



Classic Car Upholstery Interior Kits-Should I or Shouldn't I?

by Maria Erickson

The tip this month doesn't necessarily come from an article...but from my own personal experience. After attempting to restore the seats in my 1965 Mustang, I am no longer afraid to attempt my husband's 1968 GTO. This article is to encourage those of you who'd "like" to attempt this...you CAN do this. It is work, but gratifying work.

First things first: Know your limitations. If you really aren't crafty or a perfectionist and you KNOW this about yourself, you may want to rethink before attempting it. However, if you want to save yourself a bundle and are game to try, go ahead and give it a shot! It is NOT as difficult as we thought it would be. It is something that a non-perfectionist can do and make it look just as good as a custom job. Ask anyone who knows me, I am most definitely NOT a perfectionist, but my husband Carl IS (they say opposites attract). I am, however, extremely crafty and creative. So between the two of us, we decided that we would arm ourselves with the most current info we could get our hands on and educate ourselves and go for it. (Smart move on our part) I will say this: I did approach this with fear and trepidation: "What if I screw this up? I have about \$850 invested in the interior kit and if I ruin the vinyl I am in BIG trouble." So with that in mind, we decided to pay the \$27 and purchase the video (available through California Mustang) and I watched this video about 30 times so that I felt pretty confident that this was something I could do. If your car's manufacturer doesn't have a video that can be purchased, there are MANY books you can borrow from the public library and Barnes/Noble has many books on restoring the interior of a classic car. Also Back to the 50's car show in June, has a superior source of restoration books. If you don't have the videos or books, and you have a camera or camcorder, film what you are doing as you are disassembling the seats and explain to yourself like you would a 4 yr old. You won't be sorry you did.

Most front seats (bucket seats) come apart in two separate parts. Which is actually nice as it makes it that much easier to maneuver and work around. The easier it is to handle, the easier the job is to do. Make sure you remove the old seat covers and replace the seat buns (padding bottom and back of your front seats) Some manufacturers do not make the padding for the back bench seat, So you will wind up having to keep what you have.

On a side note: There is an old scriptural concept re: the lack of wisdom of putting new wine into old wineskins that can really cause havoc and the concept is true here too. This is a lot of sweaty, hot work so you don't want to have to redo it or wind up having to pay someone to do it for you, because you started out just wanting "cut costs".

The padding for the front two seats is usually available. Usually there is a burlap protective sheet between the frame and the padding. That is to protect the padding from the metal coils. You should replace that as well. The old burlap will most likely be rotted or smelling musty anyway... (New wineskins, remember?) You can purchase burlap sacks at Menards VERY inexpensively. Two sacks should take care of your needs. I also made sure I had another person (my husband) there to help me muscle things into place and helped with the hog nose clips as



my hands got a little tired. It will take two of you to get actually get the vinyl on; you will only get frustrated doing this step solo.

I also made sure that I had the appropriate tools. I didn't use "makeshift" pliers to do the job of a hognose plier. The investment of your tool (\$14) will save you tons of broken clips and frustration. Also make sure you have enough clips. Over order so you won't be caught with your pants down...so to speak. Again, they are extremely inexpensive. You will be wise to order 500 clips. You could order them thru the restoration manufacturer; however you can buy them local at any reupholstering shop....Cost?....About \$5.

Here you may want to consider going to your local dry cleaners and ask if you can purchase their thin plastic covers that they put over your clothing to protect it. You will need about 6 of them. Some places will just give them to you. Cover the new seat padding with them before you attempt to put the vinyl on. They slide on quicker than a pig heading to the mud hole! Very easy.

Secondly, it is a lot easier if you are attempting this during the summer. (This can be done during the winter months, but it has to be done with a blow dryer that is used to warm and soften the vinyl to make it more pliable and that can take forever and makes your work that much more difficult) I do know several people who have done this during the winter, so it's your decision, but for me, I want to make this as effort free as possible. You lay out the vinyl covers to warm in the hot, summer sun. After a couple of hours you will be amazed at how soft and pliable these covers will get. They will stretch like nobody's business. At anytime you have a question if you are doing something correct, that's when you stop, re-watch the video or take a look at the book. Better to take the time and be sure of what you are doing than to second guess yourself, it will be much less stressful. I wound up doing this multiple times when doing my seats.

Once the finished product was reinstalled back into my car, my brother, who actually upholsters by trade, took a look at the finished interior and stated how great everything looked. When I told him about my efforts in upholstering the seats, and what I learned, his eyes bugged. "YOU DID THIS?"....I thought you had them sent out and done professionally....you did a fantastic job! I am really impressed." What a great compliment...thanks Dave. We did the two front seats on one day and the back the next day. I was amazed at really how easy the job was to do. No goof ups, no torn vinyl.....because we took the time to make sure we crossed our t's and dotted our i's and we also have the real pleasure and pride of knowing we did this ourselves and that we saved about \$1000 to do the job ourselves. So if you are not having the seats "customed", than I say this is a viable option for anyone. If we can do this....You can do this. You REALLY can.