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How to Get the Smell Out of Vintage Clothing

Sometimes authenticity can be a little too authentic. A few months ago, I bought a used double rider off eBay, which was a concession to the fact that I wanted all the ruggedness of the design, but don't actually live a rugged lifestyle. Buying a new jacket meant that it would take years to break in the leather, and since I don't actually ride motorcycles (only fashion cycles), getting that natural, rugged look might never happen. So I decided to buy something that already had character, which meant going vintage.

The problem: although the jacket looked like it was worn by a sweaty, tough biker, it smelled like one too. I only wanted to look rugged; not smell rugged.

So, I tried a bunch of things to get the smell out. In order of procedure:

Airing It Out: Pretty simple. Just hung it outside for a week, hoping that sunlight and fresh air would naturally take care of the odor.

Effectiveness: 3/10. It somewhat worked, but I suspect it mostly just dissipated the stench that had built up from the jacket being inside a small shipping box for a week.

Spraying with Vodka: A trick commonly recommended online. Basically, lightly spray the garment with a 50/50 mixture of water and vodka (or distilled white vinegar), then let the garment dry in the sun. *Effectiveness: 4/10.* Certainly did more than just airing it out, but the smell was still bad enough that I didn't want to hang the jacket up in my closet.

Cleaning: Or in my case, wiping the leather down with Lexol's leather cleaner and then Peccard's dressing (the first will clean the surface, while the second will restore the oils). *Effectiveness: 1/10.* Not sure it really did anything, but it made the leather look better.

Coffee Beans: As recommended by StyleForum's thrifting vets, I put the jacket in a trash bag and threw in a couple handfuls of coffee beans. Sealed the bag up and let it sit for a week. After the smell of coffee went away, so did some of the musty smell (I think). *Effectiveness: 5/10.* Note: some say you can also do this with activated charcoal.

RAVE FabriCARE: Far and away, the most effective was sending the jacket to [RAVE FabriCARE](#), the best dry cleaner I know of. [RAVE](#) is one of the few cleaners who will treat odors according to the garment's material composition (most others use a treatment called ozone for everything, which can be good on some materials, but damage others). Plus, [RAVE](#) regularly treats clothes damaged by smoke in heavy fires, so I figured this would be an easy job for them. *Effectiveness: 9/10.* The smell isn't 100% gone, but it's damn near close. At this point, you have to put the jacket up to your nose to even faintly detect anything. Compare that to when I sent it in, and you could *literally* smell it from across the room. Pretty damn impressive.

Of course, most vintage clothes can just be washed, but if you have something like a leather jacket (which can't be washed), or something that's just being stubborn, try some of the methods above. The [RAVE FabriCARE](#) solution is more expensive than home remedies, but at least you know it's an effective and reliable last resort.