

Restoring 356 Knobs
Tom Scott

Well, here it is boys and girls, the long awaited and wildly anticipated, “Secrets Of The Outer Circles” method of restoring 356 knobs. First, the usual disclaimers regarding no responsibility for cut fingers, children being awakened in the middle of the night by screams of “eureka”, divorces, priceless knobs being destroyed, or points deducted by concours judges.

The process described has worked for me many years and only rarely has it failed to produce knobs, which closely duplicates new ones. We all have our special ways of doing things and this article is intended to provide some ideas, which should be tailored to your particular style. Not all knobs are restorable; ones that are broken or badly chipped are beyond hope and should be laid to rest with dignity. All other knobs, those badly crazed, scratched or discolored by time and sunshine, are absolutely restorable to like new condition. This process will work for ivory, gray or black knobs, although the latter are less likely to be badly crazed and therefore will require less sanding and may not require step one. Serrated Pre A and odd shaped knobs such as ash tray, window winder handles and inside handle escutcheons will require more hand work but with that “can do” attitude, common to all 356 enthusiasts, this process will work equally well for these.

Step One – The Lacquer Secret. All 356 knobs were made of the same type plastic material, which is soluble in lacquer thinner. Begin by soaking a clean rag in lacquer thinner and carefully rub the knob starting with the most distressed areas, until the surface has flowed and melted together and the crazing has disappeared. Depending on the condition of the knob, this may take several applications before the crazed area has been completely dissolved and fused. Repeat this step until the entire knob is the same color and consistency, about 5 to 10 minutes. As if by magic you will see a transformation beyond belief. Some suggestions, do not immerse the knob in lacquer thinner as this is not a controlled method and could dissolve the entire knob and, secondly, it is imperative to retain the original shape of the knob. Rubbing and sanding must be applied so as not to lose the original shape, especially the sharp edge on large knobs. I suggest you experiment with a trashed knob and remember that learning curve. This process will remove no more than .5 mm of the material.

Step Two – The Sanding Secret. Next we need to do some exponential smoothing of the entire surface; this is best accomplished using a drill press or an electric drill and wet or dry sandpaper. Place the knob on a threaded shaft made from a bolt or machine screw of the correct size for the knob.

Table Of Shaft Sizes

Type Knob	Size Shaft
Small – Wipers, Interior Light	M 3.5 X .6
Medium - Head Light, Wipers	M 6 X 1.0
Large - Hood, Engine Release	M 5 X .8
Shift	M 10 X 1.5

Next, screw the knob onto the shaft, place the shaft in the drill press or drill, turn it on and start sanding with 240 to 280 grit with plenty of water on the paper. Hold the paper lightly in one hand and allow the knob to rotate against the sandpaper. Do not press too firmly as this can burn the knob. If the knob begins to heat up your pressure is too great. Continue until the knob is smooth, usually no more than 2 to 3 minutes. For accurately sanding flat surfaces you should consider wrapping the sandpaper around a flat paint stir stick. Repeat the process using 600 or 800 grit and finish with 1,000 or 1,500 grit. Remove the knob and inspect for sanding or scratch marks. If there are marks, continue to sand with the finer grit paper until there are no marks. The drill press/drill method is recommended, as it is much faster and more accurately controls sanding.

Step Three – The Coup D’Etat, or Polish Secret. With the knob still on the shaft, and the shaft in the drill press and the press turned on, polish the knob to the desired gloss using a good chrome polish on a soft cloth, I prefer Blue Magic. Do not let the cloth get caught up in the chuck as this can undo all of your otherwise good work. Remove the knob and inspect, if there are any tiny swirl marks, especially on the face, place the cloth, with polish, on a flat surface and hand polish until absolutely smooth. This process can produce a knob which may be too shiny so adjust the polishing or re-sand using 1500 grit to achieve the desired gloss.

Photos are shown of the process at:

<http://imageevent.com/356consulting/restorationof356dashknobsphotos>,

unfortunately the last 4 photos are not included, I will try to re-generate the web site and include these.

There they are kids, original knobs good for another 50 years of happy motoring.

Your friend and mine, Dr. Knobs.