

For model year 2000-2004, Porsche decided to dress up the interiors of their vehicles a bit. Parts of the interior that had been left as bare black plastic for model years 1997-1999 were now treated to a rubberized application dubbed the "Soft Touch Interior." These pieces include the center console, the side A/C vents, the radio/climate control surround, and the door armrests. I've seen the Soft Touch Interior done in black or light grey; there are probably a few other colors out there. Porsche succeeded in giving these pieces a more sophisticated, luxurious feel and appearance, but it was at the cost of durability. The new surface is indeed soft to the touch, and if your fingernail strays a bit, you will leave a visible scratch. Furthermore, the Soft Touch laminate easily softens and peels from the plastic surfaces in the presence of many alcohol-based substances, including, of all things, sunscreen. Maybe it wasn't the best choice for our cars, particularly the topless variety.

The Soft Touch armrests on my Boxster had taken a beating, showing a fair number of scratches and nicks from watches, rings, etc., and this year they succumbed to the volume of sunscreen my wife and I used on our trip to the Parade in Charlotte (a great experience, I must add!). So I decided a refresh was in order. In a couple of online Boxster forums I had seen other owners with the same problems, and the best solution offered was to cover the armrests with leather. I decided to take this on, and I'm happy to report that the job was inexpensive and easy. The results look like what the factory should have done in the first place. Here's how it goes:

You'll need to get a few things together. These include two pieces of leather with similar grain to your door panels, seats, or side airbag covers; straight edge razor blades; sharp scissors; art glue suitable for both leather and plastic (I used Crafter's Pick The Ultimate, available from Michael's); and some light clamping clothespins.

First, you'll need to remove both armrests from the door. Open them up and you'll see that each is secured by two hinges. Press the pins out of the hinges, and then slide the armrest off the spring at the back. Be careful not to let the small metal bushings fall out of the armrests – they're necessary to hold the pins in place. With the armrests out, test-fit how the leather will form around each armrest. You want to get an idea of where you'll need to stretch the leather so that creases and folds are minimized and that visible areas are smooth. Before starting to glue, wipe the armrests down with rubbing alcohol to remove any oils and create a clean, fresh surface. For me, the actual gluing process took a couple of days. I wanted to make sure that when I had glued an area, it would hold fast when I pulled against it to stretch and smooth the leather. I began by gluing the primary surface, but not going over any of the edges. I spread a coat of glue across the armrest surface, just to the edges where it curved underneath. Then I placed the leather on the armrest with plenty of overhang to get the edges later. Using a small ball (a golf ball is perfect), I formed the leather into the main curves of the armrest, rolling it out to where the glue stopped, then I let it sit overnight to dry completely.



Now for the tricky part: the edges. Begin by gluing the longest edges from the center out to where the curves begin to get sharp. Put a coat of glue all the way around the edge and onto the underside of the armrest. Work from the middle out, pulling the leather across the edge. If you need to, use the golf ball or a round piece of wood to roll out any creases or lumps. When you've got a section of the edge covered and smooth, secure it with the clothes pins. Use a piece or two of scrap leather between the clothespins and the leather on the top side of the armrest to prevent the clothespins from creating an uneven edge. When that's dry, work around the ends of the armrest, pulling the leather from the outside edges towards the back and the hinges. Because the corners are so sharp, inevitably there will be some bunching of the leather. Use the scissors or razor blade to eliminate as much excess as possible, then pull the rest towards the back edge, which will not be visible when the armrest is installed. Again, use the clothespins to clamp your work, and let the glue dry as you work a small section at a time. When it's all done, trim any excess and reinstall the armrests.

As easy as the job was, and as well as it turned out, I'm actually considering covering my center console...Hmmm...

Happy driving and wrenching!

