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NEW COOL FOR OLD SCHOOL



Hot Rod Air's new under-dash kit makes it a breeze to add A/C to *bombas*.

Text and Photos by Dick DeLoach

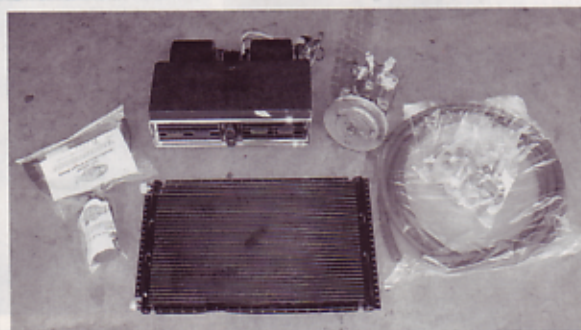
Everyone loves the look of an OG window-mounted air cooler on a *bomba*, but let's face it, when it's 100 degrees inside of your ride, they aren't so "cool" anymore. Yet, you don't want to spoil the clean dashboard of your oldie by cutting out vent holes for aftermarket air conditioning. Well, now you don't have to thanks to the new under-dash air conditioning kit from the custom A/C experts at Hot Rod Air (in Selma, Texas).

Designed to fit under the dash without removing the glove box, the new retro-look system is available in a cool only unit (P/N 501029), or heat and cool unit (P/N 50-1003). Both kits feature a polished compressor, high-capacity coil, large condenser, evaporator/blower, dryer, hoses, end fittings, mounting brackets, wiring and easy-to-follow instructions—everything that you'll need to add modern A/C (and/or heat) to pre-'60s lowriders, with straight-six engines.

To see how easy the A/C-only kit really is to install (and just how well it works), we asked Michael Tovar to give up his daily-driver '49 Chevy business coupe (with a 215-c.i.d. straight-six engine) for a couple of days. As another hot SoCal summer was just around the corner, he eagerly agreed and dropped the car off at Lynns Auto Air (in Downey, California) specialists in classic A/C installation and repair since 1974.

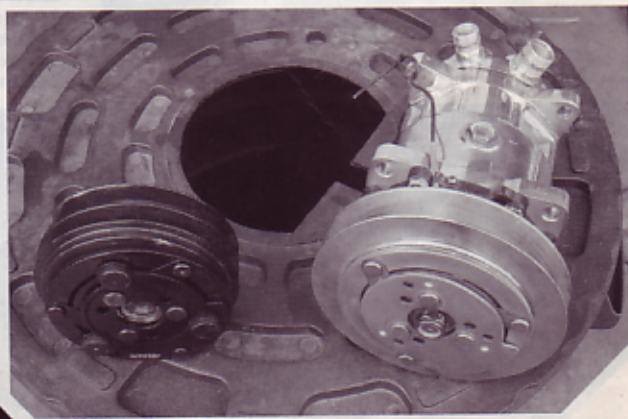
Working with resident A/C expert Benjamin "Benny" Balderrama, we immediately found a few minor problems with the kit. First, Hot Rod Air only makes a compressor bracket for the 235 straight-six and it

Thanks to Hot Rod Air, you can make your bomb frosty cold on the hottest days.



The compact, cool-only system (shown) includes everything that you'll need to add under-dash A/C to your early straight-six *bomba*. The system is also available with a heat and cool unit.

The compressor came with a 1/2-inch twin-groove clutch/pulley (left) that Benny swapped with a single-groove 3/4-inch assembly to match the 3/4-inch pulleys on the engine.



TECHPROJECT

won't work with the 215 due to block casting differences. Secondly, the A/C compressor comes with a 1/2-inch, twin-groove clutch/pulley assembly, the 215 has 3/4-inch pulleys.

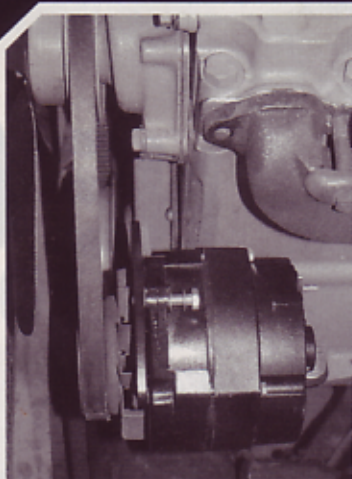
A quick call to David Stutts at Hot Rod Air took care of the pulley problem; he shipped us a 3/4-inch clutch/pulley that day. Another call to Patrick's Antique Cars & Trucks (in Casa Grande, Arizona), specialists in all things six-cylinder '37 through '62 Chevrolets and GMCs, got us a 215-six compressor bracket. (Patrick's bracket fit the block just fine, but two compressor-mounting "ears" required relocating, as shown in the photos.) We also found when test fitting the compressor that the supplied fan belt wouldn't work, so Benny used a Gates 3/4-inch V-belt (P/N TR20544) instead.

With those problems solved, the installation was a snap and it looks great, with one caveat. Because every installation is different, the hoses can't be pre-cut and the fittings can't be attached at the factory. That means that you'll have to route the hoses the way that you want them, cut them to length yourself and then have the fittings professionally attached at your local A/C or radiator shop. Better yet, let Lynns do it all for you. "Just send us a diagram showing the routing of the hoses, the exact lengths to cut them and the way that you want each fitting turned and we'll build them for you," said Benny. "We do it all of the time."

Benny also felt that the engine would need extra cooling now with the A/C running. However, the space between the belt-driven fan and the radiator is so small, a larger fan with more blades couldn't be used. So custom A/C fabricator Manny Anaya mounted a compact electric fan on the condenser, and wired in a relay to turn the fan on whenever the A/C is running. Very slick!

Okay, it all looks "cool," but the important thing is how well it works. Michael put it very simply, saying with a grin, "I love it... and it gets cold really fast!" He also noted, "I had the A/C and the stereo on all of the way home and there was no drag on the engine whatsoever. It didn't hesitate or run rough, even at idle. This is really great for the bomb, guys." Well, that's good enough for us.

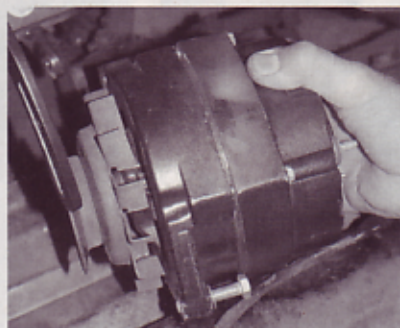
Now, follow the photos and see if you don't agree: it really is a "breeze" to add new cool to your Old School ride. ☺



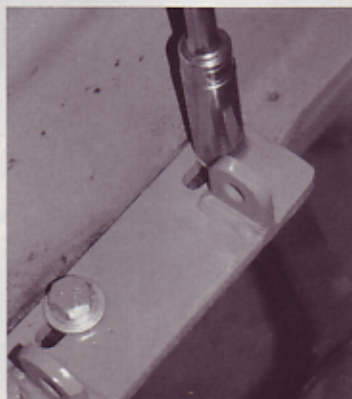
The 215-six was already changed over to a 12-volt system with an alternator (see Oct. '04 LRM). The compressor will be mounted beneath it.



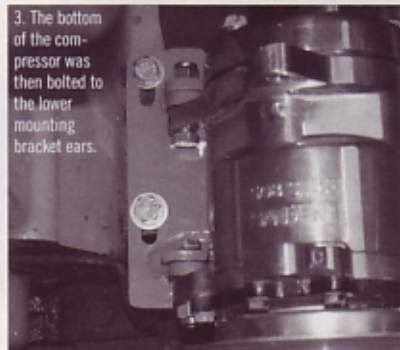
The compressor brackets from Patrick's Antique fit the block perfectly, but one mounting ear on each bracket had to be cut off, repositioned and re-welded. Benny also painted the brackets and spacers gray to match the engine.



1. After disconnecting the battery, the first step was to remove the alternator and bracket.



2. The lower compressor mounting plate was bolted on next with the hardware provided.



3. The bottom of the compressor was then bolted to the lower mounting bracket ears.

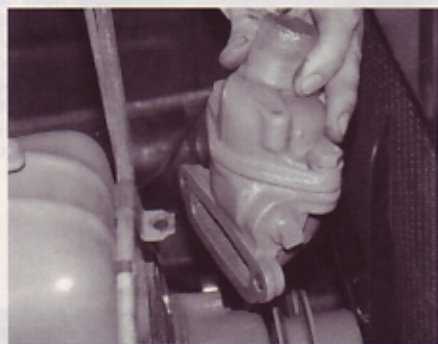


5. A bead of silicone was then applied to the block side of the water pump, a new gasket was fitted, more silicone was applied on top of the gasket and the new bracket. The bracket was then fitted over the bolts, another bead of silicone was applied and another gasket fitted and siliconed.

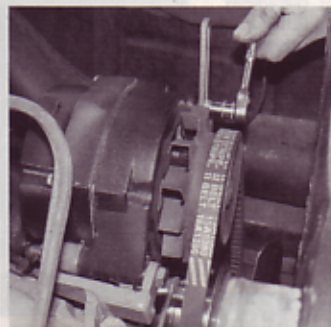
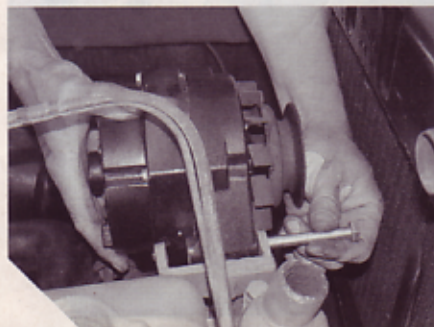


6. The water pump/alternator bracket was then bolted in place on the block.

4. Next, the upper water hose, fan belt and water pump were removed.

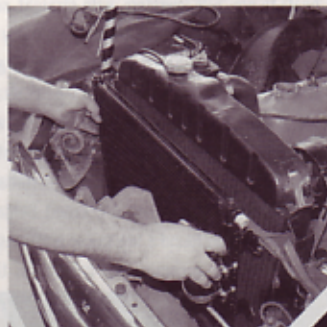


7. A long bolt and a spacer were used to attach the alternator to the upper bracket.



8. Then, the alternator tensioner arm was bolted to the compressor bracket, the fan belt was fitted over the pulleys and the alternator was adjusted.

9. Manny Anaya mounted the drier to the condenser and then bolted it to the outside of the radiator. (The drier can be also mounted on the firewall or fender if desired.)



SOURCES

Hot Rod Air, Inc.

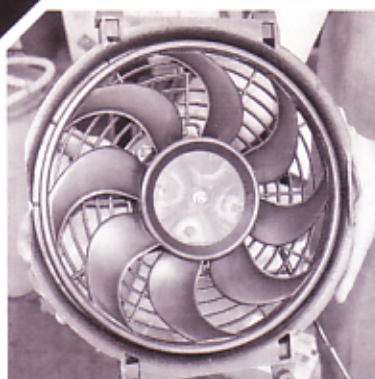
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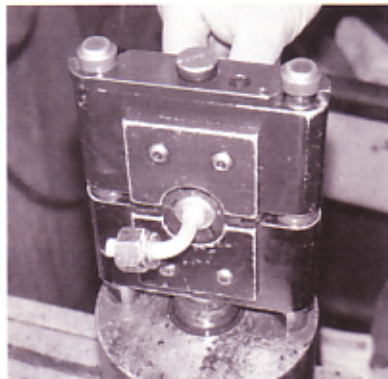


10. For better engine cooling, Manny mounted a high-output electric fan on the evaporator, with a relay wired to turn on the fan when the A/C is on.

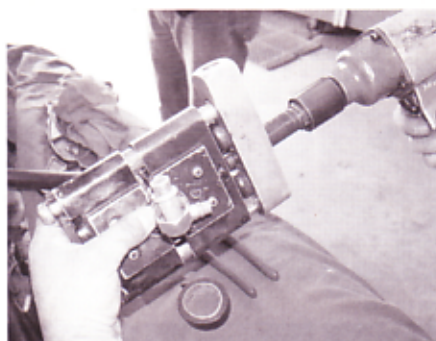
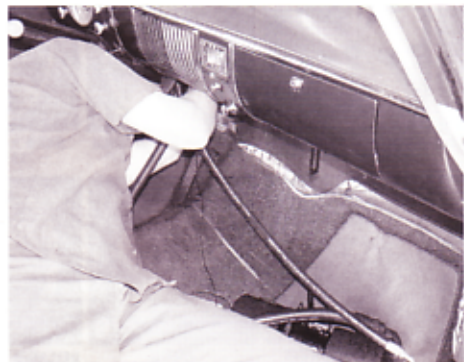
11. Benny decided to run the A/C hoses to the cooling unit from the driver's side so two holes were drilled in the firewall, grommets were fitted and the hoses slipped into the cabin. (Note-A spray lubricant makes it easier to push the hoses through.)



13. Then, the hoses were bolted to the cooling unit and wrapped with special insulation tape (provided). The hoses were then fed through the firewall from the inside and the cooling unit was bolted in place under the dash and wired to an ignition-on power source. A condensation drain hole was also drilled in the floor and the drain hose was attached.



12. The hose length was determined, then cut and the fittings were attached to one end using a hydraulic beadlock crimper.

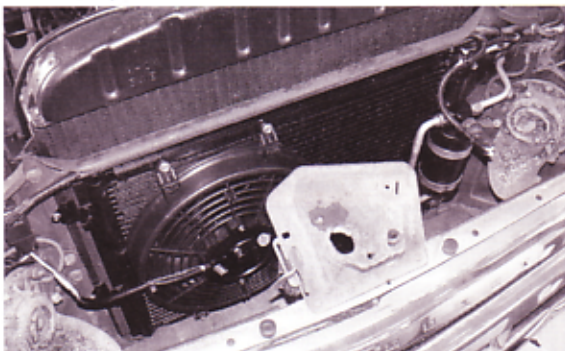


14. The hose fittings for the compressor-end were attached with a pneumatic beadlock crimper and bolted to the compressor.

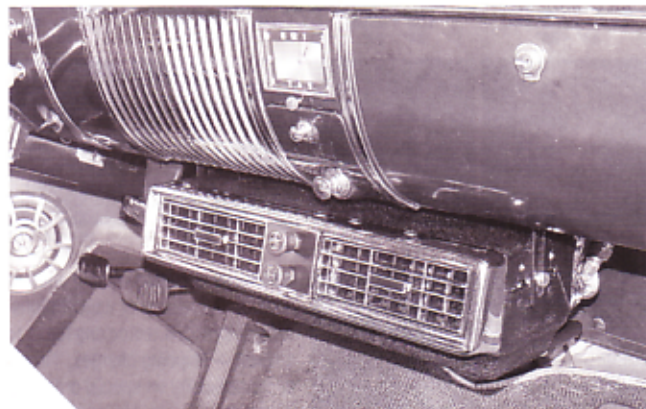


15. For a cleaner look, Manny plumbed the drier and condenser with hand-bent hard-lines instead of the rubber hoses provided.

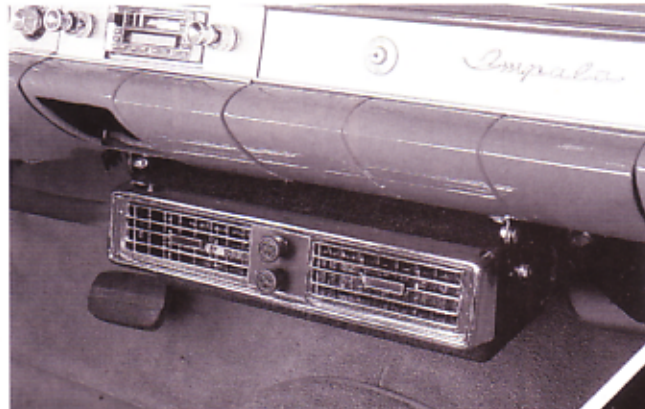
16. The fan, relay and drier were then wired in. The installation looks clean.



17. Finally, after making sure that all fittings were tight, the system was charged and checked again for leaks.



18. The compact (16x11x4 1/2-inch) under-dash evaporator/blower includes a high-capacity coil, chrome face, adjustable vents and dual controls.



19. Manny also just finished installing the Hot Rod Air under-dash A/C in a '58 Impala convertible.