

Emma's Dashboard:

The recent National Drive It Day (25th April), was our longest trip since getting Emma through MOT some two weeks earlier. During earlier shorter drives I had noticed that with the seat in a comfortable driving position my left knee rubbed the dashboard and my toes were hovering awkwardly in mid air to keep my foot clear of the clutch pedal; when we got back home I decided to do something about it.

The solution was simple enough, "nibble a bit out of the bottom of the dashboard! to give a bit more room for my knee, of course unless you nibble a bit out the other side the dashboard will no longer be symmetrical; but as the missing bit is partly hidden by the steering wheel it's not really noticeable so I didn't bother having a nibble out of Margaret's side (side of the dashboard I mean).

The first thing is to check for the presence of wiring and switch bodies etc. behind the dash, it would be a shame to cut through them; also don't forget that some previously low hanging hidden wires may now reveal themselves and require moving.

Access for this dastardly deed required removal of the steering wheel** so the opportunity was taken to go over the steering wheel, steering boss and all instrument bezels with some Solvol Autosol followed by AutoGlym polish. I also drilled a 12mm hole (with a Forstner bit), in the dashboard close to the steering column; this will take another toggle switch.****

Notes.

** *Removal of the steering wheel improves under dash access considerably. On 'Kermit' (my Aero Merlin Cyclecar), I could hardly get in it after I finished building it so I fitted a removable steering wheel. When I finally find or build my ideal NG TA a removable steering wheel will be a top priority.*

**** *In certain areas of the dashboard toggle switches are not acceptable for IVA unless you fit special guards.*

You don't need to remove much of the dashboard to make a considerable improvement. I marked out the waste with a French curve and felt tip pen, then cut out the bulk with a fret saw (used in the push rather than pull mode to help eliminate chipping of the front face of the fascia panel). This was followed by the use of a drum sander in an electric drill to smooth and profile the edge.

I don't think that my dashboard is standard and before starting I suspected that Dan, the previous owner/builder, had pinched someone's wardrobe door. Once starting to reshape the dash panel I realised it is laminate faced. It looks a bit like burr maple but I'm not sure what it is a copy of. It's actually a very nice dashboard and being laminate will not be unduly affected by; wind, rain, snow or sun, so thanks for that Dan!

Tip: - *One of my hobbies is woodwork and I often use plastic laminate as an infill. I have found that the best way to trim laminate is with a guided parallel router cutter.*

The end result was a considerable gain in comfort. The car was tested on a 32 mile round trip and I and I am pleased to say the modification lived up to my expectations.

As my dashboard doesn't appear standard this encroachment on the left knee may not be a common problem, however If you consider doing a similar modification there are a few things to bear in mind.

1. The curvature at the bottom of the dashboard needs to meet current IVA rules if your car is yet to pass IVA.

2. If your car is currently in build it might be worth sitting in it for an hour or so (read a book to stop getting bored), this will enable you to get a long term feel for any discomfort.
3. Modifications are a lot easier if carried out sooner rather than later.
4. The shape of the dashboard affects access and egress on a door-less car.
5. If you have a blank dashboard an early change of shape might be advisable before cutting out holes for instruments etc.



