

CLASSIC DRIVER

Barbour Repair Service

Lead

Although I've only had it for a short while, writes Simon de Burton, I'm already extremely fond of my Barbour Steve McQueen 'Rexton' motorcycle jacket – so imagine my dismay when I managed to rip a hole through the left arm a few weeks ago, during a 15mph tumble from an ancient BMW R80.

Various females in the family proffered needle and thread but, having witnessed their workmanship, I decided to do the right thing and invoke the professional repair service of J. Barbour and Sons at the firm's HQ in South Shields, northeast England – and I'm pleased to report that the age of exceptional service is clearly not dead.

Within a week of despatching the jacket in a padded envelope, it returned with the arm and its garish tartan lining perfectly patched and looking virtually as good as new, and all for £13 plus 'p and p'. I'm impressed, but not surprised, because the canny stitchers in South Shields, I have learned, deal with a remarkable 50,000 repairs each year.



Right now, there are probably as many as 2,000 garments in the service centre – and the fact that most of them are green and roughly the same shape would make for a logistical nightmare were it not for the fact that each jacket is given a computer code the moment it arrives... assuming, of course, that it is a genuine Barbour. Imitations are returned with a polite note, declining the request for service.

'Genuine' jackets are then inspected and checked for damage before someone undertakes the often unsavoury task of sifting through the pockets. They are rarely empty, and a 'black museum' of items discovered includes live shotgun cartridges, fox tails, fishing hooks, syringes and an assortment of contraceptive devices. Once, so the story goes, a frantic dentist called to say he had sent in his jacket, complete with a set of dentures belonging to a patient.

Once the pockets have been given the all-clear – and providing the jacket doesn't require a spell in 'quarantine' due to contamination by blood or an unknown substance – it is sent for assessment. Barbour's machinists can perform any one of more than 250 repairs in a pre-ordained amount of time. A full sleeve patch, for example, takes 12 minutes, new knitted windcuffs are fitted in six minutes a side and replacing a zip is a 24-minute job. If the work is going to take more than 100 minutes, customers are usually advised to go and buy a new jacket.

One customer, however, was happy to foot a bill of more than £250 for repairs to an heirloom Barbour, inherited from his grandfather – but some jackets are, simply, irreparable. The most common cause of expiry stems from putting them through the washing machine, and attempts at home reproofing often end in disaster, too. Far better to entrust the job to Barbour's 10-man reproofing department which re-waxes up to 35 jackets per man, per day, on special, heated tables using the firm's petroleum-based formula.



The jackets are left to 'cure' overnight before the buttons and metalwork are buffed and the garment given a once-over prior to being returned to owners who regularly write in with tales of Barbour performance.

A Munich devotee sent a note of thanks after his jacket withstood the pellets from a Magnum pistol when he was accidentally shot during a goose hunt; a demolition expert from Hertfordshire claimed that his Barbour resisted the force of 30 pieces of shrapnel after an over-enthusiastic student blew him up; and a shipwrecked mariner was saved from freezing by sheltering beneath his Barbour for two days while drifting across the North Sea in a dinghy.

Of course, Barbour cognoscenti know that the best way to avoid such difficulties is to wear your jacket only in the environment for which it is really intended – shopping on Chelsea's Kings Road.

Photos: Barbour

Gallery

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