

Understanding Carpet Quality

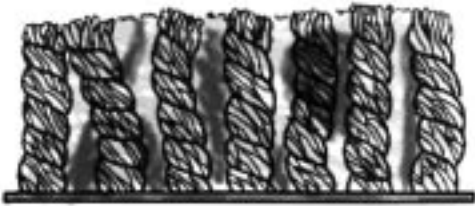
ShawMark®

Introduction

This booklet is designed to assist those who are planning to buy carpet sometime in the near future. It deals with quality, that elusive characteristic we all look for in the products we buy, but often have trouble identifying at the time of purchase.

The information in this booklet addresses quality in carpet, and specifically, the most popular residential carpet style—nylon saxony plush. Cut and loop styles, or “interrupted saxonies”, are considered part of this group.

Essentially, a saxony plush is a cut-pile carpet with a tight twist in the yarn. The twist is heat-set into the yarn during the manufacturing process to lock it in to each tuft, giving the fibers a “memory”, or twist retention.



Saxony carpets have a rich, pinpoint definition and smooth surface texture that depend on the tight twist and distinct, upright tuft construction. They are among the most elegant and versatile of carpet styles, which accounts for their overwhelming popularity with American homeowners.

What To Look For In A Carpet

Although color and price are essential factors when shopping for carpet, the right color at the lowest price does not necessarily represent the best value. Primary consideration should be given to performance value, a carpet’s ability to retain its good looks where it really counts ... in your home, on the floor.

Virtually any carpet looks good when it’s first installed, but the longer it stays looking good, the greater its real value.



How To Judge Performance Value

It's not easy to predict how well a carpet will perform in your home. All saxonies do not perform alike, and you can't tell how a carpet will hold up by running your hand over a sample to check the depth and thickness of the pile.

A better indication of a product's true on-the-floor performance record can be found in the manufacturer's warranty information, something we will explore later. First, let's look at the main reasons for carpet failure in the home.

Most Carpet Doesn't Wear Out... It "Uglies Out"

There comes a time in any carpet's life when its new appearance cannot be restored, although it may still contain its full complement of fiber and tufts. It simply begins to look old and ugly, no longer enhancing a room, but rather making the room look dingy and neglected.

Obviously, the longer you can prevent this from happening, the greater value you have derived from your carpet investment.

What makes a carpet start to look bad?

The two most common problems causing "ugly out" are matting, or traffic-laning, and staining. Although different, both problems usually occur in small areas of the carpet, and either can harm the look of an entire room.

Proper maintenance procedures will minimize both of these problems, but a carpet's built-in performance charac-

teristics are equally important, if not more so, in determining how well that carpet will perform on your floor.

As suggested earlier, you can protect yourself against these two major performance problems by making sure that the carpet you purchase is properly warranted against them.

Traffic-Laning — A Carpet's Worst Enemy

Since the average adult exerts three or four times body weight with every step, over a period of time busy pathways on a carpet can begin to show unsightly signs of wear and tear, or what carpet people call “traffic lanes.”

Saxony carpets, designed to look their best when each tuft is distinct and upright, are particularly susceptible to traffic-laning, as tuft definition can be destroyed by the beating a carpet takes in high-traffic areas.

The result is a matted traffic lane that can detract from the appearance of an entire room, even though only a small portion of carpet may be affected.

The two main culprits of traffic-laning:

1. Simple Soiling - Nylon will not stick to itself as long as it is clean, but when dirt and soil build up, a sticky film can develop and cause the tufts to stick together.

Fortunately, this sort of traffic-laning can be corrected by cleaning the carpet to remove soil buildup.

2. Yarn Crushing and Unraveling - This is a more serious problem, as clean, properly cared-for carpet can mat and crush if the tufts lose their twist.

When the twist is lost, the individual tufts lose their definition and carpet becomes frayed and fuzzy-looking. Although there is no way to correct this problem, you can avoid it in the beginning by selecting the right carpet for your home.

This is why it is essential to understand what constitutes true carpet quality and insist on nothing less when you shop.

Beware outmoded myths.

While many people still believe that a thicker, heavier carpet will perform better, that criterion is no longer a reliable way to determine carpet quality.

Although ‘hand’ (or how a carpet feels) used to be an important sign of quality, it can now sometimes be actually misleading.

How can a carpet that feels thicker and heavier actually be less durable?

Some carpets feel thicker because they use a bulkier yarn that has not been tightly twisted. This technique makes the carpet look and feel thicker than it actually is. And it’s one way to get a fuller-looking carpet without paying more money. However, what you may actually be getting is the same amount of yarn as a tightly twisted product...plus a lot more air.

While all yarn is twisted to improve appearance, too little twist can weaken the fiber’s ability to stand up under wear. The yarn may begin to unravel and mat down, leading to premature loss of the carpet’s original appearance.

The fiber in ShawMark’s *Anything Goes!*[®] Carpets is specially created to minimize matting and crushing; the shape of the fiber strand itself is compact, a characteristic designed to enhance wearability. The yarn is tightly twisted and heat-set to provide exceptional “memory”, and the carpet retains its original beauty even under years of demanding wear and punishment.

Do you have to give up style and appearance to get long-lasting performance?

Certainly not. And the preceding conclusions are not meant to imply that high-bulk carpets won't perform at all, it's just that they won't perform as well as carpets made with stronger fiber.



Fibers showing twist loss.

There may be places in your home, such as bedrooms, where the added elegance and fullness of high-bulk carpets are so desirable that you're willing to give up some performance characteristics, but be realistic in your expectations.

In areas that get a lot of concentrated traffic and daily use, these high-bulk carpets will show wear early and will probably need to be replaced sooner than you would like.

If you decide that the thickness and heaviness of the high-bulk look are what you want, but you don't want to give up long-range performance, you can look for actual yarn density rather than high bulk.

There is of course, a price factor to consider, since more density means more yarn cost.

However, if you look at carpet a little differently, you may find that you can have both appearance and longrange performance without paying a premium for extra yarn.

Before we look at those options, let's consider the other chief cause of carpet deterioration.

Staining and Stain-Resistant Carpets

Although newer residential carpets represent a significant advance in stain resistance and can save you from some dreadful staining disasters, there is no magic involved, and even these carpets have their limitations.

When a stain isn't a stain.

Sometimes what you think is a stain is really just something on your carpet that causes an apparent color change, but in many cases the appearance is caused by spotting or soiling. In these instances, the original color will come back when the offending matter is removed with proper cleaning.

When a stain is a stain.

Only when the actual color of the carpet is changed is the discoloration a true stain, and the most common staining problem is from acid-based dyes commonly found in many foods and other household items.



Acid-based dyes are also used to color nylon carpet by filling tiny dye sites in the raw carpet fiber, and some of the dye sites are left unfilled after the dyeing process; the lighter the carpet, the more unfilled dye sites are left.

When material containing acid-based dye is later spilled on the carpet, the dye reacts chemically with the unfilled dye sites to create still a new color. The chemical bond that is formed changes the actual color of the carpet permanently.

Stain prevention, not removal.

There are ways, however, to prevent stains from occurring, and that's where stain-resistant carpets come into play. The fiber in these carpets has been treated with a process that actually blocks the unfilled dyes sites that were left after the carpet was dyed.

These treatments can protect your carpet from permanent staining even from spills that have set for 24 hours or longer.

Combined with fluorochemical treatments which resist soil and don't allow liquids to readily penetrate the surface of the carpet, stain-resistant carpets today offer the best protection available against most common soiling and staining problems.

However, there are limits, and no stain-protection program can eliminate the need for a good maintenance program. You still need to vacuum your carpet regularly, clean it periodically, and treat spills as quickly as possible.

Moreover, there are some materials that will still cause permanent color changes, in spite of the protection against acid-based dyes. Dispersed dyes, found in some food stuffs like mustard and herbal teas, and bleaching agents, such as laundry bleaches and other household cleaning materials, will permanently discolor most nylon carpets. In these cases, prevention is the only remedy.

Matting vs. Staining: Which To Protest Against First

Perhaps the easiest way to decide is to look at your old carpet. Do you first notice large, ugly stains, or packed, matted areas? Or are both problems contributing equally to your carpet's worn, tired look?

Actually, most people rank matting and crushing as a more significant problem than staining, since stains are intermittent and carpet is subject to constant foot-traffic.

Fortunately, if you know how to shop for them, you can find carpets that offer top protection against both problems - and that adds up to the best performance value you can buy.

How Can You Tell About A Carpet's Performance Just By Looking At It?

The best way to start is by examining the labels on the back of the carpet sample. The labels provide good information about a carpet and how it is made, but sometimes what a label—and a warranty—doesn't say is important.

Since there are several common warranties for residential carpet and hundreds of different kinds of labels, you need to learn how to read and understand the information to keep from being misled by promises that might mean less than you think.



What to look for.

Look first for recognizable names, well-known, national mills and fiber manufacturers. These are names you can trust to stand behind their products and your assurance that you are looking at a quality product.

The most important thing to look for is the warranty information, as it provides the best story of how a carpet should perform. But you must know how to read and interpret the information.

Warranties—the key to carpet performance.

Although there are many warranties offered today, only a few provide the kind of performance protection against the things that can destroy your carpet's good looks fastest—matting and staining.

Recognizing the warranties that give the best coverage is the most reliable way to know what you are buying and what sort of appearance will be maintained a few years down the line.

The most common types of carpet warranties.

1. WEAR WARRANTIES—Probably the most common warranty, this guarantees that the carpet fiber will not wear away. It offers no protection against manufacturing defects and makes no performance promises.

This guarantee offers assurance that the fiber was made by a reliable source, an important consideration, but it gives no indication of the quality of performance of the carpet on your floor.

2. MANUFACTURING DEFECTS—Any carpet you buy should be covered by a written warranty against manufacturing defects, since it comes directly from the manufacturer and is your assurance that the carpet was not made in a shoddy manner.

This warranty protects against problems like tufts pulling out of the carpet, the face of the carpet coming apart from the backing, and the dye coming out when you shampoo your carpet.

While very important, this warranty still does not guarantee performance over the long term.

The most important warranties for longlasting carpet.

1. CRUSH-RESISTANCE WARRANTY—A crush-resistance, or texture retention warranty, states that the carpet will not resist matting and crushing due to twist loss for a specific period of time.

If you are really concerned about how your carpet will look years from now, this is one warranty you should insist on.

2. STAIN-RESISTANCE WARRANTY—Since there are a lot of stain-resistance processes on the market, look for one that is guaranteed by the mill or fiber manufacturer for proven results. Select the strongest, simplest

warranty against staining you can find, back by a manufacturer you can trust.

Take Time To Know Exactly What Kind Of Protection You Are Getting

Too often, what at first looks like a strong warranty is watered down by limitations and disclaimers. Read the warranty carefully, and be sure you know the answers to a few important questions before you buy.

***HOW LONG IS YOUR CARPET COVERED?—**Is this a 1-year, 5-year, or 10-year warranty?

The more faith a manufacturer has in a carpet's longevity, the more faith you can have in it.

***IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM, WHAT WILL THE MANUFACTURER DO ABOUT IT?—**A proper warranty spells out exactly how the manufacturer will compensate you if you have a problem, and often the compensation program starts on a minimal level and drops quickly from there.

It is important that you understand the reimbursement policy before you buy. The manufacturer's policy is another indication of how strongly the product is supported.

***WHAT DISCLAIMERS ARE INCLUDED IN THE WARRANTY?—**Sometimes a warranty does not cover certain types of installations or certain areas, and two of the most common areas where a carpet is not guaranteed are stairs and hallways. Other areas may also be excluded.

***WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO TO MAINTAIN WARRANTY COVERAGE?—**A warranty can demand a great deal of the purchaser in order to remain in effect, so be sure you understand what is expected of you.

Almost any performance warranty will be dependent on proper maintenance, but some can be more unreasonable than others. See if the warranty specifies exactly how

you must care for your carpet and if those requirements are reasonable.

***WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR WARRANTY IF YOU SELL YOUR HOUSE?**—The average American family changes houses every five years, and most warranties are not transferable to new owners.

A transferable warranty can be a selling point if you decide to sell your house, and it is another indication of how seriously the manufacturer supports and believes in the product.

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