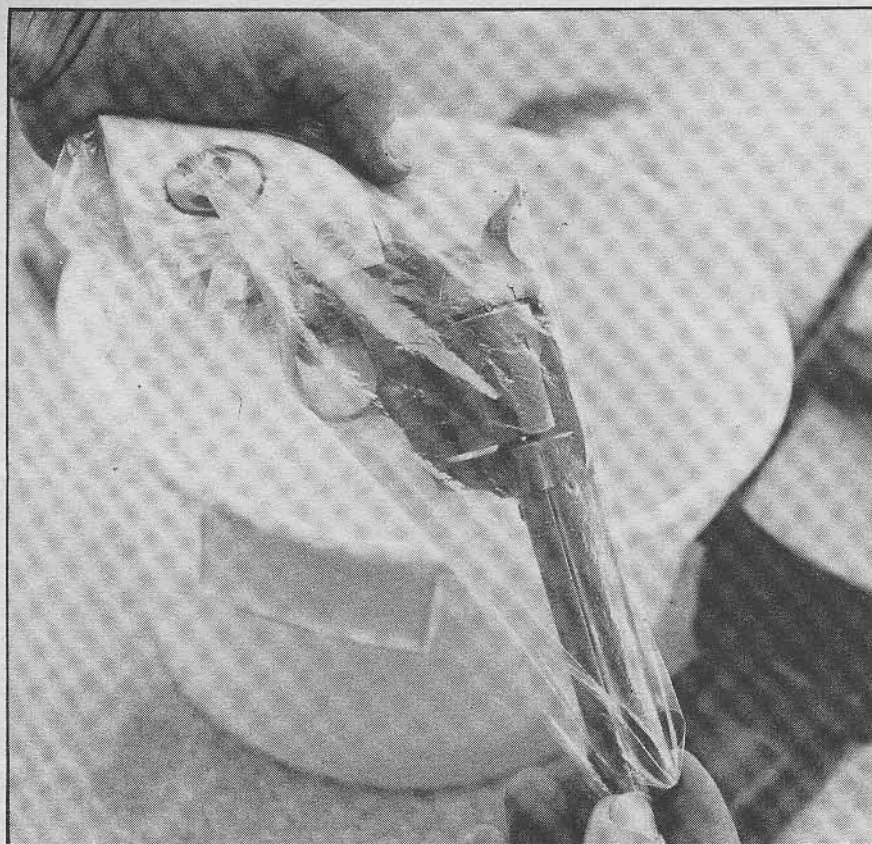
Old and valuable pistol holsters can be rejuvenated by the methods outlined in this chapter. This rare, old holster for Colt Navy percussion is more rare than the gun that it fits and deserves full preservation.

IN POSSIBLY eight out of ten cases, individuals are using leather goods, such as holsters, rifle scabbards and knife sheaths that are ill-fitting for the gun, the knife and/or for the person himself.

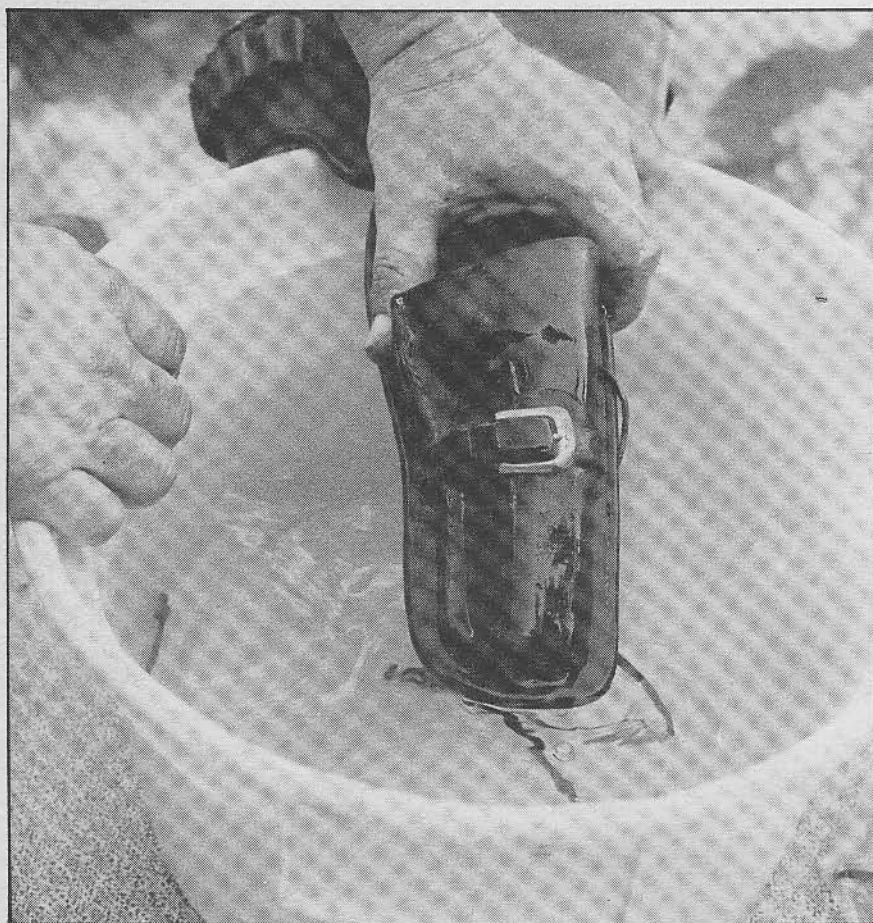
Take, for instance, the man who cries his eyes out when he notices that his latest pistol, revolver or rifle suddenly has come down with blue-wearitis. Although the gun was carried in a new holster he had purchased, the malady is there. The gun is getting pale around the muzzle. The

beautiful blue is wearing slowly to a grayish metallic appearance!

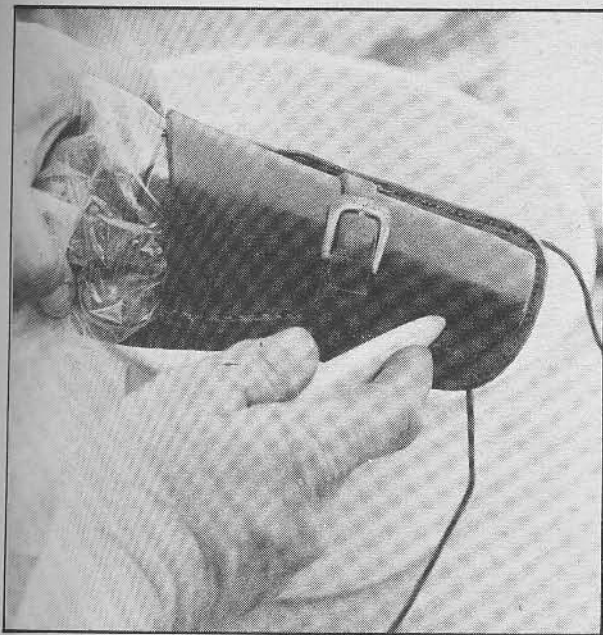
For the most part, leather goods purchased from the better known makers are almost devoid of that tight fit which spells nothing but blue wear on a fine firearm. Some makers have worked out a system whereby each holster is formed to the exact shape under hydraulic pressure. Following this, while the leather is still damp, each holster is rubbed by hand to assure a perfect, friction-free fit. However, this



Prior to insertion in wet holster, the gun first should be coated with a light gun oil, then wrapped in a tough but thin plastic sheeting.



Leather is allowed to soak until it takes on an evenly darkened color. Then holster is ready for forming.

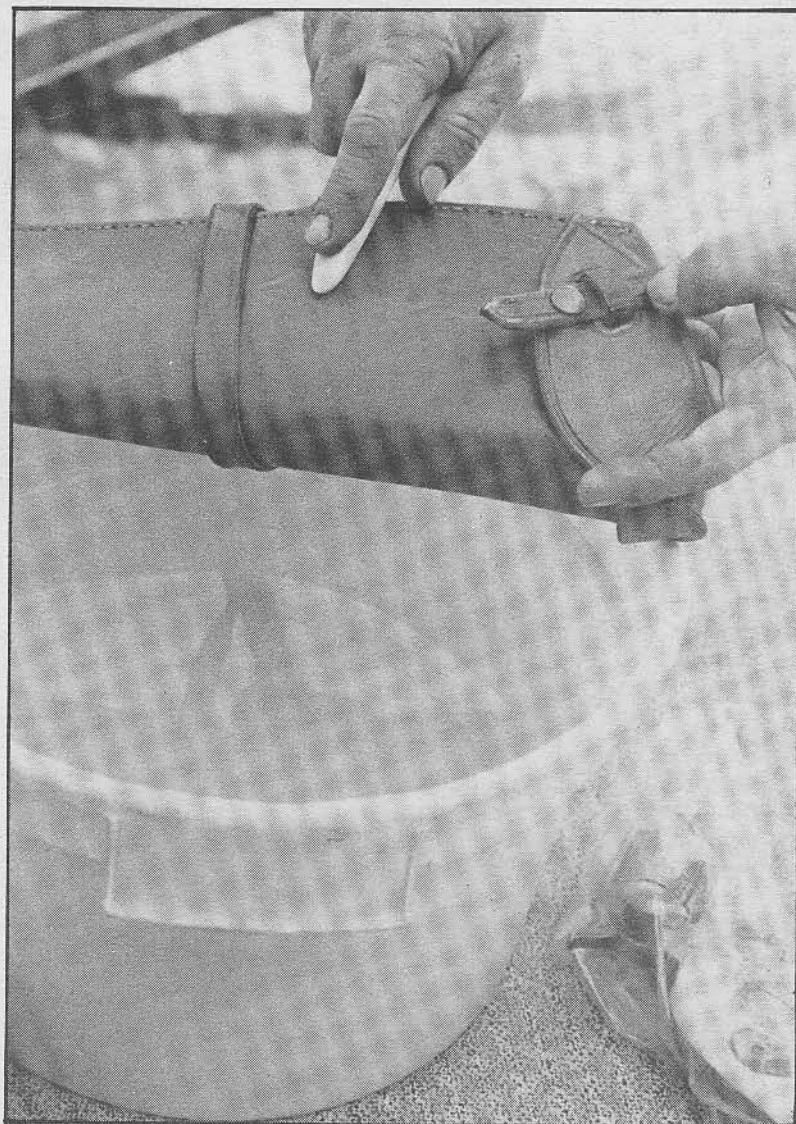


narrative is not for those who buy only the finest in moulded and fitted leather goods. It is for those who might own older or ill-fitting leather that they want to improve through a minimum of elbow grease and little or no cash outlay.

Most blue wear of fine firearms is due to ignorance of the qualities of leather and to what extent they might be worked. For those not familiar with the types used in gun holsters and belts, such leathers are known by numerous names such as California skirting leather, chrome-tanned and others. For the most part, the better holsters are made of skirting leathers containing a minimum of the wax or tallow found in many English saddle leathers; the best leathers are known as rolled shoulders. This denotes the part of the beef from which the leather is obtained and, rolled means that it has been rolled with heavy steel rollers to improve the texture and durability.

Over the years, I have found that California rolled shoulders stand up better under hard use than any other type of leather I have used. It will stand repeated soakings from rain, sleet or snow or from submersion in a river or mountain stream. Despite all of this, if the leather is allowed to

Above: All surfaces are boned down where tightness or friction may be encountered, moulding the leather to the contour of the gun. (Right) Rifle scabbards can be moulded to exacting fit in the same manner outlined in text for a holster.





Readily available to most is Kiwi's Mink Oil leather preservative and waterproofer. Author has experienced excellent results with it, especially in snow and rain, with the leather left unaffected by repeated soakings.

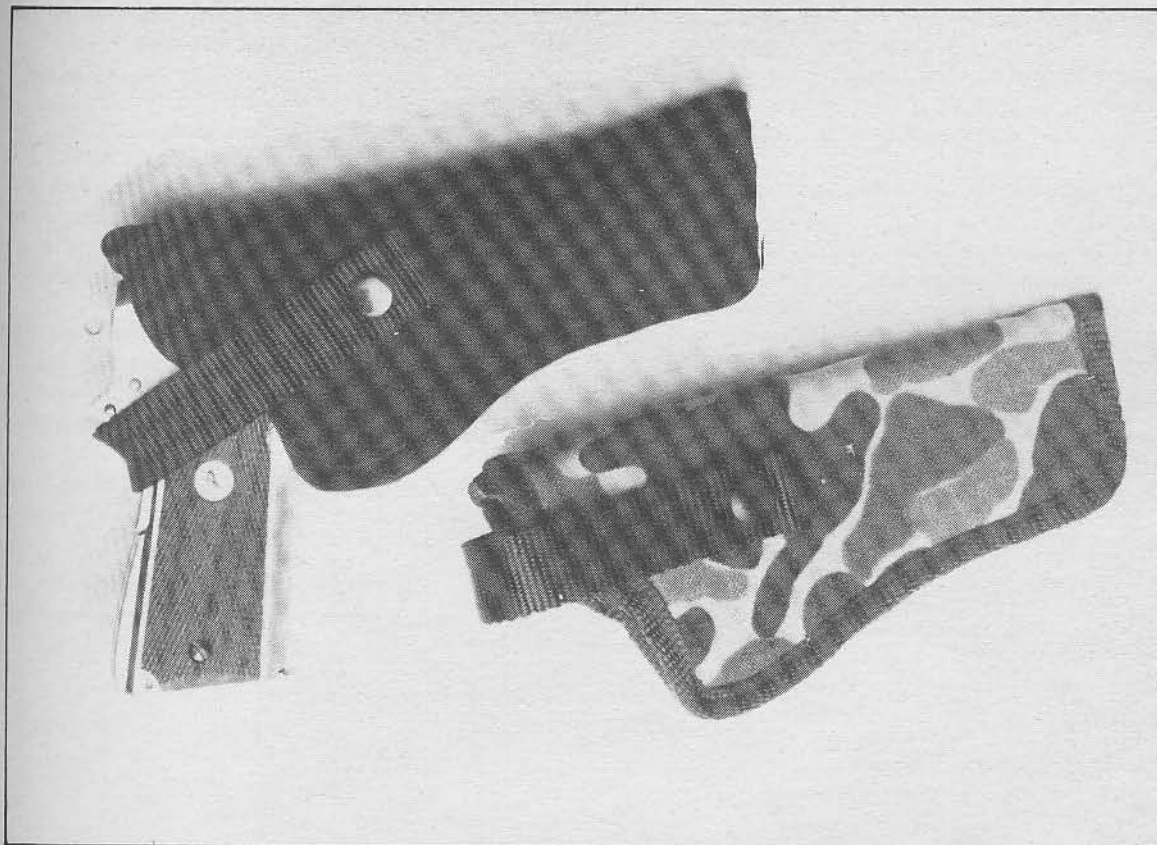
dry naturally in the prevailing temperature, it will return to its original toughness.

Never place any leather near artificial heat, such as a stove or heater, to dry it out. This will deteriorate the leather more quickly than any other means.

Remember that if it is good saddle-type leather, water isn't going to hurt it, provided the water is cool. Good saddle leather can be shaped and moulded to any configuration desired, once it has been soaked a prescribed time in cool water. It then is allowed to dry naturally on the form to

which it is shaped. Once dry, the leather will retain this shape indefinitely. Following the shaping and drying, the leather is given a thorough coating of a glycerine-based saddle soap, allowed to dry once more, then is coated with a dressing.

I have always had a problem in wearing a new carved leather belt. As a rule these belts are of a style worn almost solely in the West and measure about 1½ inches in width. When new, belts of this type have a nasty habit of not hugging the hips as they should, resulting in the hard edges of



Requiring virtually nothing in the way of care, Cordura holsters designed for both revolvers and automatic handguns are produced by Michaels of Oregon. They do not cause any wear on bluing.



the belt sometimes sawing away at the tops of my hip bones. The remedy I found for this some years ago was to soak the belt in water, then place it, still damp, around my waist the moment I was through carving it, then wear it until perfectly dry. The result is a perfect, hip-hugging fit!

For fitting gun belts and holsters, pour a small amount of cool water in a container large enough to hold them. Allow them to soak until the leather is well darkened. This shouldn't take much over five minutes, depending on the thickness of the leather. The pistol or revolver then is oiled well and placed in a thin plastic bag such as the type in which your laundry returns your shirts. The bag is wrapped tightly around the entire gun, then the gun is pushed snugly into the holster.

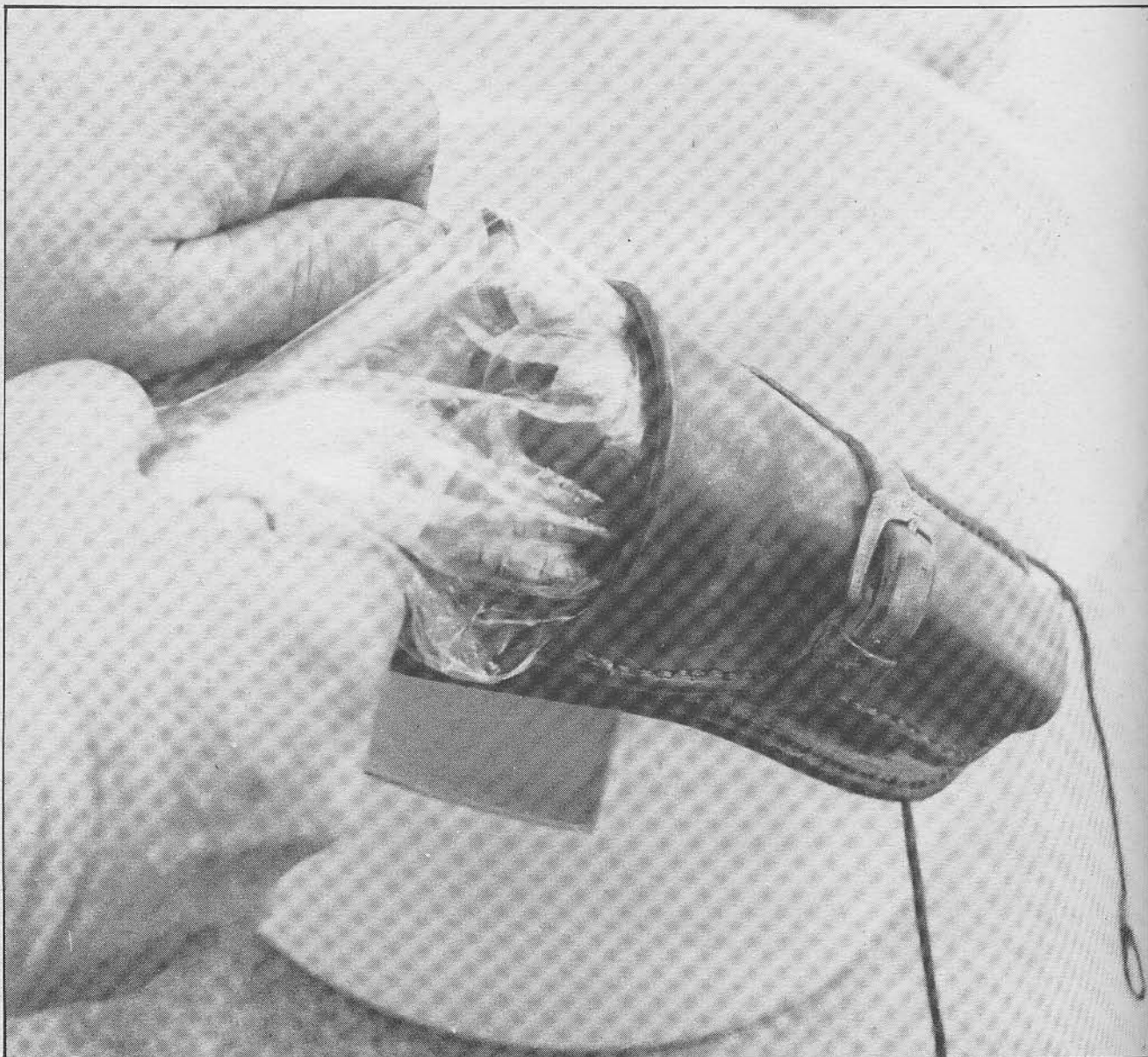
With the plastic-wrapped gun inserted all the way into the holster, the next step is to use a hard, smooth object,

such as a toothbrush handle or a short section of smooth ivory to rub the entire surface of the leather. Take particular pains with those areas covering the cylinder and frame and the muzzle of the barrel. This is where most blue wear occurs. Continue to rub in this manner, until the leather begins to return to its natural color, denoting that it is beginning to dry out. Then set the unit aside until it is completely dry. The plastic-covered gun may be removed from the holster, the bag removed from the gun. The gun now should slide in and out of the holster with no tight rubbing as before.

Should the leather be quite old and rather dried out, it is best to saturate the surfaces thoroughly with glycerine saddle soap instead of water before rubbing. Not only does this tend to relubricate the leather, but gives the leather new life.

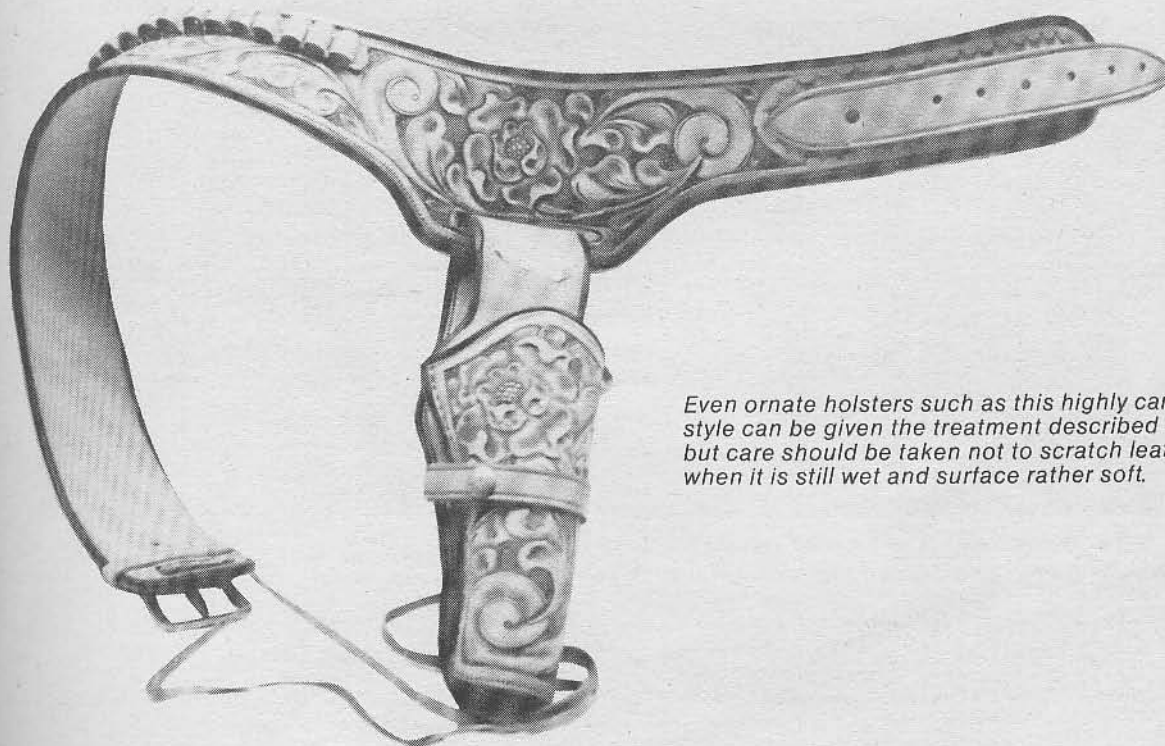
Contrary to popular belief, the use of neat's-foot oil on

The leather of this holster has been soaked until it has become pliable; this is done before gun is snugged into it.

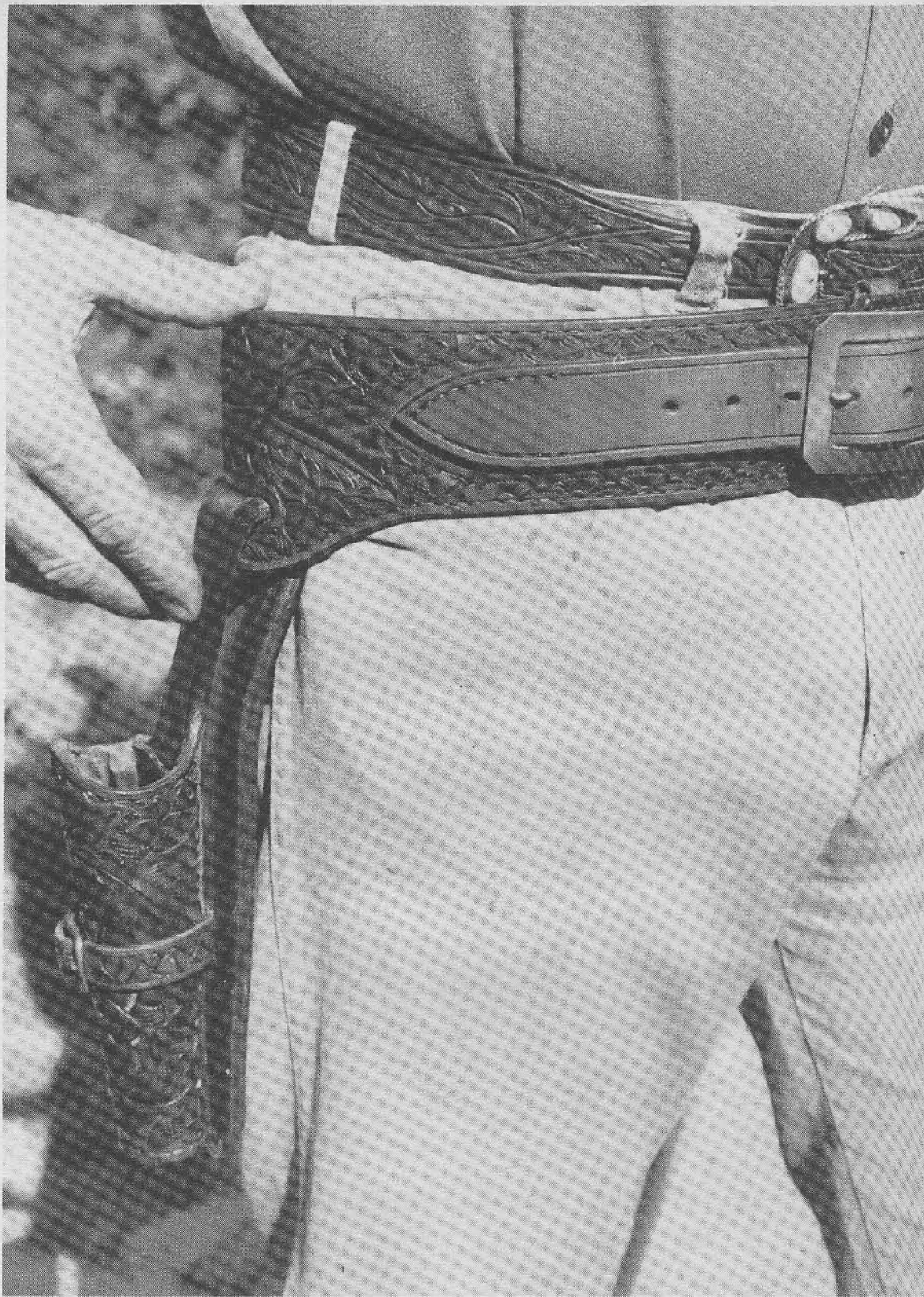




Knife sheaths can be moulded to the blade of the knife; wet the leather before the blade is inserted. Then rub the sheath as outlined, using a hard, smooth object.



Even ornate holsters such as this highly carved style can be given the treatment described here, but care should be taken not to scratch leather when it is still wet and surface rather soft.



Pistol or revolver belts are buckled around the waist while still damp, then are moulded to contour of the individual.

old leather is strictly taboo, unless you want your older holster, belt or any other leather goods with any age to fall to pieces! Neat's-foot oil should and must be limited to new leather and, even then, to one thorough coating. After this, the leather should receive only an occasional lubrication with mild saddle soap, preferably with those with a glycerine base.

Incidentally, an excellent leather preservative and water-proofer is one readily available to most. Known as Kiwi Mink Oil, this treatment contains everything necessary for good leather care including silicone.

Most new gun belts have a nasty habit of not fitting the hips as they should, as happened with the waist belt described earlier. After soaking, remove the gun belt from the water and wipe all excess water from the surface. Strap it around your waist and begin moulding it to your body by rubbing it with your hands. If it has a habit of riding your hip uncomfortably, allowing the top edges of the leather to stick out away from your hip, mould it with your hands until it lies snugly in place. Once the belt is perfectly shaped to your own conformation, allow it to dry. This shouldn't take much over a half-hour or so and, when dry, you will find that the belt fits as though moulded to your waist, which it was!

Saddle and skirting leather is one of the most versatile of all materials. It may be moulded to any shape desired and will retain that shape indefinitely. When well cared for, it will easily last through generations of the hardest use. Neglect it and it will go to pieces in a few years!

The same basic method described refers to any leather used by sportsmen, hunters or horsemen. Leather is leather and, regardless of who uses it, it all requires the same identical treatment for either shaping or moulding to fit a specific purpose or to prolong its life.

On the other side of the coin, Michaels of Oregon has recently introduced an all-new breed of gun holster. It requires no form-fitting, will not mildew, dry out, crack nor require special care.

These holsters come in ten sizes, are constructed of a tough Cordura nylon and lined to prevent blue wear on fine pistols or revolvers. What I like about them is that they are American-made of American materials. Made for either right- or left-handed shooters, they are available in either camouflage or black. Holster belts of the same material and colors are also available. So, if you are the lazy type and don't care to baby your leather holsters, then these no-care holsters may be for you.

Once the gunbelt and holster have been moulded as the author has outlined, it should retain its original finish after it has been dried properly. However, it should be allowed to dry in shaded area, away from a heat source.

