

Deluxe Steering Wheel Restoration

by Bob Lyons

Nothing can detract more from the interior of a restored Mustang than a worn out looking steering wheel. But before you refurbish your old steering wheel or order a new one, why not consider adding a deluxe woodgrain steering wheel? It was available with all 1965 or 1966 Mustang interiors and is MCA legal (except for wood wheels) again in 1987.

As you might expect, the woodgrain wheel is more trouble to restore than the standard wheel. First, disconnect your battery. Then line up your front wheels so they point straight ahead. Next, remove the steering wheel by grasping its center cap and pulling it gently while tilting up. Then undo the wheel's mounting nut.

Examine the center cap. If its plating is good, then clean it up to be reused. If it is pitted, it will have to be rechromed as the only readily available replacement is, in my opinion, not a quality reproduction, and sells for \$55. The center emblem, which sells for \$20, can be replaced by removing its three screws, foam, and the backing plate holding it in place. After the cap has been taken care of, the FORD and MUSTANG letters can be renewed by using a detailing paint brush and small bottles of Testor's hobby enamel Gloss Red and Flat Black paints.

Now turn your attention to the woodgrain steering wheel. Remove the three screws and springs on the hub. This releases the outer horn contact ring. Clean the track area and the contact points underneath the ring with fine steel wool. Then remove the three screws on the back of the hub to release the inner horn ring. Clean its track and contact points. Examine the horn ring. If it is cracked around the hub, it can be lead soldered, or replaced with a new ring for \$35.

The plastic woodgrain rim is next. If it is uncracked or has only a few minor inoffensive cracks in it, great! To repair these cracks, there is a book called, "The Steering Wheel Restoration Book", by Jack Turpin (available through the Eastwood Company,

(800-345-1178, or in PA, 215-644-4412), which will help you repair those minor cracks. For major damage, nothing short of new "plastic wood" will do. Many vendors offer this repair service.

Finally, look at the wheel spokes. The sides of the spokes and the insides of the holes are chromed and usually need no attention. But the backs of these spokes are not plated very well and are susceptible to rust. Remove this oxidation with steel wool. The front faces of the spokes are a brushed steel argent color. Carefully remove any rust and clean the metal thoroughly. If the front faces are in good shape, then mask off the rim and give the spokes a

coat of clear spray enamel on both sides to ward off rust. If the argent color of the spoke faces have rust damage, then mask off the rim and chromed areas and give them several coats of argent spray. When the argent is dry, mask it with a mild adhesive tape and give the back and sides a coat of clear spray. After the wheel dries, reassemble the pieces in the reverse order it was disassembled. It's almost impossible to put the wheel back together incorrectly unless you really work at it!

Not counting the time spent farming out my wheel elsewhere for a new rim installation, I completed my woodgrain wheel in four days, with an average time spent of only thirty minutes a day. This was really no time at all when you consider the vast improvement this deluxe wheel made to my Mustang's interior! **MT**

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