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Trim Shop

Seats were made up on the ground floor of the Trim Shop, a two storey building. The frames, bought in from Lace Webb Ltd, Leicester, were covered with the material that had been cut to shape and sewn together upstairs. Coachtrimming, i.e. building of seats, fitting interior panels and other items, was done by men. Women machine-stitched the seat covers.

Seats might be covered in leather, from Connolly Bros., or cloth - either Drayton, or West of England cloth. Leather was very popular because it was hard wearing for hire car use, a popular role for limousines. Some limousines for private use were upholstered in the traditional fashion with leather in the chauffeur's compartment and cloth to the rear. A limousine with all leather interior used about 420 sq. ft. of leather. An average hide was about 50 sq. ft.; they had become smaller during recent years as Argentinean farmers concentrated on breeding cattle for beef rather than hides, thus killing them earlier. Flaws caused by barbed wire or warble flies sometimes meant that not all the hide could be used, and about nine hides were used for a limousine.

Material for the seats was cut to shape using a template. Individual pieces were hand tacked or stapled together before hand stitching, after which the tacking and staples were removed. Foam padding was glued in position on the seat frame and the covers fixed to it by "hog rings" (small brass clips) and hand stitching.

On the first floor were the stores for seat parts, and the areas where the seat covers were made and trim cut. The hides were stored over wooden horses to prevent creasing. Each hide was cut by hand, using templates produced in the Wood Machine Shop. Waste leather was sold to employees who made purses, moccasins and other items. Sometimes it was given to hospitals for the patients to make small leather goods for sale.

The front seats of the limousine were designed using the "H" point - derived in relation to the driver's sight lines, the seat belt mountings, and a manikin produced in the Wood Machine Shop. Whatever modifications were made to the rest of the car no changes were made to the front seat positions. Seats were not made in fixed batches, though it was preferred if similar jobs could be done in sets of ten. Cloth was cut in bulk. Sheets were clamped together topped by a template, and cut with a mechanical knife. Seats could be made to individual customers' requirements, e.g. the Queen Mother went to Kingsbury in 1978 to be measured for the seat of her new Daimler limousine.

When cut the seat material parts were stitched by women, using Singer sewing machines. Limousine seats had flutes sewn in, individually stuffed with foam strips. Seats for the saloon were made in a cheaper way by inserting large pieces of foam into the covers and being sewn into the seat. Seats used to be padded with latex, but supplies of that were severely interrupted by the Vietnamese War, and foam was substituted.

The interior trim of the limousine, such as roof lining and door panels, were of wool cloth. For the saloon and 1500 brushed nylon was used. Carpets, from Halifax, had their edges bound by machine, and were then stuck on a 0.5 inch sound deadening underlay. Piping for edging leather seats used to be hand made by apprentices. More recently a "Heath Robinson" machine had been built to do it. Leatherette strips were glued, pulled across runners and O section plastic placed along the middle. The leatherette was then folded and glued.

The 1500 was fitted out on the ground floor of the Trim Shop, next to the seat production line. By mid 1979 this area was virtually empty following cessation of production at Kingsbury. Seats and interior trim for the saloon and limousine were taken to the Daimler Shop to be fitted.

Cow Shed

The Cow Shed, so called because of its appearance, was next to the paint shop. Here the limousine was given a final paint inspection, and any necessary rectification before being released to the Showroom.

Showroom

The completed cars were given a final inspection and polish, and the interior cleaned. If, even at this stage, the inspector was dissatisfied with any aspect of the car it would be returned to the Cow Shed for rectification. This was the culmination of the weeks of skilled work when the completed car was at last ready for delivery to the customer.

The Showroom was on the ground floor of a three storey brick faced building, on Church Lane. On the first floor were the executive offices and canteen; the drawing office was on the second floor. The canteen for the works staff was in a separate building next to the Metal Shop.

Closure

On closure of the works in November 1979, Daimler production was transferred to the Jaguar/Daimler factory in Coventry. Vanden Plas was subsequently integrated into the Jaguar Car Company. Although some of the workforce remained with British Leyland and moved to the Midlands, most became redundant. Some joined Rolls-Royce, at their Mulliner Park Ward subsidiary in Willesden.

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