

YOU CAN DO IT EASY UPGRADES

by Randy Irwin

1955-57 CLASSIC UPDATE WIRING KIT



Randy Irwin - Technical Writer

Randy has been involved in the Chevy parts business for over 25 years. He is a wizard at creating, making and modifying custom parts for Chevys.

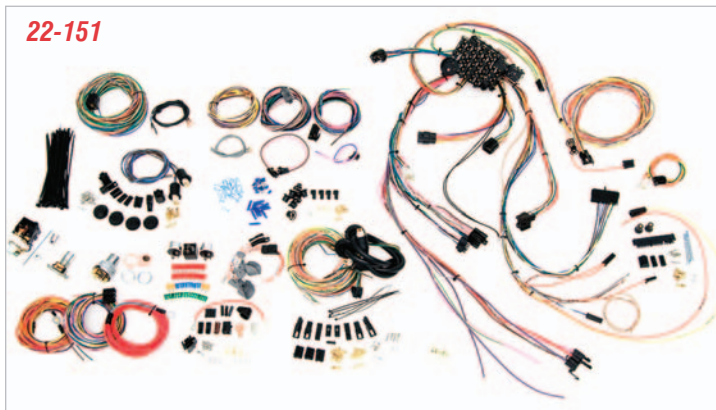
Wiring is a word that seems to scare everyone. Many people would rather have a tooth pulled than to try any wiring on their car. When it comes to wiring, it's either right or it's wrong. Many replacement harnesses are made out of the same color wire, making it impossible to keep track of the wires and where they go. Many custom harnesses for Tri-Fives are nothing more than a street rod harness with a few extra wires. The American Autowire Classic Updated Wiring Kit is designed and built just for the Tri-Five cars. The harness incorporates a late model ATO fuse box with built in relays and flashers. The harness includes accessory wires for an electric radiator fan, electric fuel pump, power windows, power seats and a third brake light. The wires in the harness are color coded like original and also have the wire function printed on each wire every 4". This harness couldn't be any easier to install – even if wiring scares you!

This article shows an installation in a 1955 hardtop. Installation in other years and body styles will be very similar.



Photo 1: The Classic Update Wiring Kit includes all the wiring you could possibly need to wire any Classic Chevy and includes a new ignition switch, headlight switch and dimmer switch. Each harness (dash, headlight, taillight and so on) is bagged separately with its own instructions and wiring diagram.

22-151



Parts Needed:

- 22-150 1955 & 56 Classic Update Wiring Kit
- 22-151 1957 Classic Update Wiring Kit

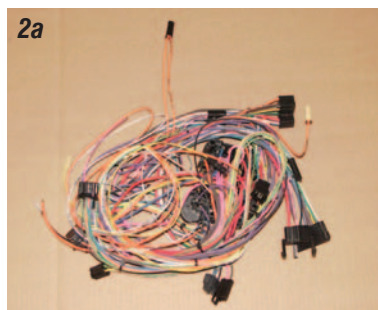
Tools Needed:

- 7/16" Socket and Ratchet
- 7/16" Wrench
- Screwdriver
- Wiring Cutters/Crimpers
- Rat Tail File

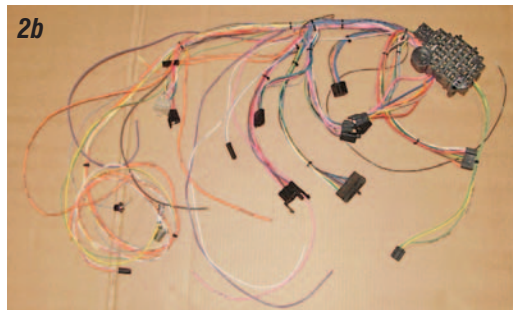
Time Frame:

8 hours

2a



2b



Photos 2a & 2b: The dash harness is the largest part of the complete kit. When the dash harness is removed from the bag it can look pretty intimidating, but once you lay it out there is not that much to connect and it is all clearly marked.

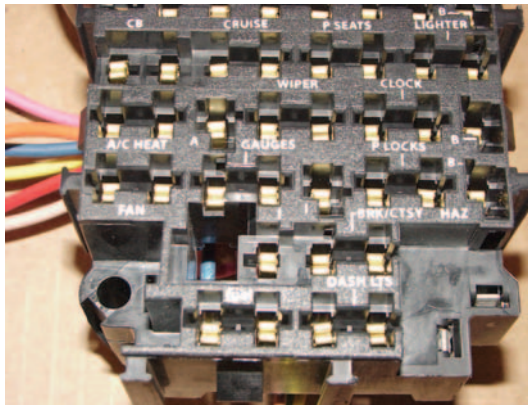
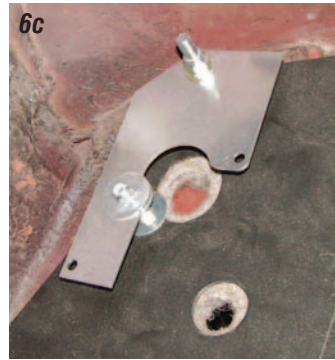
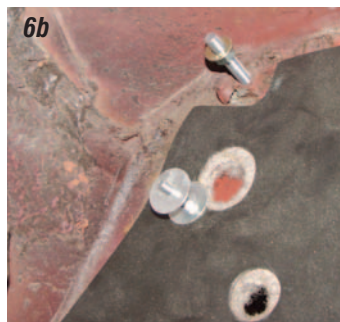


Photo 3: The Classic Updated harness uses an ATO style fuse box with each fuse clearly marked. The fuse box is pre-wired to the dash harness.

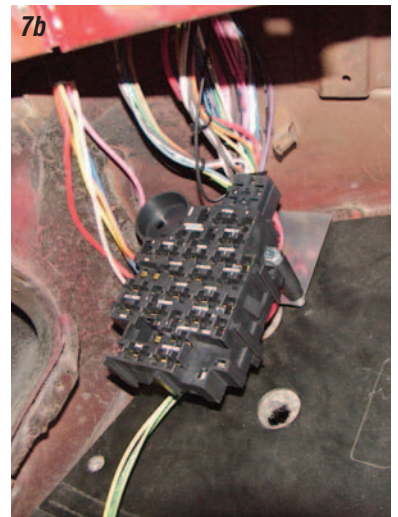
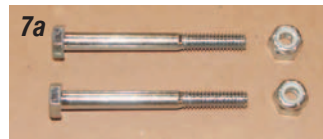
Photo 4: The fuse box is a bolt-in unit, unlike other kits. If your firewall is all painted, you don't want to go drilling holes. An aluminum bracket is attached to the firewall and the fuse box bolts right to it.



Photos 5a, 5b & 5c: The hood hinge is held to the firewall with two 3/8" bolts. The lower mounting bolt for the hinge will be replaced with a supplied 3/8" X 2 1/2" bolt. This longer bolt provides a mounting point for the fuse box bracket. There is a 5/16" hole about 4" below the lower hood hinge bolt, which is used for one of the firewall pad retainers. Remove the retainer and install the 1/4" X 2 1/2" straight screw. This screw will be used as the firewall retainer and as another mounting point for the fuse box bracket.



Photos 6a, 6b & 6c: With the new bolts installed, install one 3/8" nut on the threads on the new hinge bolt and tighten the nut to the firewall to lock the bolt in place. Install one large 1/4" flat washer and nut on the 1/4" screw and tighten. This will hold the firewall pad tight to the firewall. Next, install one 3/8" nut and flat washer on the hinge bolt and one 1/4" nut and flat washer on the 1/4" screw and thread the two nuts halfway on. Install the fuse box bracket using the remaining 3/8" and 1/4" nuts and flat washers.



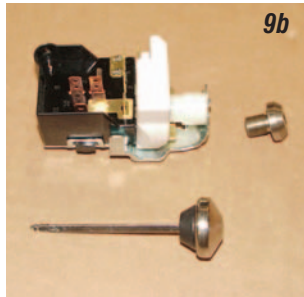
Photos 7a & 7b: The fuse box is held to the fuse box bracket with two 1/4" x 2 1/4" bolts and lock nuts. The fuse box mounts with all the wires exiting the box from the top and left hand side of the box except for the dimmer switch wire. This makes it very easy to hide all the wires from view.



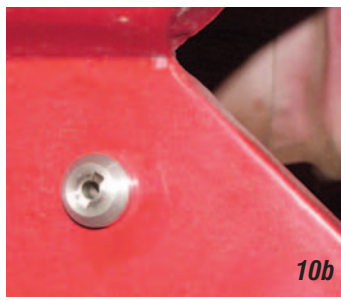
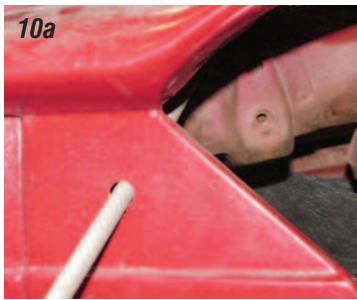
Photos 8a & 8b: The wires for the dimmer switch exit out the bottom of the fuse box and just about fall into place. The original dimmer switch on a 1955 and 1956 mounts from the outside toe board and is held in place with two 1/4" bolts. The new dimmer switch mounts to the inside of the toe board. The original 1/4" bolts can be used, but nuts will need to be used on the outside of the toe board to hold the switch in place.



Photos 9a, 9b & 9c: The new headlight switch includes the knob and shaft along with a spanner nut. The new spanner is longer than the original nut, which helps when installing thicker billet aluminum dash trim. The headlight switch includes a wiring diagram with all wires color coded like the original wires and marked every 4". The headlight jack is pre-wired and simply needs to be plugged in.



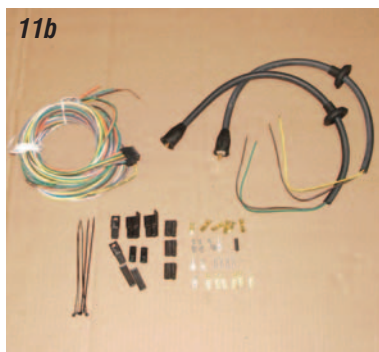
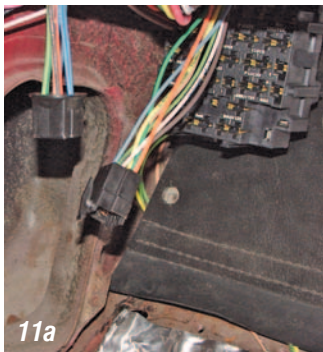
Photos 11a, 11b & 11c: Using the wiring diagram supplied with the dash harness, locate the male jacks for the front and rear lights. The rear body harness includes the wires for the running lights, brake lights, turn signals, license plate lights and dome light wires. It also includes a wire for a third brake light if one is going to be used. Plug the rear body harness into the corresponding female jack from the fuse box.

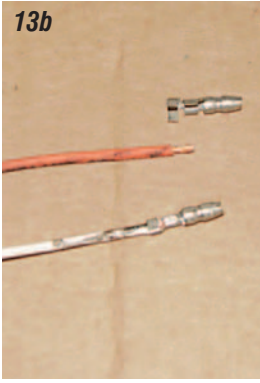


Photos 10a, 10 & 10c: The new spanner is slightly larger than the original nut. Using a rat tail file, enlarge the hole in the dash and install the switch, spanner nut, knob and shaft.

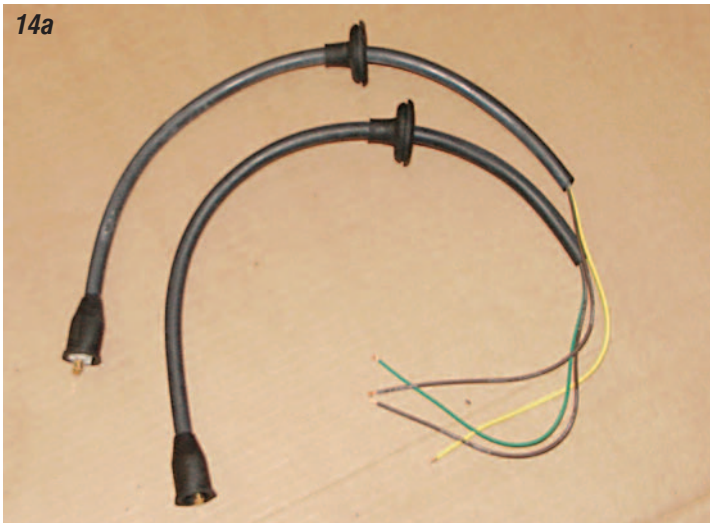


Photo 12: The front and rear body harnesses are made extra long so that the wires can be routed anyway you want which makes it great on custom cars when you wish to hide the wires.





Photos 13a, 13b & 13c: The orange and white wire in the rear body harness is for the dome light. The 1955 2-door hardtop has two small dome lights in the B-pillars. The orange and red wires are fed up through the B-pillar and using the supplied bullet connectors, the wires plug into the dome light housings.



Photos 14a & 14b: The wiring kit does include some stock components that are necessary for wiring up a Classic. The stock taillight housing boots and pig tails are included so that the wires can be connected properly. The boots will route the wires from the inner trunk wall to the taillight housings and the pig tails connect to the original sockets on the taillight housing.



Photos 15a, 15b, 15c & 15d:

The tan wire marked “fuel sender” connects to the gas tank sending unit. Cut the wire to length (not too short!), install the rubber insulator on the wire, crimp the supplied lug on the end of the wire and slide the rubber insulator up onto the wire terminal. The wire runs through a grommet **P/N 09-67** in the center of the trunk floor just behind the rear seat.

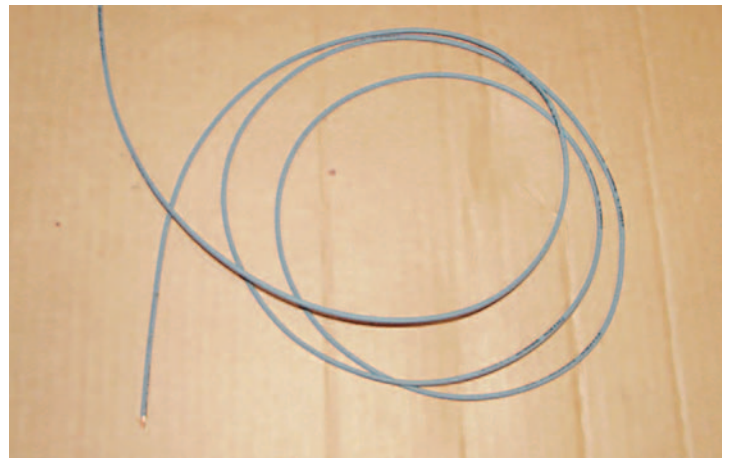


Photo 16: The rear body harness has a light blue wire and is marked “third brake light” every 4". This wire connects to the red wire on any brand third brake light or may be cut back if not used.

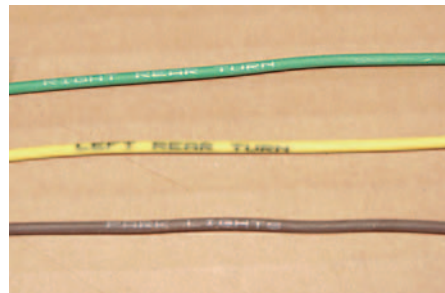
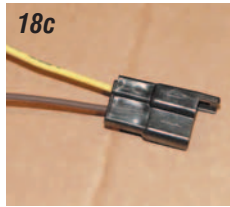
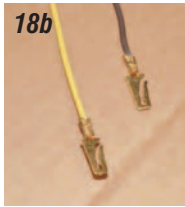
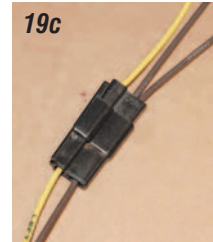
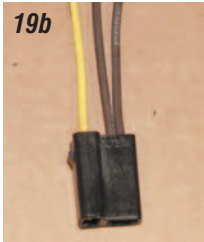
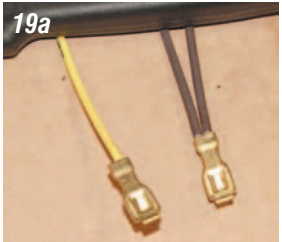


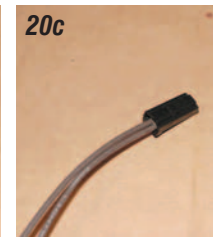
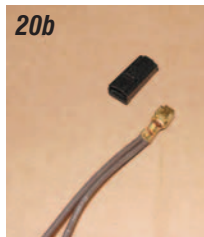
Photo 17: The rear body harness has a yellow, green and brown wire. The yellow wire is marked “left rear turn”, the green wire is marked “right rear turn” and the brown wire is marked “rear running light”.



Photos 18a, 18b & 18c: The rear body harness includes male and female connectors that are used to connect the rear body harness to the taillight pig tails. Crimp the male wire terminals on the ends of the wires from the taillight housing and install the wire ends into the female plastic jack. Note the location of the wires in the jack.



Photos 19a, 19b & 19c: Next, cut the yellow & brown wires in the rear body harness to length so that the wires meet up with the taillight harness jack. The brown wire runs across the rear of the car and powers the right side taillights and the license plate lights. Install the female terminals on the ends of the two wires and install them in the male jack that matches the female jack on the taillight harness. Make sure to orient the wires in the male jack so that they match up to the wires in the female jack.



Photos 20a, 20b & 20c: There is a hole on each side of the tailpan just inside of the taillight housing for the license plate lights. Cut the brown wire to length, connect this wire to the existing brown wire in the harness and install the female terminal and single plastic jack. The single plastic jack plugs into the license plate pig tail. Now feed the brown wire over to the passenger side of the car and repeat the same process for the passenger side license light.

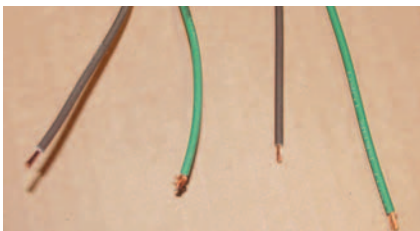


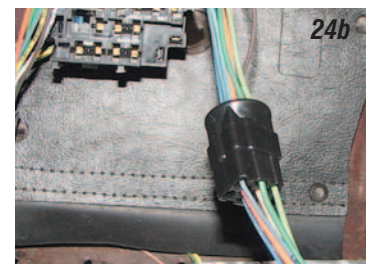
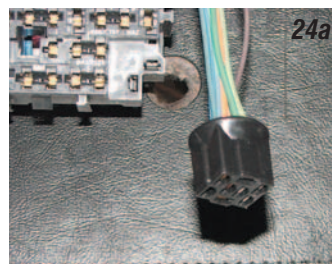
Photo 21: Feed the green wire in the rear body harness marked "right rear turn" across the rear of the car along with the brown wire and connect the brown and green

wire to the passenger side taillight housing in the same manner as the driver's side taillight housing.

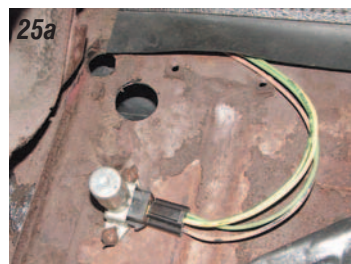


Photos 22a & 22b: The last wire in the rear body harness is the light green wire marked "back up Lt", this wire is for the back-up lights if they are going to be used. If your car was not originally equipped with back-up lights, P/N 22-152 includes the back-up light sockets and plates, springs and wire ends you will need to complete the installation.

Photo 23: The front harness includes the wires for the headlights (high & low beam), parking lights, turn signals, horns and electric fan if one is going to be used. The front harness also includes the headlight bucket grommets and tubes as well as the parking light grommets and tubes.



Photos 24a & 24b: The rear harness plugs into the corresponding jack from the fuse box.

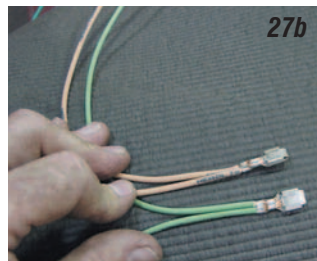


Photos 25a & 25b: The stock hole and grommet in the firewall can be used for the front body harness if you desire. We are going to hide all the wires in the engine compartment for a cleaner look so we will drill a hole down low out of sight. Using

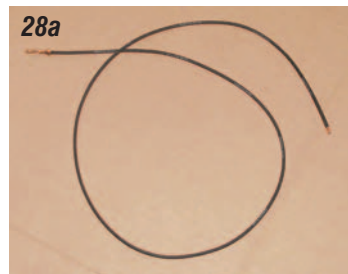
a 1-3/8" hole saw, we drilled a hole in the toe board just above the dimmer switch. Feed the wires through the hole in the toe board and using the ignition/starter grommet P/N 09-09, insulate the wires from the metal surrounding the hole.



Photos 26a & 26b: Our wires will be run on the outside of the inner fender to give the engine compartment a very clean look. Like the rear body harness, the front body harness is plenty long enough to run the wires anywhere you want.



Photos 27a & 27b: The front wiring harness has a tan wire marked "low beam" and a light green wire marked "high beam". The tan and light green wires will need to be connected to each headlight. Cut the tan and light green wires to length on the drivers side of the car and connect the excess light green wire to the now cut green wire and connect the excess tan to the now cut tan wire. These wires run across the front of the car to power the right side headlight. Now install female spade connectors on the tan and green wires.



Photos 28a , 28b, 28c & 28d:

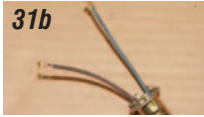
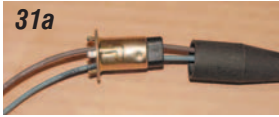
The front harness includes two short black wires with a round lug on one end marked "ground". These wires are used as the ground wires for the front headlights. The round lug end of the wire should be connected to a good body ground. Cut the ground wire to length and install the supplied female spade connector. Now, using the supplied wiring diagram, install the three female connectors into the headlight jack. The headlight jack plugs directly into the headlight bulb. With the left side headlight wired, feed the remaining tan and green wires across to the passenger side of the car for the right side headlight.



Photos 29a & 29b: In the front harness there is a brown wire marked "park lights", a light gray wire marked "left front turn" and a light blue wire marked "right front turn". The brown wire is for the left and right front parking lights.



Photos 30a, 30b & 30c: Cut the light gray and brown wire to length for the left hand parking light. The brown wire will need to be spliced and run over to the right side of the car for the right side parking light. The wiring harness includes parking light boots which is a must for the 1955 and 1956 cars to keep the water and trash out of the parking light sockets. The brown wire will need to be soldered and heat shrink tubing used to insulate the connection so that the brown and light gray wire will slide into the parking light boot easily.

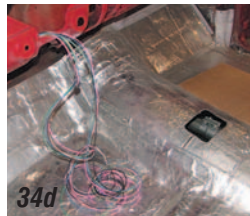
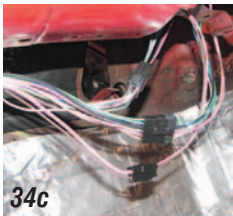
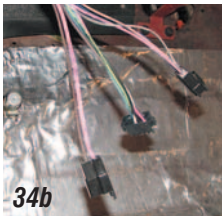


Photos 31a, 31b & 31c: The wiring kit includes new sockets for the parking lights. Using the supplied diagram, feed the light gray and tan wires through the parking light socket and install the buttons on the ends of the wires. Now, slide the parking light boot up onto the socket. Feed the tan wire and light blue wire over to the passenger side of the car for the right side parking light and repeat the process.



Photos 32: There is an orange wire in the front wiring harness marked “electric fan”. This wire is for an electric radiator cooling fan and connects to the electric fan relay. The wire is fused and marked “FAN” in the fuse box. This wire can be taped or cut back if not used.

Photos 33: There is a single green wire marked “HORN” which connects directly to the horns. Remove enough green wire from the very end to splice into the green wire near the drivers side horn. Route the other end and trim to length for the passenger side horn. The relay for the horns is now located in the fuse box. With the horn relay in the fuse box and not in the engine compartment, that is one more thing that will clean up the under hood area.



Photos 34a , 34b, 34c & 34d: With the front harness installed, we will move to the last part of the harness which is the dash harness. The Classic Update harness includes a gauge harness that can be used with the stock gauges or aftermarket gauges. The harness is wired to the gauge pod and allows the pod to be removed and installed without unplugging the gauges. The harness can be used with mechanical or electric gauges and

incorporates wires for the fuel, oil, water, volts, speedometer and tachometer. The harness also includes wires for the gauge lights, turn signal indicators and the high beam indicator light. Follow the supplied diagram to wire the stock gauges. If aftermarket gauges are going to be used, follow the manufacturer diagram.



Photos 35: The dash harness is pre-wired with a 1969 and later GM turn signal switch jack. This is the jack that is used on most aftermarket tilt steering columns like our ididit columns. The harness kit includes the male part of this jack and a wiring diagram for the stock column if the stock column is going to be used. The turn signal flasher is now located in the fuse box. If an aftermarket tilt column is going to be used and is equipped with 4-way flashers, this flasher is also located in the fuse box.

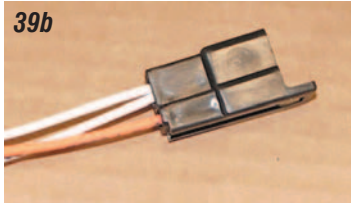
Photos 36: There are two single female jacks in the dash harness; one with two orange wires and one with a white and blue wire. The two male terminals on the brake light switch plug into these two female jacks.



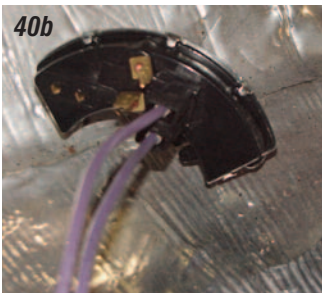
Photos 37a & 37b: The orange wire marked “heat/air” in the dash harness is for the stock heater or for an aftermarket heat and air conditioning system. If the stock heater is going to be used, follow the supplied wiring diagram. If an aftermarket air conditioning system such as Vintage Air is going to be used, the orange wire connects to the air conditioning harness. The orange wire has two bare ends. One end connects to the accessory jack from the fuse box marked “heat/air” and the other end connects to the stock blower motor switch or to the aftermarket air conditioning harness. Install a male spade connector on one end of the wire and clip the orange wire into the male jack for the accessory jack on the fuse box and plug it in.



Photos 38: The white wire marked “radio” connects to the power lead on the radio or stereo. Using this wire the radio can only be turned on with the ignition switch in the on or accessory position. If you would like to have the radio work with the key off, you can wire the power wire from the radio to one of the accessories positions on the fuse box. The accessories jack is the jack that the heat/air wire is connected to.



Photos 39a & 39b: The Classic Update wiring harness includes two courtesy lights that may be mounted under the dash. There is a two-wire male jack in the dash harness with an orange and white wire. This jack is for the courtesy lights and dome lights. If the door jam switches are going to be used, wires from the door jam switches should be spliced into the white wire using the supplied terminals and jacks. Follow the wiring diagram supplied with the dash harness. If the door jam switches are not going to be used, the only way the courtesy and dome lights will operate will be to turn the knob on the headlight switch.



Photos 40a & 40b: There are two violet wires in the dash harness marked “starter solenoid”. If the car has a manual transmission,

these two wires should be connected together. We recommend soldering this connection and using heat shrink tubing. If the car has an automatic transmission, the two wires will connect to the neutral safety switch. Install female spade connectors and the single spade female connector covers on the ends of the two wires and plug the wires onto the male spade terminals on the right hand side of the neutral safety switch.



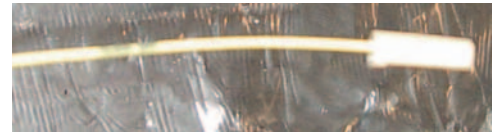
Photos 41: If the car has back-up lights, the light green wire marked “back up” and the orange wire marked “12-volt fused” in

the dash harness will plug onto the two left hand terminals on the neutral safety switch. Female connectors and covers will need to be installed on these wires as well.

Photos 42: There is a white wire marked “wiper feed”. This wire is used to power the wiper motor. If the car has a stock electric wiper motor mounted on the firewall, this wire is fed out to the wiper motor in the engine compartment. If the car has an aftermarket wiper system, this wire connects to the power wire on the wiper switch.

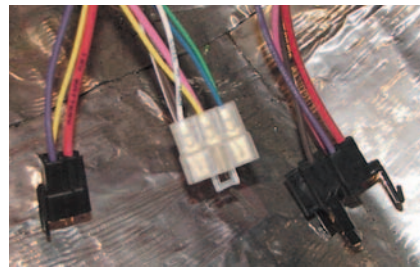


Photos 43: There is a yellow wire with a female spade connector on the end marked “clock bat”. This is the power wire for the clock.



Photos 44: There are two grey wires with light bulb sockets on the ends marked “dash light”. One socket is for the ignition switch and the other socket is for the heater control panel.

Photos 45: The last single wire in the dash harness is a black wire with a round lug on the end marked “ground”. This wire needs to be connected to a good body ground.

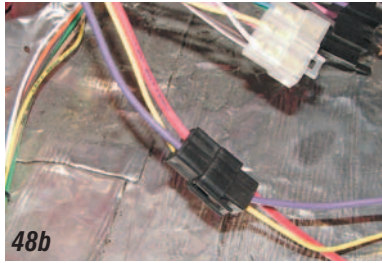


Photos 46: There are three male multi-wire jacks in the dash harness. The three wire black jack is the starter harness jack. All three wires connect to the starter and will work with a stock

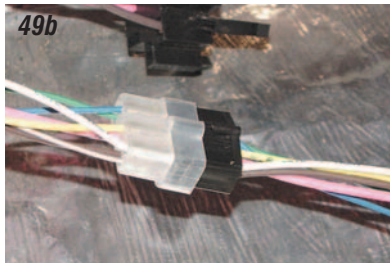
starter or a gear reduction starter. The six wire clear jack is the ignition harness jack and connects to the oil and water senders, the ignition coil, the alternator and the starter solenoid if the stock ignition coil and distributor are going to be used. The large round black jack is for the ignition switch and will plug directly into the supplied ignition switch.



Photos 47: The wires in the ignition/starter harness kit are plenty long enough to route the wires anywhere you want to hide them. The kit includes the jacks and terminals to connect to the dash harness. A 10-gauge red wire with a fusible link is supplied to connect the alternator to the starter.



Photos 48a & 48b: The starter harness has three wires. The red 10-gauge wire marked “12V-battery” connects to the large stud on the starter where the positive battery cable connects. The violet wire marked “starter solenoid-s” is the wire that activates the starter when the key is in the start position. This wire connects to the smaller stator stud on the starter solenoid (closest to the engine block) on a stock GM style starter. If the stock ignition coil and distributor are going to be used with a GM style starter, the yellow wire marked ”starter solenoid-r” connects to small rectifier stud on the starter solenoid (farthest from the engine block). If a gear reduction starter is used, the violet wire only connects to the small stator stud on the starter. The yellow wire will not be used. Using the supplied jack, connect the red, violet and yellow wires to the corresponding wires in the dash harness.



Photos 49a & 49b: The ignition harness has a pre-wired jack that plugs into the dash harness. Once again the wires are long enough to be routed anywhere you want for a clean and custom look. The large pink wire marked “ignition feed-coil” connects to the positive (+) side of the ignition coil. The wire marked “coil - > tach” connects to the negative (-) side of the ignition coil and supplies the signal for the tachometer if used. The green wire

marked “water temp sender” connects to the temperature sender on the engine if an electric gauge is used. The blue wire marked “oil pressure sender” connects to the oil sender on the engine if an electric oil gauge is used. The yellow wire marked “starter solenoid-r” attaches to the positive (+) side of the ignition coil if the stock distributor, coil and GM style starter solenoid is used.



Photos 50a & 50b: The LAST connection to make under the dash is to plug the ignition switch in. The large round jack plugs onto the supplied ignition switch. The supplied ignition switch does not include the ignition switch lock cylinder. Your original lock cylinder will work in the new ignition switch so all the keys for the car will still match. If you need to order a replacement lock cylinder the **P/N is 26-05** and will include two keys.



Photo 51: Now for the FINAL wire, the large red 10-gauge wire marked “American Autowire Sys” connects to the power outlet on the back of the alternator and to the large main stud on the starter solenoid where the battery cable is

connected. There is a fusible link on the end of the power wire at the starter for safety precautions, which is another great idea that was never on the original wiring harness.

Install the supplied fuses in the fuse box and you are ready to go. With the Classic Update Wiring Kit installed, you now have a much safer harness with many more options to add accessories to your custom classic! Good Luck. ▼