

Working With Brass

Fabricating a Chromed Trim Strip

by Lee Carroll

Occasionally a section of chromed trim is needed and not otherwise available. It requires fabrication. This article deals with a specifically needed piece, but it may be easily modified to fit other needs that you may have.

THE PROBLEM: The edge of the rumble seat had seventeen holes drilled into it. Similar cars had neither holes nor any trim. In that this car had a premium trim package, it was decided that the holes were originally intended for a trim piece. The perfect spacing of the holes indicated that they were factory drilled. Since the edge of the rumble seat folded into a rain channel, the holes obviously weren't intended for weather stripping.

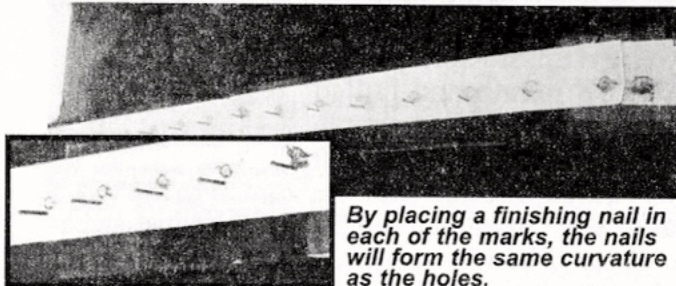
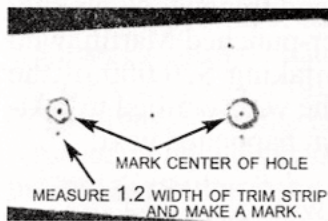
The width of the rumble seat edge was about 36" and had a slight curvature to it.

We selected a piece of brass from the Restoration Supply Company. It was four feet long, 0.500" wide and 0.125" thick. It is called Half Oval. The piece was selected so that the 1/8" thickness would not interfere with the closing of the rumble seat.



We began by cutting several strips of paper, 2" wide and about 38-40" long. We taped the first piece, using removable painter's tape, over the edge which contained the holes. Then, with the edge of a pencil, we outlined each hole. Each of the seventeen holes was 0.250" in diameter, except for the two extreme end holes; They were 0.375" in diameter. We repeated the same procedure with the other two strips of paper so that if we made a mistake, we'd have a replacement readily available. The penciled holes on the strip of paper matched the size and contour of the curve on the metal's edge. The tape was removed, and the strips of paper set aside.

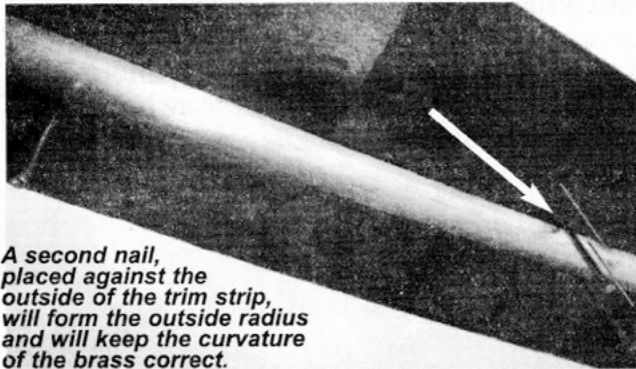
Using a caliper, we found the exact center of each hole on one of the paper strips. We then measured 0.250" (one-half of the width of the brass strip) from the center of the hole to the inside curved radius. We marked this point with a colored pen. The strip of paper was then stapled to a piece of wood (a 1"x4" or a 2"x4" works fine), and a finishing nail was hammered through the colored hole, extending out of the wood by about 0.750". The nails now formed a curved jig for the inside radius of the brass.



Now back to the brass strip. It was placed on several bricks and, with a propane torch annealed. Annealing means heating the brass to a temperature of about 900° F (a dull red) which softens the metal. Brass remains soft whether air-cooled or quenched in water. It is important, as the metal is heated, to be sure that it remains flat. The brass strip has a tendency to curl. It must be flat in order to fit onto the rum-

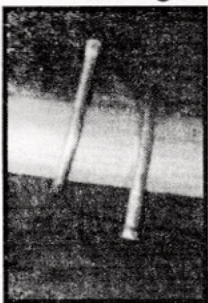
ble seat edge. If the trim has to be bent or curved to fit a fender or other body contour, it can be done at a later stage.

Once cooled, the brass strip is set against the nails in the wood. Beginning at one edge, hammer another nail into the wood, against the brass strip (this represents the outside radius of the curve) in order to hold it firmly in place.



A second nail, placed against the outside of the trim strip, will form the outside radius and will keep the curvature of the brass correct.

Continue to fit the brass against the inside radius, and hammer nails into the wood forcing the brass to conform to the curvature set by the jig. You may use very light taps of a lead or leather-faced hammer to keep the brass flat against the wood. About every other



Bending the nails will keep the brass strip from curling. Do not hammer the nails down too hard when bending so as to avoid marring the face of the brass.

Again, using the propane torch, heat the brass strip to a dull red. The wood will just begin to char at this temperature. When the entire strip of metal has been heated, quench it with plenty of water. The water will cool and set the metal, but it will also prevent the wood from igniting. You may remove the nails. If done properly, the brass strip will retain the curve needed to fit the edge of the rumble seat. Lay the strip in place and gently bend to correct any small errors in the curve. Do not cut off the excess metal yet.

Carefully mark the position of the center hole against the underside of the brass. Measure exactly one-half the width of the trim strip and mark the brass on the underside. Clean the underside of the brass with very fine sandpaper. Lay the brass strip, face down, on the wood. Use a drop of flux, and solder a flat head brass screw to the brass strip. If you use a torch, you may want to place a wet rag on either side of the solder point to prevent the heat from migrating through the brass and warping it. Be sure that the head of the brass screw is smaller than the 0.250" hole so that it will fit into it and allow the trim strip to lay flat against the metal. After soldering each screw, cool the brass and test it in the holes in the car to be sure that it fits properly.



One by one, working outward from the center hole, do the same for each hole. The final two holes, at the very edges, will require a larger screw. They have to fit into the 0.375" holes. The trim strip should lay flat against the metal covering each of the holes. Mark an equal distance from each of the outermost holes, and cut and chamfer the ends of the brass.

Clean the brass with a piece of wet/dry 3000 grit abrasive paper. It is now ready for chrome plating. Once returned from the plater, the trim strip is ready for installation. Use a dab of silicone adhesive around each screw at each hole, fit in place and use a weight to keep the strip flat against the metal as the silicone cures. Allow it to fully cure for 24 hours before waxing. (By using a silicone rather than a more permanent adhesive, the strip may be removed at a future date if necessary.)

S.K.

