FC Dash Replacement
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As restoration of my ’61 GB progressed, I inevitably had to deal with the dash. When I purchased the van in 1980, the instrument panel had been cut out and replaced with a piece of cheap paneling, which matched the shag rug covering most everything else. Needless to say, grounding of gauges was intermittent at best.

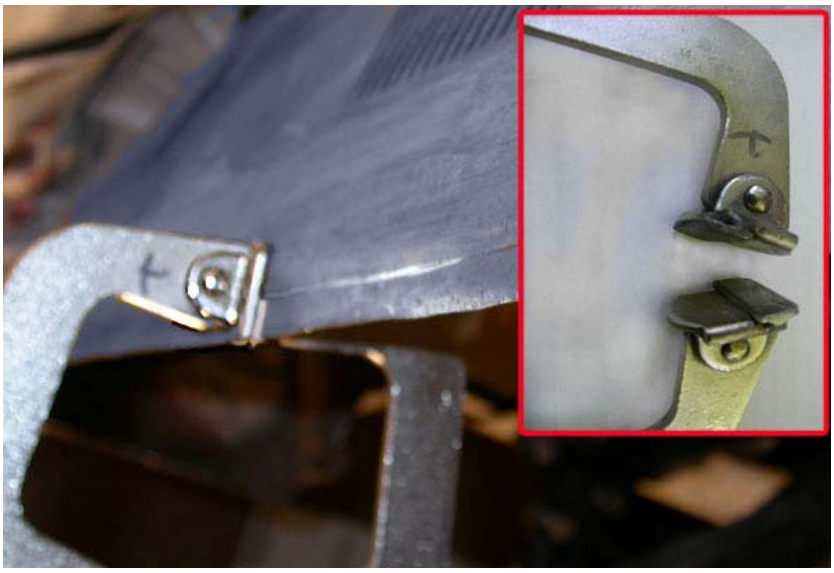
Sometime later I made a mahogany panel which at least was solid and looked decent (at least when not covered with dust as in the first figure). But the time had come, and not wanting to deal with a complete dash replacement, I opted to replace just the front along with the lower support bracket. While this project may be a rare necessity, possibly some of the techniques might be of use to others.

The replacement dash came from the Corvair Ranch. The second figure shows how the dash was prepped; a process that was mirrored to remove the corresponding section of the original dash in the van, shown in the third figure with the mahogany panel removed. The bottom was separated from the front inner panel brackets by drilling out about a half-dozen spot welds on either side (arrows). The plan was to butt weld the replacement along the bottom and sides, where the curvature of the metal would prevent warping, and use a lap joint across the top. A drafting compass was used to scribe the cut lines onto both dashes.

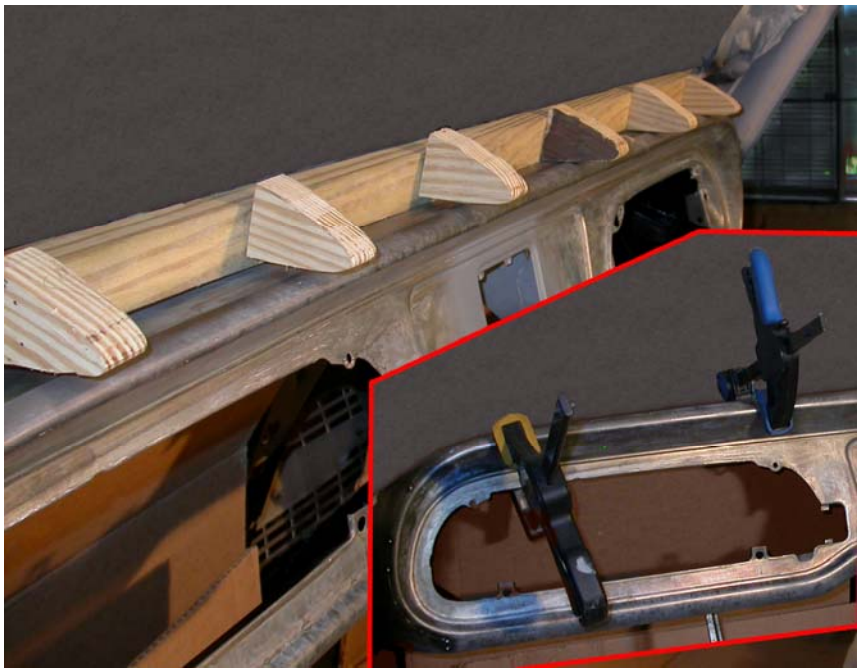
The cuts along the edges were made using a Dremel tool with 409 cutoff wheels; it took a few, but the precision is unrivaled. The dashed line in the second figure shows the where the sides were cut, about a half-inch behind the contour ridge (dashed line in figures 2 and 3). The cut across the top was made with an angle grinder since precision wasn't as important. The cut was about one inch behind the contour ridge for the replacement dash, and a half inch behind for the old dash, so that a half-inch lap would occur.

I decided it would be easier to refinish the inside of the old and replacement dashes prior to reinstallation. The fourth figure shows the original dash after the front was removed and the underside was stripped, primed and painted. The weld seam was refinished afterwards.

I had discussed the project with a local body shop, and they suggested that the new dash could be simply slid over the old metal to form the lap joint, and this may have worked but I worried about reestablishing the surface profile. I decided instead to flange the edge of the old dash. I made a flanger by welding 18g steel tabs to a welding c-clamp (fifth figure). When clamped tightly to the cut edge of the old dash and hammered laterally along the edge, a perfect flange was produced.



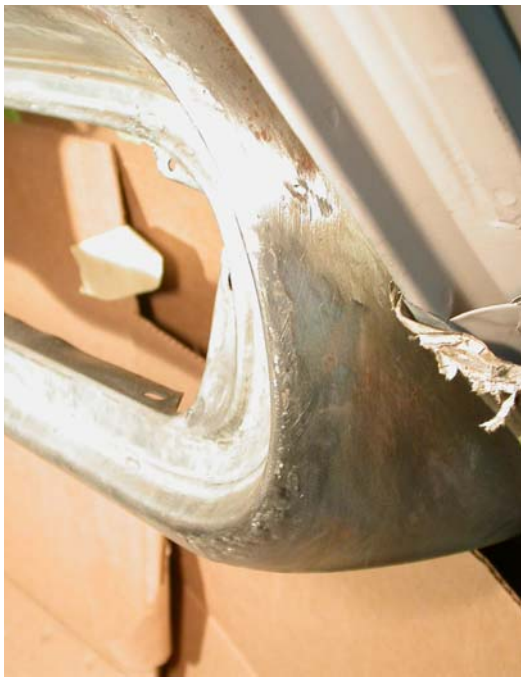
A challenging part of the repair was securely seating the edge of the new dash along the flange; because of the location, there was no way to directly clamp the joint together. To do so, I fabricated a wooded form to fit the inner contour of the dash (sixth figure). With the new front piece roughed into place, the wooden form was snugged into contour along the top of the dash. Then the two pieces were pulled together against the form with clamps through the dash openings and air vent holes (inset). After the replacement dash was spot welded in place the wooden bracket was removed.



Assorted clamps to the window posts, etc. were used to align the edges (Figure 7). With the accurate cuts, alignment was not difficult to achieve.

The rest of the story is pretty routine. The edges received a continuous weld and the top was spot welded about every half inch (Figure 8; probably overkill). The dash was plug-welded at the bottom onto the support brackets.

The welds were ground flush, and the seam given a little filler, and sanded smooth (Figure 9 and 10). Because of the location, the seam is almost invisible when viewed from the underside. It was nevertheless primed and painted.



The final figure shows the finished dash in the body shop where the van is receiving its final paint. The dash has been painted the interior color, and is ready for instrument installation.