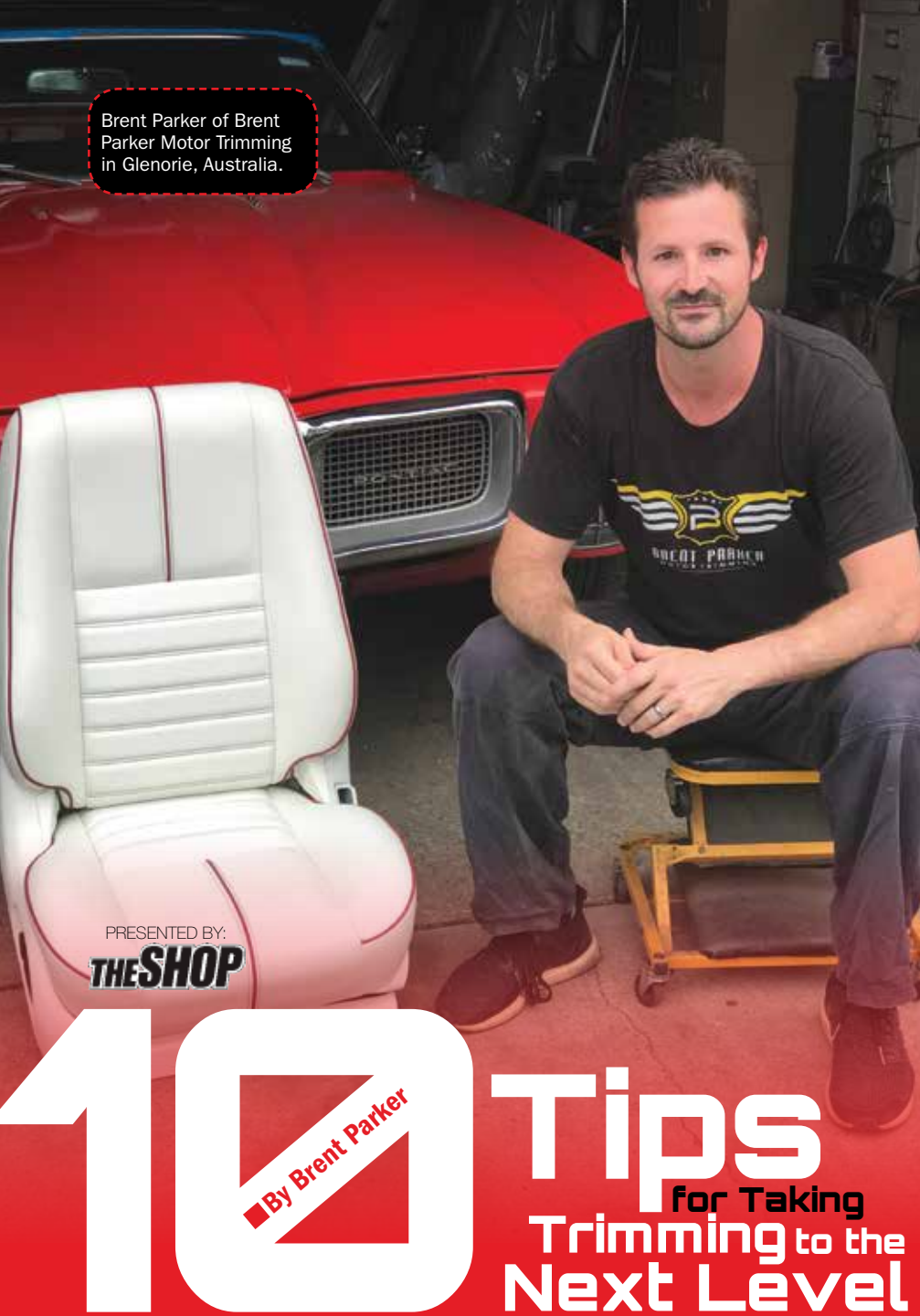


Brent Parker of Brent Parker Motor Trimming in Glenorie, Australia.



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THE SHOP

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By Brent Parker

Tips for Taking Trimming to the Next Level

Answers to popular questions from interior professionals.

Over the last couple of years, trimmers have begun reaching out to me with questions on how to improve the quality of their work. While I'm happy to help, I don't always have the time to answer right away or provide them with a thorough response.

Therefore, I've decided to write an article sharing 10 tips on how to take your upholstery work to the next level.

In essence, the tips answer some of the most common questions I receive, such as, "How do I avoid creases in leather?" and "Why is my piping so wavy?"

For some trimmers, these tips will be old. For others, they'll be new. Who knows?

You might even do things differently, and it works. That's OK. These are simply the way I do things at my shop, Brent Parker Motor Trimming, and I hope you find them helpful.

TIP #1

GLUING LEATHER TO FOAM

In my opinion, this is a big no-no. Because leather is generally stored rolled up or folded, it needs to be stretched out, flattened and worked onto a job to get its wrinkles and creases out.

If you glue it to foam, you're essentially gluing those creases and wrinkles in place.

Wherever possible, cut your foam over-size, sew your piece to the foam, and then trim off the excess. You really want your material and foam to work independently.

TIP #2

TRIMMING CONCAVE CURVES

Of course, there are times when you have no other choice but to glue leather to foam. This is true in cases where you're dealing with odd shapes, such as concave curves.

The biggest mistake that trimmers make is gluing the two pieces together flat on a bench and then expecting it will curve without creases. A clever workaround is to lay the foam in the curve and then glue the piece of leather to the foam while it's in there. This reduces the likelihood of creases.

Another tip to eliminate creases when dealing with concave curves is to leave the glued panel to dry for 24 hours before sewing, so that when it's folded the glue doesn't soak through the materials' pores and stick together, which causes creases. Problem solved!

TIP #3

MARKING TEMPLATES

When marking out new templates, pin a similar scrap piece of material to each panel you're marking out. (Especially on seats like Mercedes-Benz models where the side bolster wraps right around the top).

Pin it on nice and firm, but not too tight. Make lots of attachment marks. By doing



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When marking out new templates, pin a similar scrap piece of material to each panel you're marking out.



Make your bobbin thread the same color as the material you're sewing.



Sew piping to the box border first and then sew it to the pleats so that it floats over the pleats, keeping the piping tight and looking good.

it this way you know it will fit, because you have essentially just fitted it to the seat.

I almost never take the old cover off before I mark out new pieces. Why do I do it this way? Because in most cases, pieces like a side bolster have been on for many years and have been stretched and hardened by the sun, so trying to unpick that panel and getting it to lay flat for an accurate pattern is nearly impossible.

If you don't believe me, try marking out both ways and then compare your two templates and see how much they differ.

TIP #4 SEWING PIPING

Whenever possible, always sew your piping to either your front or side border, or the piece without the pleats, first. This will prevent rippling.

For example, say you have a bench seat with pleats front to back that are each 2-inches wide going along the length of the seat. If you sew the piping to the pleated piece first, you're attaching it to all those ups and downs, which essentially lengthens your piping and causes it to ripple.

However, if you sew the piping to the box border first and then sew it to the pleats, it will sort of float over the pleats and keep the piping tight and looking good.

TIP #5 LAY OFF FAT PIPING

One of my pet peeves is seeing thick piping on seats. In my opinion, using thin piping looks so much neater.

Do yourself a favor and find somewhere that you can take your leather strips to get them split thinner. Not only does it

look better, but it's so much easier to sew, because you have less bulk.

Also, try buying a few different thicknesses of tubing to go inside your piping. If you can't get your leather thinned, you can at least counteract the thickness by reducing the size of the tubing inside.

TIP #6 TOP STITCHING & FRENCH SEAMS

I often see jobs where trimmers made their top stitch too far away from a seam, which looks untidy and can result in unsightly ripples, especially around corners, due to the selvage going all wavy. If you stay close to the seam, you can trim close to the top stitch and get rid of the wavy selvage.

The same goes for French seams. Keep the width small (no more than 7mm).

Doing so looks neater and causes less drama.

Another quick tip: Try and make your bobbin thread the same color as the material you're sewing.

Also, check out my tutorial on how to make a seamless French seam on TheHogRing.com. I learned this little trick from a very experienced Malaysian trimmer and it's helped so much with certain jobs. It's not for seats, but works great on hard surfaces that don't get much wear.

TIP #7 REDUCE YOUR BULK

I can't stress enough the importance of reducing bulk in all aspects of your sewing and fitting. It can really make the difference between a good and bad job.

You must learn to cut away selvage, trim



If you stay close to the seam, you can trim close to the top stitch and get rid of the wavy selvage.



It makes a big difference in how your work looks when you make the right cuts and reduce and distribute bulk.



EVA foam feels nice and firm when touched and its firm density works fantastic in getting wavy bumps out of a surface because it's sand-able.

the pieces to raw edge and butt together pieces of material so you see no raw edges. This will make a significant difference in your quality of work.

Also, try to keep the amount of foam in your sewing to a minimum. If you need to add foam to your seat, then add foam to your seat—not into the sewing of your cover.



USE EVA CLOSED CELL FOAM

Incorporating EVA closed cell foam into your work will change the way you do things. Without it there is no way I could get some of the finishes I've been able to achieve, especially on all the dashboards I do. Ordinary foam simply doesn't cut it.

Not only does EVA foam feel nice and firm when touched, its firm density works fantastic in getting wavy bumps out of a surface, because it's sand-able. Just wrap 100-grit sandpaper around a block and sand out all the bumps. Trust me, it's much easier than trying to get a smooth surface with body filler.



FIND YOUR INSPIRATION

I'm always on the lookout for inspiration; it's everywhere around you! You just have to look.

Check out other people's work to see what they are doing. Don't copy them, but you can take some hints from what they do. Also look at other people's quality of work. You might think you're up to standard, but then you see what someone else has done and it clicks in your head, "Wow I need to do better."

Don't be intimidated by that

thought. Instead, use it to your advantage to get better.

Also, don't be afraid to ask questions of the people you look up to. You will find most guys will share their knowledge, as long as you ask in a respectful way.

For example, if you ask someone a question on Facebook and they reply, then take the time to thank them. It's a small detail that can go a long way.

I also can't stress enough how important it is to surf the internet looking for ideas. I can literally spend hours every night looking for all sorts of ideas. Whether researching new materials and suppliers or watching trimmers work on YouTube, the amount of knowledge you can find on the web is endless and invaluable.

In the end, it'll make you a better trimmer, because you'll have more knowledge and ideas at your disposal.

Another way I find ideas is by walking through the aisles of my local hardware store and scanning all the shelves for things I can use in my own work. I can't believe some of the things I've found that aren't meant for trimmers, but come in really handy on the job. So keep an eye out!

You can find design ideas anywhere. For example, I got my design for some speaker grilles on a Ford F-100 I did not long ago from the headlights of a Mercedes-Benz. I'm in the process of making a custom door trim at the moment and I'm getting an idea for the design for the speaker grille and surround from the front bumper bar of an AMG Mercedes.

It just so happens I'm digging the designs of the new Mercs lately. I'm just trying

to illustrate that you can get ideas from everywhere. So keep your eyes open!



PAY ATTENTION

Don't ignore small things that can make a big difference. For instance:

- Use the correct sewing machine needles. Whether that be the correct size for the thread you're using or using knife point needles for leather, they make a big difference.
- Use quality thread. Stay away from 100-percent cotton thread—always try to use a polyester thread or a UV-bonded thread.
- Use the right stitch length. When sewing two pieces together, use a short length. When top stitching, there's nothing worse than it being too short or too long. Keep it somewhere in the middle.
- Get your thread tension right on your machine. I can't stand seeing the bobbin thread poking through the top of your piece or loose top stitches. Play around with some scrap material and get it right.
- Always do a test piece to see if you have everything right before you sew.

One last thing—and this is more advice than a tip—work hard to become a jack-of-all-trades. In our craft, it's no longer good enough to just know how to sew.

To pull off show-quality interiors, you need to be able to do metalwork/machining, welding, woodwork/carpentry, auto electrical, fiberglass, etc. Knowing these things will help you design better interiors and make you less dependent on others.

So, there you have it—some of my best tips for taking your trimming to the next level. I hope you can take something helpful from it. **TS**



A seamless French seam is not for seats, but works great on hard surfaces that don't get much wear.

BRENT PARKER is owner and operator of Brent Parker Motor Trimming in Glenorie, Australia. To see some of his outstanding work, visit his shop's Facebook page and check out more of his articles on TheHogRing.com.