

How to RECOVER the TOP

THE repair and replacement of the automobile top is fast becoming one of the most vexing problems with which the used car manager or shop foreman has to deal. I will try to set forth herewith a few "wrinkles" which may help to eliminate the wrinkles and packers in the average service station top job.

The first essential when installing a top, be it a closed or open car, ready-made or made from a roll of material, is to "center" the fabric. To do this, first find the center of your rear curtain or top and then find the center of your body or bows. Attach the fabric at the center points with tacks driven in temporarily, drawing the material tight from front to back or top to bottom as the case may be. After this is done the material should be stretched to the four corners away from the centers, and tacked temporarily.

You can now tack down the ends and sides or ends as the case may be, pulling the fabric tight as the tacks are driven home.

In the case of the closed car top, "woodwork" must almost invariably be installed before the top can be covered. The old cover should not be removed but should be left in place to act as a ground for the new top. Of course, it must be turned back to get at the bad places in the woodwork. Low spots should be filled in with cotton wadding, similar to that which tailors use to pad coats. The bad sections of wood should be cut out with a chisel and saw, so that a wedge shape splice can be made. It is often advisable, where a bad section occurs over a door, to replace the whole rail section above the door and splice in back of the hinges. In this way the splice will not show from below.

It is good policy to use cypress for roof rail repairs, as it is easily worked and resists decay. The spliced sections can be secured with finishing nails, screws, or bolts, depending on the quality of the work. Sagging doors should be "wedged" between the upright post and door, and after the spliced sections are made secure, remove the wedge.

FRONT rails need not necessarily be dovetailed, mortised and glued, as is often done originally. The rail may be allowed to extend across the side rails and then nailed solid to them; bolted to the inner wood, which generally remains solid, or fastened to the side rails with ell irons and screws or bolts. It is generally advisable to replace the entire front rail instead of splicing in a section. Ribs for sedan tops can be obtained at the nearest woodworking shop or mill and in some cases from the car manufacturer. Where much woodwork is done a small band saw is a necessity. After the woodwork repairs have been made the top should be drawn

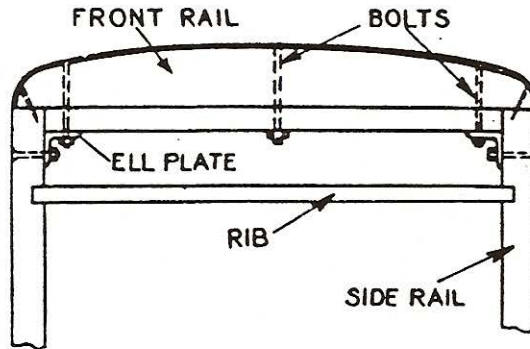


Fig. 1. Method of replacing a front rail

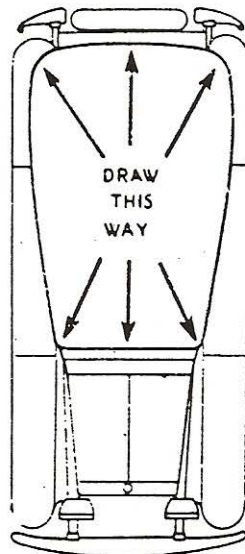


Fig. 2. Top material is centered and then drawn tight toward the corners

back in place and tacked down, and the new cover drawn on and tacked down as previously described.

The tacks used on a sedan top should be 8 ounce swedes and should be spaced two or three inches apart. When these are driven home the fabric may be trimmed around the edges, close to the tacks. This may be done with a knife or shears, the loose material being held clear with the operator's free hand. After a little practice the shears can be held in a fixed cutting position and simply forced through the fabric which is held taut as

before. The front and back of a sedan top should be bound off before the side rails are attached. It is advisable in tacking on binding, to attach one end and then draw the binding tight across the surface to be covered. The far end can then be tacked down and the remaining section filled in with tacks. It would be useless to delve into the subject of side gutters as there are so many different varieties and each new model brings out a new one. Landau sedan or sport coupe tops are handled in much the same manner as open car tops.

THE average service station is not equipped with a sewing machine or an operator for same so it is only interested in the installation of the "ready-made" top for open cars.

To fit these tops is not always an easy proposition but a few suggestions may be found helpful. Above all, the frame of the top must be straight and in line. If the old pads are being used they generally need taking up, which should be done by detaching them from the back bow, forcing the back bow up and forward and then tacking them to the back bow again. The distance from the back seat upholstery trim rail to the back bow should correspond to the height of the ready-made rear curtain. Often this measurement is given by the maker of the cover.

When the ends of the pads are trimmed off the rear curtain should first be snapped on to the fastener studs on the car and rear sockets. If these have not been installed in the curtain it should be centered in the manner previously described.

Care must be taken however that the outer edges should overlap an equal amount, the position of the fastener eyes of the caps can be marked with chalk or by perforating with a hammer. It is also helpful to slit the edges where there is a tight fit, but always draw the fabric away from the center of the curtain and place the tacks in temporarily until the curtain fits smoothly. The top is comparatively easy to install, but it must be centered and drawn to the four corners, and then tacked down. Trimming the rear corners of the top is a comparatively simple operation, but the two front corners must be slit back from around the corner of the front bow to just below the last tack on the outer edge of the bow. This strip, which is cut from the top but which is still attached to it, is then drawn forward to cover the outer edges of the front bow and is tacked down over the first line of tacks. It is then trimmed and the binding applied to the top. Tips should be used on the binding to make a finished job.