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Servicing Moller pitmans and shifters

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We find that servicing a Moller pitman chest with the pitmans in the bottom can indeed be tricky. It is not unusual for many of the pitmans to fall upon dropping the bottom board. By inserting a pencil type "Exacto" knife blade through the center of the so called "toilet seat" cardboard pitman retainer, then sticking the pitman on the tip of the knife blade, the retainer may be glued back in place without losing the pitman. I use a toothpick to place a dot of glue on both sides of the pitman retainer to minimize the risk of getting glue into the pitman cavity. The same knife blade is used after the glue has had a chance to partially set to wiggle the pitman around in the cavity insuring that the pitman has free movement.

To repair the shifters in a duplex chest, I use the same knife to neatly cut away the kraft paper covering the shifter cavities. The shifters are then laid out on a table, the rotten discs having been removed. Replacement disks are then glued on one end of the shifter rods. After the disks have thoroughly dried, while supporting the shifter from one side (inside the chest), I place a dot of glue on the other end of the shifter rod with a toothpick. With a replacement disk stuck on the tip of the knife blade, the disk is then carefully placed dead center on the tip of the shifter rod. An excess of glue on the disk, on the side of the shifter rod, or in the shifter channel can spell disaster. After sufficient time has passed, the knife point is again used to wobble the shifter in its channel, insuring that it has not gotten hung up on any glue deposits.

Replacement pitmans, shifter disks, and pitman retainers are currently available from Organ Supply Industries.

To releather an older Moller primary, the primary valves are unscrewed using hemostats. In some installations, the first rank of pipes, along with thier associated rack board and toe board may be removed to gain easier access to the primary valves. If the toeboard is glued to the chest frame, however, abandon that notion. Once the primary valves are unscrewed from their pouches, the ground wires must be unsoldered to free the pouch board. If the pouch board cannot be releathered within the limits of the cable, then the cable junction must also be unsoldered. With all of the screws removed, the pouch board will break loose from its cork gaskets, most likely ripping those gaskets. If the pouch board is handled carefully, the ripped cork gaskets will again mate, otherwise the gaskets must be replaced.

Assuming that the leather is original, or that the last releathering was performed by a thoughtful technician, hide glue would have been used and as such will dissolve with several wipings from a wet cloth. Hide glue is strongly suggested for use on the replacement pouches.

Chris Nagorka adds: On Moller primaries from the '20s, the magnet board will come off of the chest primaries completely. I would suggest that where possible, it would be preferable to take the entire primary assembly out, rather than trying to just take the pouchboard out. On the '20s chests, once the bottom boards are off, and the rank immediately above the primary is removed, it's a matter of removing four screws from the ends of the chest (two on each end), then tapping the primary with a mallet and the whole assembly will come out of the chest. It will

be much easier to take the valve wires out at that point, as one can use a pin vise from the end. Also- the pitmans and shifter disks were the same item- only "pitmans" are listed in the OSI catalog, but they also work as shifter disks. Finally, when rebuilding shifters, I usually lubricate the surface of the shifter rod with graphite before putting it back in the chest.

Dennis Milnar adds: "The newer primaries are removeable by removing large screws on the ends of the chest as well as the top board screws."