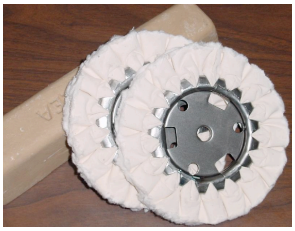
NEW KEYTOP FINISHING



Pianotek's in-house key recovering department is often praised for our outstanding final fit and finish. As we enter our 20th year, we would like to share some tips and techniques that have contributed to our success.

Those of you who do your own key recovering know that new keytop material, whether in blanks or pre-molded, has to be fitted to the original key. This process normally includes machining, hand filing and sculpting, or some of both. As a result, the new top material is left with many rough edges and some unwanted scratches (which always come with the job!). The question then is: "What is the most efficient method for the final finish?" Our final goal is to make sure the final finish is not only beautiful to look at, but also to guarantee the player a "soft" and uniform feel.

OK, let's get to the details. When we first started recovering keys in 1990, we experimented with dozens of buffing wheels and compounds. After a few years of trial and error, we settled in on some simple techniques and materials that we continue to use today.

Buffing compounds for plastic are normally graded as "cut", "cut and color", or just "color". "Cut" refers to removing scratches, machining and file marks, but not polishing. "Color" refers to polishing only, and "cut and color" does both. Our PBC-1 compound is a perfect "cut and color" and is the best we've found.

Choosing the correct buffing wheels will assist in getting the optimum finish. Our DC-600 and DC-800 buffing wheels are bias cut as opposed to stitched types. Bias cut helps eliminate streaking, prevents unraveling, and holds a better load of compound.

Once you are set up with your wheels (you will need two pressed together), motor, and compound, you are ready to start. You will need to load the buffing wheel with compound (while the wheels are turning) for each key. The trick now is to move the key into the wheels for just the right amount of time. The friction from the wheel and heat build-up can actually melt or distort the top and ruin your work if you leave it in too long. You will learn exactly when to remove the key before distortion occurs.

Remember to load the wheel with compound for each and every key. The best way to learn the technique is to find old junk keys, recover a few, and practice finding the limits before distortion. The rate of speed of your motor, how hard you lay the key into the wheel, and how long you leave the key in will be the main variables. Once you master the technique, you should be able to work an entire set of keys perfectly in 20 to 30 minutes.