

Difference-Makers

CAPPING OUR FOX-MUSTANG INTERIOR RESTORATION WITH A SERIES OF SMALL PARTS NETS A HUGE IMPROVEMENT

Text and Photos by Tom Wilson

Followers of the slow-boat restoration of our '91 LX hatchback know we recently finished having TMI/Classic prototype its Fox sunroof headliner in our car. It came out great, complementing our TMI-sourced leather interior and Chicane Sport Tuning carpet. However, a headliner, carpet, and upholstery a new interior do not complete.

There were plenty of small items still stinking up our LX's cockpit. The old SVO leather shift knob looked dog-bit, with the leather ripped open, thread hanging out, and white underlayment blazing like a searchlight. The clutch and brake-pedal pads were worn clear through. The door map pockets were sagging after 19 years. Like seemingly every Fox these days, the door-pull surrounds were cracked in two, and even the leather-trimmed steering wheel was alternately shiny smooth or lunar-pocked where fingers had worn it down, or rings and fingernails had dug out the trim.

The good news is that aero-nose Foxes such as ours are fully supported by the aftermarket, so searching flea markets and junkyards for trim parts isn't required. In fact, with Latemodel Restoration Supply on the scene, it's pretty much one-stop shopping for sprucing up a Fox interior these days. And that's exactly where we headed, having LRS supply a couple of small boxes of vitally needed resto trim parts.

As we can't photograph ourselves doing the install work, even for jobs as

simple as these, GTR Performance was once again drafted for installation duty. It was like a day off for Ricardo Topete at GTR after his steady diet of bolt-ons and supercharger installs. How involved can slipping on new pedal pads be? In fact, the only challenge was R&Ring the steering wheel. Like so many interior parts, you just have to know where to pry with a screwdriver to get the job underway.

Note that getting trim parts to fit just so and matching colors takes more than expected. Much depends on your ultimate

goal. If you're sprucing up a weekend-drag or open-track car, you've got better things to worry about than if the map pockets are the exact same shade of gray as the door panels. But those things do matter—a lot—when restoring a Fox for pride-and-joy cruiser status. In that case, count on spending some time making things fit, and err toward replacing everything at the same time for the best color matching. It's not that the new parts are necessarily bad but after 20 years, the originals have faded or warped out of shape, and dye lots vary



HORSE SENSE: Bluntly put, Mustang restoration parts are mainly blessedly inexpensive. In another life, we once had a Porsche 914, which had about as much carpeting as a good-size bathmat. That didn't keep the OEM replacement price of the carpet under \$600 though! Honestly, some cars have more area in floor mats.

► Sure, it's no blower, but minor parts make a major difference. Like most old 5.0s, our door-latch bezels were cracked and doing their best to fall off. For \$19.99 and about two minutes with a screwdriver, we replaced the pair and haven't had to apologize to passengers since. Latemodel Restoration Supply offers these parts in the original all-black shown here or with a chrome surround.



▲ Our pile of parts from LRS didn't even scratch the surface of what the company has available. Some of the parts are LRS' own; others are sourced from other aftermarket vendors. When it makes sense or they're available, genuine Ford parts are supplied. Best of all, LRS has the pesky supporting pieces, such as screws and other small hardware, already bagged and marked for each specific application. This saves a ton of running around looking for matching trim screws.



▲ Some of our window and lock switches had given up and almost all their paint had worn off. The switches aren't repairable and cleaning them won't restore the painted characters, so we replaced them all with new Ford parts from LRS. The window switches are \$14.99 a piece, or \$39.99 for the convertible version with four window switches ganged together. The door-lock switches hover around \$25 each.



▲ At \$6.99 a shot, pedal pads have to be the least expensive, easiest install "slip-on" in the Mustang universe. That is, until you get to the pad for brake pedals in automatic Foxes; it's just \$3.99. Of course, you can spend more. LRS offers these typical Fox clutch/brake pedal pads with a "5.0" molded in at \$9.99. And if we have to show you how to install these, you need to put down this magazine and get someone to water you.



▲ Much of our work was in the door panels, which are easy enough to remove. Remove the small triangle piece inside of the exterior mirror, strip all the bezels and the armrest, pry the bottom of the panel away from the door, and lift it up off the window channel. Now the panel can be cleaned or replaced, and all new bezels and switches can be installed. Our door panels were in good shape, but for best results for matching map pockets and arm rests, replace the door panel at the same time.



▲ Unless you have a large bench, working on the floor could be the easiest way to work on the door panel. Here Ricardo is removing the map pocket from the panel, which involves bending up a small forest of metal tabs. A split-toed upholstery tool worked well to move the tabs, and the washers were pressed over them.

no matter how diligent the manufacturer. We also suggest keeping a spray bottle of vinyl cleaner handy when doing this work, as it's an excellent time to clean years of grit from otherwise inaccessible nooks.

Once we had our interior parts installed, our old hatch turned the corner from tired airport car with a few new parts to a newly exciting weekend toy—or in our case, daily driver. Yes, our mechanicals still have 197,000 decently maintained miles on them, but the feel of the car went from social outcast to neat old car!

Besides not taking long, if you're sprucing up a tired daily driver such as ours, the cost is really quite reasonable. Many of the usual cracked plastic bits are ten-dollar parts, so it shouldn't take long to save up for a small-parts spruce-up. And when you're done, you'll agree that the small parts make an amazing difference.



▲ Getting started on the new map pocket we sourced from TMI/Classic requires a minimum of three hands—all those metal tabs have to be bent together at the same time. We found two people could get the tabs aligned and fitted into the panel, while one person simply worked in circles on this chore.



▲ Ricardo isn't really trying to drill a hole in his hand, but enlarge a hole in the replacement armrest pad. It uses a different mounting system than the stocker, and we found it best to enlarge the mounting hardware, thus enlarging the mounting hole. Each pad is \$39.99 and is available in black, red, or light gray for '87-'93 Foxes (earlier years are also available). These pads can also be painted with LRS spray paint, but we found the as-delivered color was the best match.



▲ Typical of later Foxes, our driver-side-lock and window-switch bezel was bent. We opted for a \$19.99 stock replacement from LRS, which also offers a billet-aluminum bezel for \$29.99 or \$39.99 for convertibles. Installation is as simple as one screw and can be done without any other door disassembly.



▲ Installing the switches is possible by pulling off only the armrest, but we already had the door panel and armrest off. The switches simply plug onto pins at the end of the pink wires, so replacement is simply pulling off the old switches and pushing on the new ones.



▲ Here's another one that's one-screw simple: the mirror-hole cover. This triangle piece is often broken or missing; the replacement part is all of \$9.99 from LRS.



▲ The only job in this story that isn't screwdriver simple is swapping out the steering wheel. And that's only because you have to search for some of the fasteners and wrestle with one stubborn tapered fit. Ricardo started by removing the steering column trim so we could indulge our cleaning fetish. By this point, he had already threaded on the new shift knob before we could catch him in the act with the camera. It simply threads on, however, so we think you can use your imagination.



▲ Our '91 LX has an airbag, so step one was to remove the exploding baggie. Four 10mm bolts accessed behind the wheel hold the airbag in place.



▲ Once unbolted, the airbag simply pulls out of the wheel. Disconnect the two wiring harness plugs and the airbag can be set aside.



▲ The trim around the cruise control buttons is easy—once you know where to pry. Look for tiny latches (like on a wiring harness connector) on the inside edge of the trim (where Ricardo's left index finger is here). Depress them with a small screwdriver and the trim pops off.



▲ Once the trim is off, remove the two screws and the cruise control switches come free. Take a moment to memorize how the small wiring loom is inset to the channels in the steering wheel as you'll need to carefully stow the wires during reassembly or the airbag won't fit.



▲ The horn switches pry out with a small flat-blade screwdriver, and their wiring disconnects via small harness connectors. There are a couple more harness connectors and wiring guides at the top center of the wheel; remove those now too and you're ready for the main attraction.



▲ At the center of the steering wheel is a bolt—it's easy to remove but the steering wheel ... not so much. It'll be seemingly welded to the upper steering shaft by a taper fit, and how you separate the two depends on whether you have a steering wheel puller (who does?) or your blacksmith skills.

► Not having a steering wheel puller, Ricardo began with an impact hammer and got nothing. (Note he's beating on an old bolt and not the one used to hold the steering wheel on in service.) Then he heated the connection with a propane torch and shot WD-40 into it. Nothing. Then he hammered again. Then more heat. Then he hammered. About when we were ready to give up, the steering wheel popped off as we pulled on it for the thousandth time. Heat, penetrating oil, and persistence are your best tools here.



▲ You no sooner get the old wheel off than you put the new wheel on; torque the bolt 23 to 33 lb-ft with blue Loctite. The connection is keyed so there are no worries about lining anything up. Repopulate the wheel with its wires, switches, and airbag, being careful to route all the wires into their passageways, otherwise the airbag will pinch the wires when you bolt it down. Steering wheels are \$369.99 at LRS with a \$100 core charge, but having a handsome, soft, grippy wheel sure is nice.



▲ Car designers talk about touch points in automotive interiors, and after replacing our steering wheel, shift knob, pedal pads, window switches and so on, we have a more ingrained idea of their importance. Our car felt remarkably newer, even though we were used to the reupholstered seats and headliner, because wherever we interacted with it the feel was new. It's a nice change! 5.0

MATCHED SETTING

With the guts of our '91 LX looking so good, we couldn't help but think about the outside. Original as they come, our car had its share of bump and grinds, faded paint, and stained wheels.

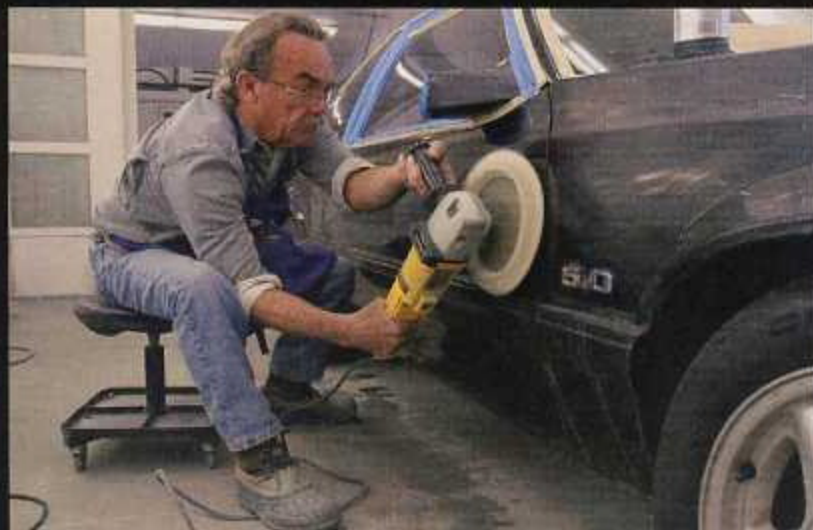
Our first thought was new paint, but a quick stop at the good auto-body shop in town and the from-the-hip \$7,000 estimate told us everything we needed to know about that option.

Next up was a detailer. Thankfully Ford used simple one-step paints back in the Fox days—no clearcoat—and seemingly three quarters of those Foxes were black. Painters and detailers love black because it has more pigment than any other paint. Black goes all the way to the primer, so you can carefully cut off the top layer to expose a much fresher layer beneath. That's what our detailer did for us, starting with a 2,000-grit sandpaper roughing, followed by buffing with rubbing compound, and finally waxing.

This requires a practiced hand, so don't shop this job strictly on price. A good job will take one man a long day at least, so plan on spending several hundred dollars. Also be aware that only so much that can be done by cutting paint. There is, after all, only so much paint on the car, and not much can be done about crazing or thin spots. The urethane bumpers and other soft spots can also pose problems. They will probably respond best to considerable hand-detailing with rubbing compound and wax.

If you're bucks down, this job is mainly labor—you can tackle it one fender per night in the garage. Some technique is required, and you really do want a good electric buffer for a job this big, but it's a place to save some money while growing your skills, if you're so inclined.

We're tickled with our results. Sure, there are some swirl marks from the compounding, and we spent another day with our Mother's gear, cleaning up little corners missed by the detailer, waxing the door jambs, hitting the plastic parts with spray protectants, and so on. But the transformation is incredible. The DOA paint is now showroom shiny and smooth—and we can still say it's original.



▲ A serious day or two cutting paint and buzz-canning the windshield wipers, mirrors, and worn rub rails positively transforms the typical older Fox.

SOURCES

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