

Tonneau Cover Installation

A full tonneau is a cover that protects the entire cockpit of a roadster. They usually have a zipper that divides the cover into two halves, which lets you keep the passenger seat covered while you drive. This allows topless driving in cool weather with the heater blasting, keeping at least the lower part of your body cozy. A warm hat would be advisable for those who want to try it! I recently installed a full tonneau cover, ordered from Moss Motors, for my 1973 MGB. The price was right during their spring sale, so I jumped!

When I opened up the box, I realized that "installation" meant more than just snapping the cover onto the car! The cover is great, but the Lift the Dots (LTDs) and snaps come in a little plastic bag with the cover. Installation of a tonneau cover means installing all the snaps that attach the cover to the car in the proper place. Once over my initial shock, I realized this is actually smart, since every car may be different, and we all want a custom fit, don't we? Amusingly enough, the only instructions that Moss sent with the cover are "take it to an upholstery shop"!

Well, don't! It's not that hard to do, and I'd hate folks to spend money on a job so simple. So here's how to do it. Once I had the proper tools, it took about one hour.

NOTE: Some of this may apply only to the MGB, but the general rules apply.

You'll need the following tools:

- Chalk
- String (for non-headrest cars)
- Hole punch or "wheel punch pliers" -- preferred and much easier! (Sears, ~\$10,)
- Regular metal punch (and a small button anvil, if you want)
- X-acto Knife or small utility knife, (razor blade if you're brave)
- Hammer or mallet
- Pliers (I used standard "Channel Locks" for leverage)
- Eyeballs, a steady hand and patience
- Warm weather or a heated garage - makes the cover more pliable.

Instructions:

1. Vinyl tonneau's shrink with cold, age and weathering. Keep this in mind and give some slack, especially if the ambient temp is warm.
2. Lay the tonneau over the cockpit. On my '73 B, it was easy to orient on the headrest pockets in the cover, but older cars don't have this advantage, so you use a string and the chalk to mark lines to give you reference points. Hook the back portion into the metal "hooks" at the rear of the cockpit. There are two pockets with reinforcing plates. This is your point of reference.
3. Work from back to front, side to side. This is critical for a good fit.
4. Stretch the cover and mark over the male LTD connector with chalk on the cover. Punch a hole, NO LESS than about 3/8", so the fabric doesn't bind in the snap. Look at the female LTD opening to give you an idea of how big to make the hole. Don't make it too big! Otherwise the LTD won't have fabric to grab for the little "teeth"

5. Punch a hole on your chalk mark.
6. This is the tricky part...orient the top LTD piece over the hole, narrow end toward the edge of the cover, hold it in place and flip over to the underside. Push on the upper LTD and find the points where the little teeth want to stick through, CAREFULLY cut the underside of the fabric at these points in small slits, and push the metal clips through.
7. Once all the teeth are through the fabric, fit the under side piece of the LTD over the teeth and bend them to the INSIDE with pliers.
8. Take a deep breath, drink a beer, or do whatever relaxes you. You'll repeat the above step over and over, working back to front, side to side. Your fingers will get sore from this procedure, but not bloody, as long as you're careful with the knife.
9. When all the "Lift the Dot"s are in place, (don't forget the one on the dash, too!) you may have a couple of "snaps", female side, to install. In my situation, I was short two female snaps. (Check that little baggie!) I went to a local upholstery shop and got them for free.
10. For the snaps, same procedure. On my MGB, there are two male snaps on the windshield posts, left and right, and one each behind the edge of each door. Mark with chalk, but punch a hole a bit smaller than the shaft of the snap. Push the shaft of the snap through the hole.
11. Lay the head of the snap on a hard surface. (There are small "anvils" for this, and upholstery shops have them. I used the driveway with a rag underneath and my sore fingers to hold in place.) Hammer the metal punch to splay the shaft into the snap, once splayed, the snap is set into the body of the snap.

It's really a very quick and easy job that can be done in an hour or so! And the tonneau is much easier than the "hood" if the skies get