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Tip: The Book Halter, an Alternative to the Colibrì Book Jacket

Conservators often hesitate to apply library labels directly to book bindings, particularly in the case of older books bound in leather, cloth, or decorated paper. Because of their fragility, such books are unsuited for the Colibrì Automatic Book-Covering System (www.colibriusa.com), which many research libraries use to create polyethylene dust jackets for new case-bound or paperback books. The polyethylene "book halter" described here is a solution for bindings that need to be labeled on the spine but cannot be opened fully to receive a Colibrì book jacket (fig. 1).

The Colibrì system consists of three standard sizes of polyethylene book covers, each with two pockets to accommodate the book boards, as well as a heat welder. The jackets protect book covers from dirt and abrasion, and they also provide a surface to which library spine labels or barcodes can be adhered. In its advertisements, Colibrì claims that it takes only 20 seconds to cover a book using this system. While this may seem like a time-saving boon to library staffers, fitting a book into a Colibrì cover requires swinging both book boards away from the text block until they meet opposite the spine (fig. 2). This position puts stress on the spine and inner hinges of the book, making the system inappropriate for old, weak, or fragile bindings.

The Colibrì halter was developed to allow American Philosophical Society library staff to attach labels to older books that are too sturdy to require boxing but too fragile to be forced into the potentially damaging position required to put on a Colibrì jacket. Heat-sealed polyethylene straps wrap each book board adjacent to the spine, and a third strap, attached with double-stick tape, links the two board straps at the bottom of the spine. The straps can be cut from Colibrì book covers and sealed with the Colibrì welding machine, and the halter can be attached without undue manipulation of the book. The halter also saves money and materials, since five or more halters can be made from each Colibrì jacket (fig. 3). With time for cutting materials, each halter takes

Fig. 1. A row of books equipped with Colibrì book halters.

Fig. 2. The position a book must assume to be covered with a full Colibrì dust jacket (courtesy of Keara Teeter).

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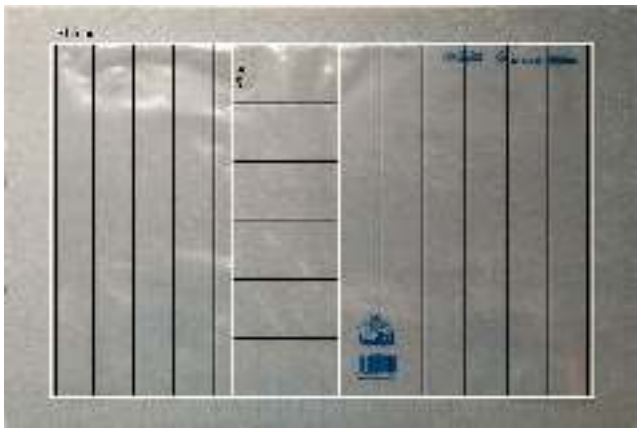

Fig. 3. Cutting diagram for a Standard Colibrì cover (49.21 cm x 12.625 cm; 19 3/8" x 12 5/8").

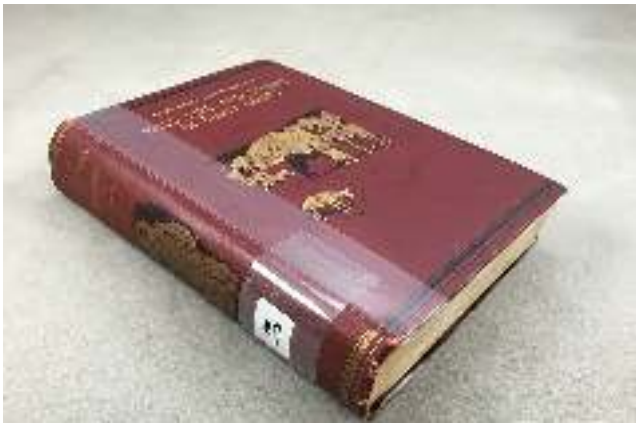

Fig. 4. The finished Colibrì book halter with attached library label.

approximately 8 minutes to make—far more than the 20 seconds required for a full jacket, but far less than the time required to make a custom book box.

To manufacture the book halter, select the Colibrì cover that would fit the chosen book. Using a board sheer or knife, cut the pockets of the cover into vertical strips approximately 3 cm (1.25 in.) wide (or wide enough to accommodate any barcode labels that must be attached to the book boards). Cut the spine of the Colibrì cover into horizontal spine strips tall enough to accommodate the height of any spine labels. Each pocket strip is a double thickness of polyethylene with narrow heat seals at the top and bottom. Open a pocket strip and slide it over one book board, nestling it into the hinge of the book. Leave excess plastic at the head of the book. Place the closed book on the Colibrì machine with the head facing the welding bar and the strapped board down. Snug the book up against the welding bar and use the machine to weld and trim the strap. Repeat with the second board. Finally, with the book closed, use strips of 3M 415 double-sided tape to secure a polyethylene spine strip to the two board straps. Trim away any excess plastic from the spine strip. The book halter is now complete (fig. 4).

While these book halters are visually unobtrusive and dispense with the need to place adhesive labels or marking inks directly on book covers, they are not perfect. When shelving two books with book halters side by side, the straps that wrap the book boards can catch on each other, stretching and warping the polyethylene. Shelving books at an angle and then rotating them upright helps to prevent this problem. Readers who experiment with the book halter and make improvements to the design are encouraged to share their results.

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