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Installation: 1998-2002 Dashboard Replacement

INTERIOR

Thank you for your purchase of the replacement dash for your truck.

To make this project a little easier we've included TDR Issue 82 and an article from TDR Member Brent Boxall that takes you through the step-by-step process.

Brent's article was written in the Fall of 2013. Since that time several things have changed. The easiest way to address the changes/updates are to list Brent's reference numbers and add our comments.

The first thing you'll note is that Brent purchased a dash from LMC Truck parts. We think ours is a "better mousetrap." We learned the hard way that molded-in plastic reinforcements to the dashboard should be designed-in and used at the five dashboard-to-cowl locations. The LMC design uses awkward metal tabs to sandwich the plastic at these attachment points.

Second, in the lengthy development of this part you won't believe how efficient we have become in removing and installing a '98-'02 dash. Each truck is a little different, and this one-piece unit will most likely require some light trimming to fit. Use masking tape to help you "draw" a straight line along the dash side panels.

Now, on to the "numbered" items in Brent's article:

#23: Brent tells us that he removed the windshield. If you have the right tools, removal of the factory screws really isn't that bad. The right tool – a small battery powered screwdriver with a magnetic tip and an 8mm socket. (Tip: When removing the old dash, you can also break it out piece by piece which will ease access to the mounting screws. This saves a lot of time and hassle.)

#23: We see that Brent used a chain and straps to support the dash. Ours was left to hang in the breeze. A strap can be beneficial on the passenger side. Driver's side will sit on steering wheel and steering wheel will rest on seat.

Here is a note not covered in Brent's write-up.

The OEM passenger and driver's side window defrost louvers have a tendency to break when removing them from the OEM dash. Because of this we chose not to have these openings cut out during manufacturing. If you are able to remove your louvers without damaging them, then you can use the reference indentation on the underside of the dash as a template to cut out the opening and install your OEM defrost louvers.

Our dash has positioned the notches at an angle to direct air to the windows similar to how the OEM ones do. You will also find that there are not mounting locations for the side defrost air ducts, but rather heavy-duty double sided tape. This has proven to be an easy and reliable way to mount the air ducts.

The factory dash has many screws that face towards the rear of the truck near the fire wall. These screws are redundant due to the defrost plenum metal tabs being sandwiched between the firewall and the dash top. Once everything is installed and the five screws at the firewall are tightened, the defrost plenum and side vents will not move around or rattle.

Finally, the manufacturer suggests that you paint the dash using plastic vinyl interior trim paint to reduce UV long-term damage; plus, the dash material is reflective on the inside of the windshield and paint should help reduce the glare from the reflection. We suggest you can instead simply cover the dash with an Ultimat dash cover.

And when it comes to cleaning this, or any other dash, our plastic guys tell us not to use those citrus-based cleaners as they will dry-out the plastic.

If you need more assistance, we are only a phone call away.

(770) 886-2500 Monday–Friday 8:30AM–5:30PM

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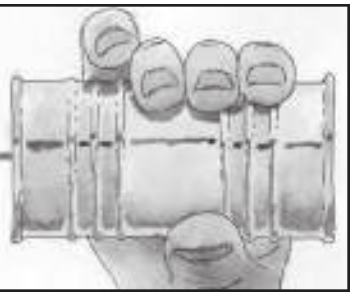
MEMBER 2 MEMBER



I think you will agree with me when I categorize Turbo Diesel owners as independent people who are not afraid to try something new. You are an ingenious membership who reinvents and improves a product to make it better serve your needs. You show a strong willingness to share your shadetree solutions. With your input each quarter, we publish the "Member2Member" exchange to give you a forum to tell other members how you solved a problem.

In this issue we've got a write-up by TDR member Brent Boxall about replacing the dash on his 2001 Turbo Diesel.

REPLACING YOUR CRACKED DASH

by Brent Boxall

All you have to do is Google "Dodge Ram cracked dash" and you can get as many pages of results as you want. I'm thinking that unless you leave the truck parked in a cave the Second Generation Ram dash is going to crack and/or break. Does the picture below look familiar?

You can even see my failed attempts to glue the dash.

There are three solutions to solve this problem:

First, purchase a fabric mat to cover the unsightly problem.

Second, purchase a plastic dash cover which comes with a silicone adhesive that glues the new cover to the existing dash. The silicone glue has two functions: one is to hold the dash cover in place and the other is to keep the broken pieces of the original dash from falling down into the dash and possibly damaging wiring, vacuum lines, etc. After noticing that my dash was falling apart, I decided against this repair. If your dash is just cracked this solution may work for you. It is a lot easier than an entire dash replacement and less expensive.

The third solution involves replacing the entire dash top with a new one. This article will illustrate step by step how I accomplished this dash replacement on my 2001 Dodge Ram, Quad Cab.

There are many sharp edges under and around the dash and associated parts so, extreme caution should be exercised. Also, be very cautious with the vehicle's wiring harness. Damage done to the wiring harness may not be readily apparent, but can result in lots of blown fuses and, worst case, a fire and loss of the vehicle.

Since this operation involves electrical connections and the air bags you ***MUST DISCONNECT THE GROUND STRAP ON BOTH BATTERIES!***

1. DISCONNECT THE GROUND STRAPS FROM BOTH BATTERIES!

2. Set up adequate work lights inside the truck and have a plan for organizing the parts and fasteners that you remove.

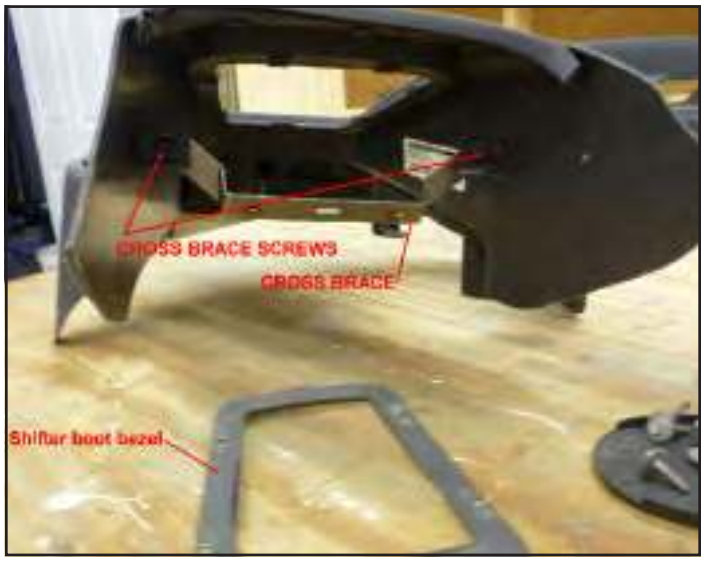
3. Remove both doorway thresholds and kick panels.

4. Gently pull the plastic instrument bezel off the dash by gently pulling out with your fingers along the bottom edge, a little on each end, a little in the middle, a little on each end. SLOW and GENTLE is the idea here. If you can't get it started, use a wide putty knife or a plastic trim removal tool so as to spread the load out instead of prying in one spot and cracking the bezel with the concentrated load. Take my advice; don't pry plastic with a screwdriver. The key is gentle, even pressure to move the bezel out away from the dash.

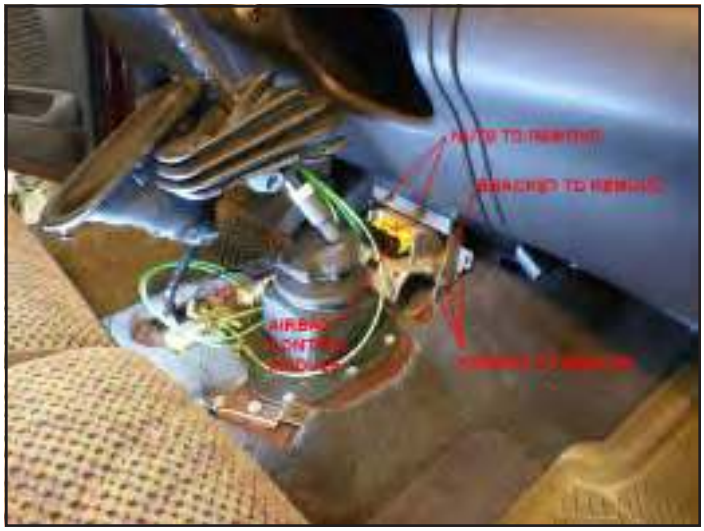
5. The next step is removing the center console. Remove the six Phillips head screws from the gear shift boot and then six hex head screws from the center console with a 5/16" socket.

(Note: Some screws are hidden under the transfer case bellows on 4x4 trucks and some are under the rubber pads in the drink holders.)

6. With the center console loose you can remove the metal bezel from the bottom of the transmission shifter boot. Then, with a small Phillips screwdriver, remove the two screws holding the center console's cross brace inside the plastic shroud. Then slide the center console up the shift levers and off. You may be able to skip this step, but I found the center console uncooperative without removing this cross brace.



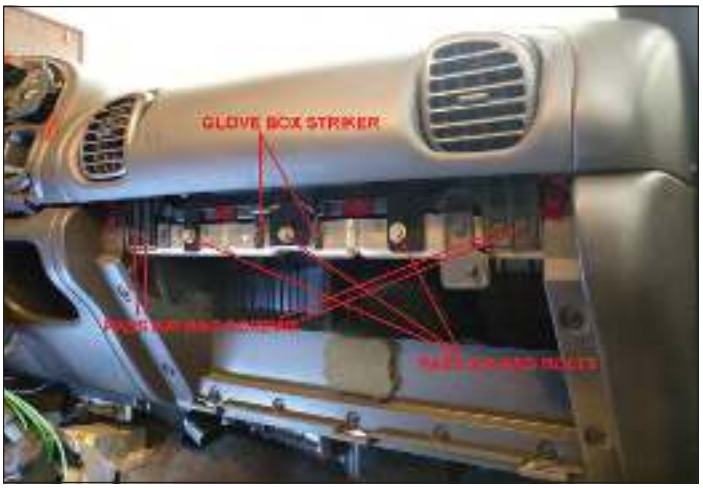
7. Remove the center bracket that ties the floor to the dash structure and supports the airbag control module.



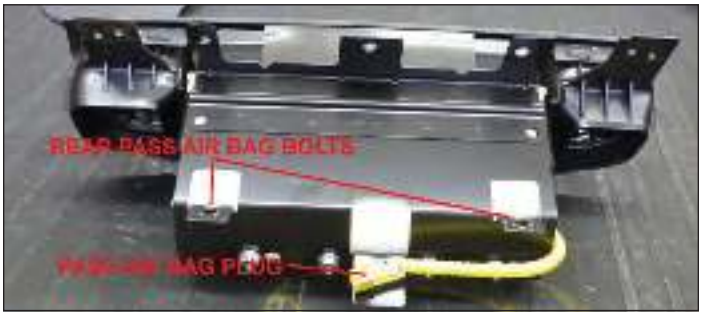
8. Next, remove the glove compartment by opening it, then flexing it past the stop hooks on each side so that it tips on out toward the floor. (A trick here is to bow the back of the glove box which allows the tabs to move past their stops.)

9. Now that the glovebox is past the stops, push up on the hinges as shown below and the glovebox should 'unhinge'.

10. Now remove the plastic strip that covers the glove box striker and the front airbag mounting screws as shown below:



11. Before trying to remove the passenger airbag module, it must be unplugged and the two rear mounting screws removed. Always remember that air bag electrical connectors are YELLOW. To help you locate the passenger airbag module electrical connector, it is shown in the picture below. (The airbag is already removed for clarity but you can access this connector through the glove box opening.)



12. Next remove the five screws holding the dash top along the windshield carefully so that none of them fall into the defrost vents.

13. Remove the hood latch release and allow the release to drop to the floor.

14. Remove the knee panel below the steering column and the stamped steel cross brace along the bottom of the dash.

15. Disconnect the parking brake release handle linkage and the parking brake switch electrical connector.

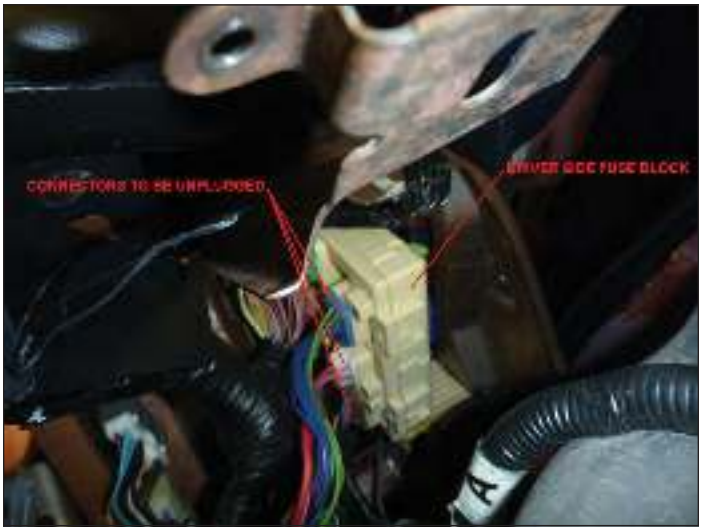
16. Disconnect the driver's side air bag module which is the yellow electrical connector just below the steering column shown in the picture below.

17. After determining that no wiring will be damaged by lowering the steering column, remove the two bolts holding the steering column and gently let it pivot down so that the steering wheel is resting in the driver's seat as shown below:

Make sure the steering column doesn't pull on any wires as it is allowed to pivot down!

18. Disconnect the vacuum harness connector under the dash near the center as shown below:

19. Disconnect the three wire harness connectors from the back of the fuse box on the driver's side. One comes from the body wire harness, and the other two come from the dash wiring harness as shown below:



20. Loosen the bolt and disconnect the large electrical connector near the clutch pedal as shown below:

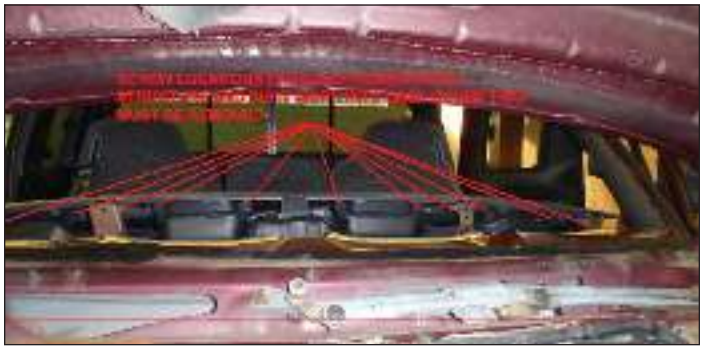
21. Loosen the two bolts on either side of the instrument panel that bolt outward into the A-pillars. The objective here is to let the instrument panel pivot back on the lower bolt which will require removal of the upper bolt. GREAT CARE MUST BE TAKEN NOT TO STRESS ANY WIRING HARNESS COMPONENTS OR OTHER CONNECTIONS. A lift strap or cargo strap should be used on each side to support the dash when it is tipped back. Verify that all items are clear and unstressed prior to allowing the dash to pivot. When you are satisfied that no damage can occur, remove the upper bolt on each side and allow the dash to pivot aft.

The photo below shows the position of the dash from each side pivoted back:

Dash cover already removed for clarity.

22. Once the dash is tipped back, it is time to remove the old dash cover. This is done by removing all the screws around the instrument cluster and glove box area, as well as the single screw on each side at the A-pillar.

23. Now comes the interesting part! I had my local windshield replacement guy stop by and remove my windshield prior to this operation because it was cracked anyway. The photo below will show you why; there are screws that must be removed that are under the dash cover.



Given the difficulty of getting at these screws you may opt to have your windshield removed even if it is not cracked. Here are the facts about our windshields:

• There is a risk of breaking an 'uncracked' windshield during removal. But, my windshield had a crack approximately two-foot long and it was removed without further cracking or breakage.

• Getting at these screws to remove them is going to be very difficult with the windshield in place.

• Should you choose to opt for a new one either because it broke during removal or needed replacing anyway, the price of a new windshield here in northwest Georgia is $238.

Also, this a great time to replace your heater core while the truck is disassembled to this level. I winched my entire dash up to allow access to the heater core for replacement. The photo below shows the approximate position of the dash for heater core access:

Once the heater core is replaced, the dash is merely lowered back down to rest upon the lower cowl mounting bolts, which were used to pivot it back originally. This looks a lot worse than it is! The passenger side support scheme is shown for reference:

24. To prepare the new dash cover for installation I found it easier to add the side window defrost ducts to the new dash cover prior to installation as shown below:

These ducts can be snapped onto the main manifold when the new dash cover is initially placed onto the dash.

25. Place the new dash cover in position inside the truck and snap these side window defrost ducts into the main duct manifold.

26. Discard screws for top vents. They are now held in by pressure fit with the new dashboard.

27. The remainder of the assembly involves reversing the disassembly procedure, so work carefully through this list in reverse order, taking care to triple check your work as you go. Don't forget to add the dash pad reinforcement washers to the five screws that install from the top in the recesses in the dash where the dash meets the windshield, as shown below:

The results are worth the effort!

Brent Boxall
TDR Writer