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ESSENTIAL FLOCKING TOOL KIT

FIND YOUR ESSENTIAL FLOCKING TOOL KIT HERE

A full reflock is a satisfying job, allowing the fully trained Saddle Fitter to achieve correct and comfortable saddle balance where the tree and panel design, and seat and blocks otherwise complement the horse and rider.

Reflocking is not just about the panel and wool – it is also an opportunity to check the soundness and symmetry of the tree, stirrup bars, girthing, and panel, and to make your findings known to the client where safety or comfort may be compromised. It is also the time – only where the Fitter has completed the appropriate training – to add or remove points or balance girth straps and to make any small repairs to stitching. It must be stressed that all Fitters should have recourse to a qualified Saddler for work that they are not able or qualified to carry out themselves. We find that Saddlers are happy to advise, and to take on work for you or your client. Don't be shy to seek help where it is needed, especially when you are beginning.

It can be daunting for those who have never 'dropped a panel' (cut the stitching to separate the panel from the seat), let alone 'faced' one back in again. Even if you have a tool list, how do you know that you are about to order the correctawl or needle ... and what is a clicker knife? We hope that this guide will set you up to complete good work in your own workshop, having gained your flocking training.

All the essential tools and materials mentioned in this article can be purchased separately.

Please note that this guide lists the key tools for each stage – if a tool has been used in an earlier part of the process it will not be listed again. Your tutor will instruct you on when and how to use each tool and/or material. Tools marked with a ** are not available from Abbey but may easily be found at a DIY or craft store.



OUR CONTRIBUTOR



CATHERINE BAKER

Catherine Baker excels in all areas of saddlery being a Master Saddler, Master Bridle Maker, Qualified Saddle Fitter, and Qualified Bridle Fitter. Catherine also lectures on bit and bridle fitting for both introductory and advanced SMS Bridle Fitting courses.

DROPPING THE PANEL

To separate the panel from the tree/seat, you will need:

Clicker handle
Clicker blade

The curved blade is useful when dropping the panel, but most people find a straight blade most useful for cutting leather.

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ASSESSING THE TREE

When it comes to removing tacks or staples to peel back the gullet lining to inspect the tree, you will require:

Staple and/or tack remover

A cutting mat with a grid* to assist the eye with symmetry assessment.

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READYING THE PANEL

Remove the old flock, and make any necessary small adjustments to the panel. We recommend the following products:

De-flocking iron

Awl to prepare leather for stitching
Long nose pliers**

Awl handle

Beeswax

Tiger thread: 0.6mm – 0.8mm

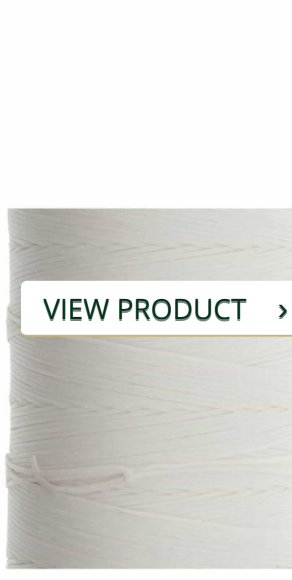
Size 2 harness needle (straight) or 3" curved mattress needle

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A note about needles: there are three distinct needle types often used in reflocking a saddle. The straight, blunt **harness needles**, as below, are most often used to stitch closed the inner panel after all old flock has been removed and any lining and new flock has been put in place, and to complete any adjustments or corrections to the panel shape. These size 1 or 2 needles are also usually used to lace-in the front of the saddle.

The **curved mattress needle** may also be used for the jobs above, and to lace in the rear of the saddle where the panel is attached to the seat.

Finally, a long, thicker **straight mattress needle** can be used to 'quilt' panel legs once the flocking is complete. Often just three of four stitches are placed along the lower section of the panel leg so that the shape of the panel complements the conformation and activity of the horse. You should have assessed the horse and rider before considering whether and where to add quilting.

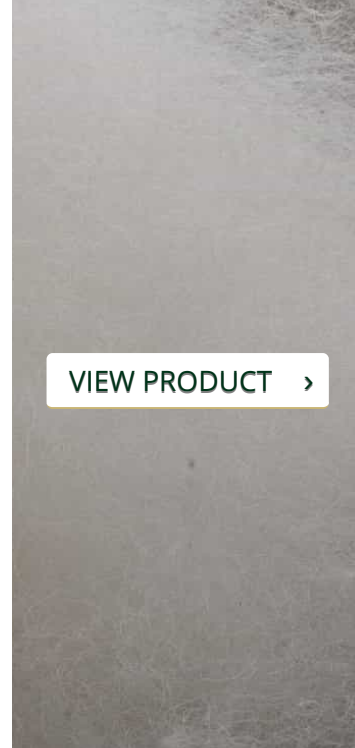
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FLOCKING THE PANEL

Flock the panel with White Long Fibre or Brown Jacobs wool. Having 2kg of flock to hand should be sufficient.

Flocking seems to carry you the work. Choose either our Economy Stuffing iron which is easier to bend or Stainless Steel Flocking Iron. Finally, you will require a Smasher, also known as a Mashie. Choose from aluminium or brass.

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LINING THE PANEL

If you wish to line the panel you may choose to use:

Soft Polyester Felt

Neoprene Epdm, most commonly 3mm.

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LACING IN THE PANEL

For re-securing the panel, you will need:

White gel pen** to help position the panel – this can be useful before dropping the panel tool

20mm tacks or scratch awl to hold the front of the panel in place

Curved awl (with handle)

Clicker or scratch awl

Tiger thread – 0.8mm or 1mm (doubled) for the front, and 1.4mm to lace in the back

Thread snips** or small sharp scissors to get a nice fine point on the thread before threading your needle

Harness and curved mattress needles

Short nose pliers or saddlers pliers

A short length of round darning** can be a great help when pulling the lacing tight

If you wish to add quilting to the panel legs, having consulted with your tutor, a **straight mattress needle** will be useful.

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FINAL CHECKS

Before returning the flocked saddle to fit to the horse and make any fine adjustments, you'll want to check your work, and give the saddle a final wipe over and leather treatment.

Either the Abbey saddle food or Sedgwick Leathercare will do the trick.

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ADDITIONAL TASKS

If you have been taught how to add or replace girth straps you may also need:

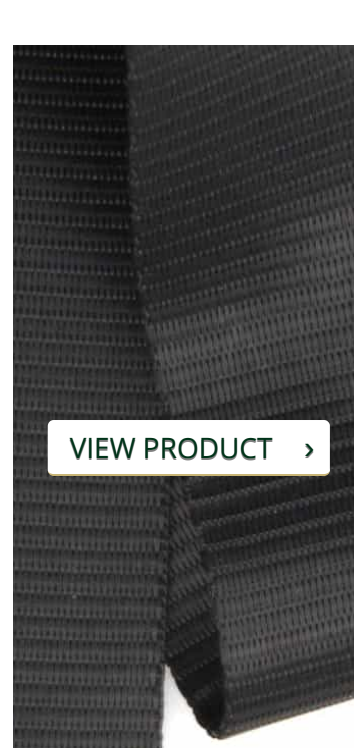
Polyester Saddle Web

Girth Straps

Pricking iron

Mallet:

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REGULATING

If working with serge panels, an awl may be used to regulate the flocking.

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HOW TO ATTACH AN AWL BLADE

Your course tutor will be on hand to help attach your curved awl blade to the haft, or handle, and your curved clicker blade to the handle. It can be a tricky job, and one to carry out with care when doing it for yourself for the first time.

Here are some handy reminders:

If you have access to a vice:

- Secure the awl blade, point down, in the vice. You can use two 2p coins either side of the blade so that the softer metal protects the blade from the vice.
- Carefully tap the haft/handle onto the end of the blade using a mallet
- Check that the blade is secure before use

Or, you can purchase a **handle with a screw fitting**.

Please note, this is a guide only, and you should be confident that you can carry out the task safely. If you are in any doubt, ask your tutor or a Saddler to help you.

KIT

You will develop tool and method preferences with experience, but here at Abbey we think the kit below will furnish you with what you need to get started:

- Clicker blade and handle
- De-flocking iron
- Harness and curved mattress needle
- Tiger thread, 0.8mm and 1.4mm (black or brown)
- Curved awl blade and handle
- Short and medium (12" & 16") curved flocking iron
- Medium straight flocking iron 14"
- Clicker awl
- Sedgwick's Leathercare 60ml

