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A TRIM FIT

A GRP headliner – what could be finer? asks Lindsay. Last month he showed how to prepare a LaSalle Trim headliner for fitting to his 110 Station Wagon and this month, shows how to install it.

IF YOU had a completely bare van body on a Defender 90, with no Alpine lights, I reckon you could install one of these headliners in a day. This installation took several days, partly because the 110 Station Wagon has Alpine lights and trim to contend with; partly because I've opted for a roof-mounted radio and speakers and partly because it took ages to work out exactly where the Alpine lights trims should be fitted. Still, onwards, upwards and into the roof space we go…

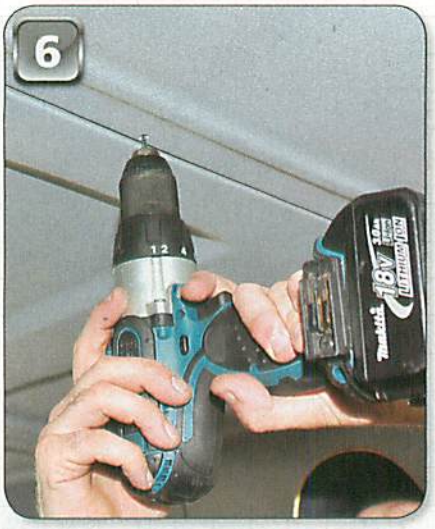
PICTURE 1 This is the rear of the three fibreglass sections. LaSalle trim recommend that, with the 110 models, you should install the rear section first but I don't think it makes any difference at all whether you start with front or back.

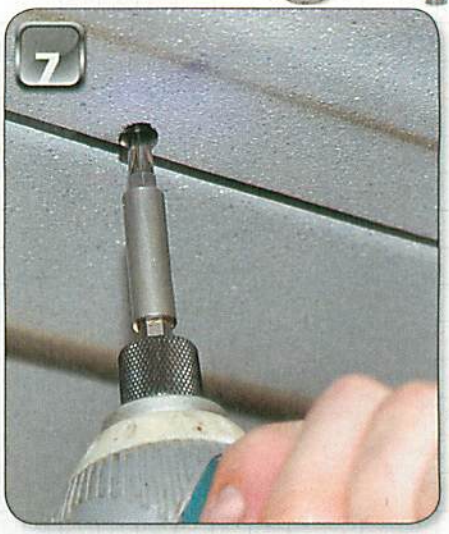
PICTURE 2 In any event, we started with the rear. You really need a second pair of hands to work with you on this job. The headliner has to be held in position so that you can make a mark and then drill a pilot hole for a self-tapping screw. At this stage, the rear section can be held in place with just four self-tapping screws evenly spaced around the perimeter.

PICTURE 3 LaSalle recommend fitting the centre section next but, having been there, I don't agree. Like the rear section, the front is more-or-less fixed in position so I would recommend fitting that next.

PICTURE 4 It's best to use all three screws holding the rear-view mirror bracket into position but not to tighten any of them at this stage. In practice, we had to start things off with a much longer 5mm screw, using that to pull the headliner in so that the standard screws could then be fitted.

PICTURE 5 The rear-sides of the front section can be fitted with a couple of self-tapping screws, as used on the rear section. Note that we use the depth stop on the Makita drill to attempt to prevent the drill from penetrating too deeply. There are too many uneven surfaces however, and it didn't work very well here. These rear screws were left loose so that the centre section could be fitted next.





PICTURE 6 The idea of fitting the centre section last is because it's the only one that doesn't have a fixed position and therefore, bearing in mind that Land Rovers do vary somewhat in their dimensions, you can slide the centre section behind its overlap on the front section, hold it up against the back section and alter its position to give matching gaps at all the joints. Once again, it was a question of drilling tapping-sized holes...

PICTURE 7 ...and inserting self-tapping screws. (The Makita LXT rechargeable impact screwdriver makes inserting self tapping screws a doddle.) Once everything was found to fit correctly, it was possible to go ahead and make marks for the various cutouts that needed to be made, such as at the tops of the B-posts and...

PICTURE 8 ...the Alpine light apertures from which the glasses had been removed.

PICTURE 9 Using the Würth jigsaw to cut out the radio aperture from the front headliner section was slightly interesting. After marking out the exact size, a hole was drilled in each corner. It was only possible to saw one long cut from one side of the panel, while the other long cut had to be sawn from the other side of the panel. The short cuts had to be done by hand. It's best to protect the surface of the inside of the panel with masking tape so that the foot of the jigsaw can't damage it.

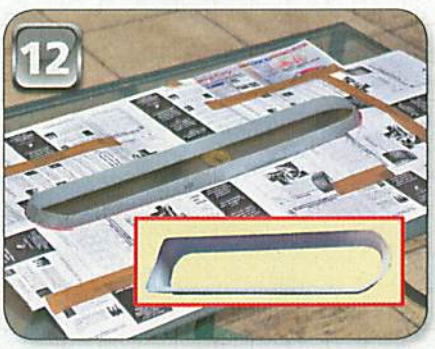
PICTURE 10 It's always best to cut a little undersized and then to open out the hole with a file until the radio fitting cage slides in snugly.

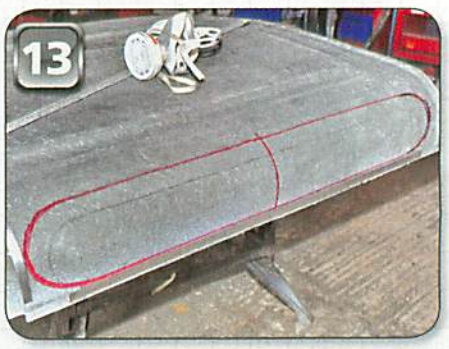
PICTURE 11 The hole size you'll need to cut for the speakers depends entirely on the speaker dimensions, of course. If you've got access to a suitably sized hole saw, so much the better – it's a lot quicker.

PICTURE 12 Unfortunately, simply marking the position of the Alpine lights onto the centre headlining section didn't actually tell me where I needed to cut for the trims. So I used a large piece of cardboard (made up of lots of smaller pieces taped together) and experimented until I found the right shape and size to fit over the LaSalle Alpine trim (inset).

PICTURE 13 Here, you can see the original pencil line surrounded by a red line made with a felt pen, using the card template shown in the previous shot.
Also, you can see a strip of aluminium glued to the surface of the GRP, following the curve on the left-hand side of what will be the cutout and another long strip running down the bottom edge. These strips of aluminium were glued into place with epoxy resin adhesive to add strength.

I was concerned about the possibility of the GRP breaking during or after the cutting-out process. →





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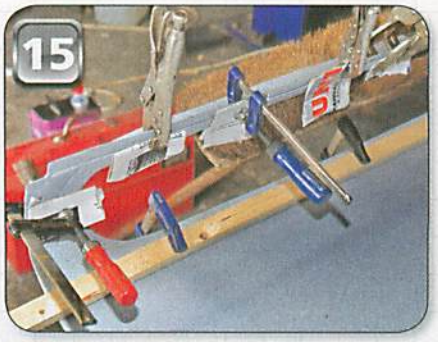
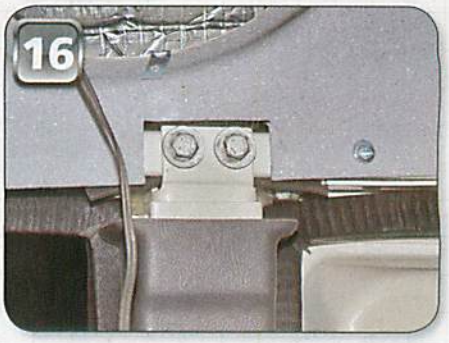
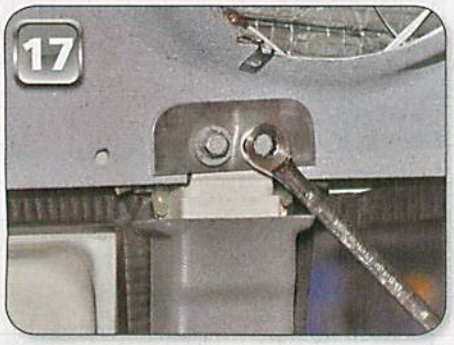
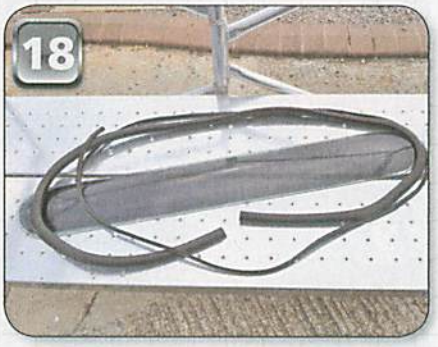








→ ***PICTURE 14*** Sure enough, the aluminium strips provided some extra support so that, after the cutting out was complete, the narrow sections of GRP were not under threat. Note that, in addition to wearing the Würth facemask, I also used a vacuum cleaner to grab the dangerous dust before it got into the air.

PICTURE 15 You could, I suppose, fix the Alpine light trim in place with screws but I chose to use epoxy resin. As well as taking care not to allow the clamps to mark the finished surface of the headliner, you also have to watch out for excess glue oozing out onto the visible side of the joint.

PICTURE 16 Meanwhile, the front section was cut out to fit around the top of the B-post.

PICTURE 17 I made a pig's ear of the cutout, so turned a problem to advantage by making an aluminium plate to go beneath the bolt heads and washers. As well as covering up my mistake, this has the advantage of clamping the headliner at the top of the B-post. You really shouldn't try to clamp through the fibreglass because this is a major structural body connection and you need to be able to tighten the bolts back to their original torque – and you can't do that against GRP, which crushes. You can tighten them satisfactorily against an aluminium plate, however.

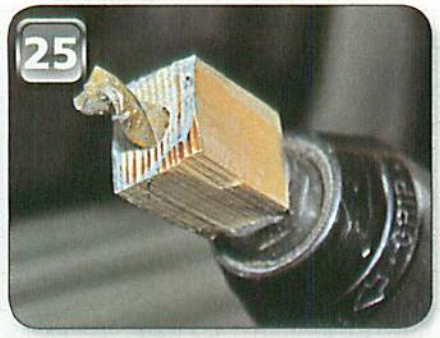
PICTURE 18 With the headliner in its final location, it was time to start putting things back together again. These are the new rubbers and inserts I purchased. I reasoned that, since the vehicle was six years old, it wouldn't hurt to have new rubbers in place, giving an extra lease of life to an area that is known to crack and leak over time. Unfortunately, none of us seemed able to get the Alpine glass back in place.

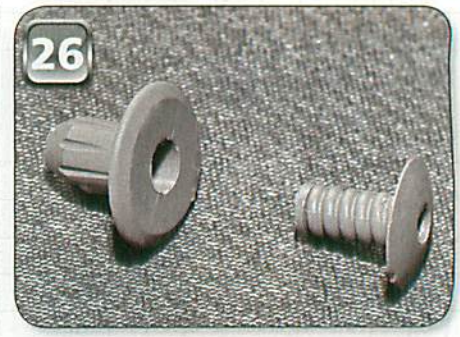
PICTURE 19 So, we called on Autoglass who rapidly found that the aftermarket rubbers (right) were not exactly the correct profile and were larger than the original rubbers (left), so sure enough, we had to use them after all.

The moral? Only purchase Land Rover OE rubbers – but don't buy them from a Land Rover main dealer. My local dealer quoted £57 per rubber whereas several advertisers in the pages of **LRM** are selling genuine OE ones for under £20.

SAFETY REMINDER

Whenever drilling or cutting GRP, and especially whenever using a power tool, you must ALWAYS wear an efficient particle mask. This is because GRP contains strands of glass which, when powdered by machining, turn into microscopic flakes of silica which could cause terminal lung damage.





PICTURE 20 Autoglass' Russell started by fitting the main rubber section, with the joint at the bottom.

PICTURE 21 Next, he inserted the glass, using his plastic spreader tool to ease the lip of the rubber over the glass.

PICTURE 22 The trickiest job is to insert the rubber spreader into its recess in the rubber. It's all but impossible without the right tool, seen here. Russell lubricated the rubber with WD-40 (you could use soapy water) to help matters along.

PICTURE 23 Watching Russell from Autoglass finish a job in minutes that we had struggled for ages to do made me realise that spending £60-odd on the experts turned out to be money well spent.

PICTURE 24 I decided that all the fixings that would be invisible because they would be hidden by the Station Wagon trim with self tapping screws with washers, whereas all the visible fixings would be trim clips. LaSalle supply trim clips with their headliners but, while they're okay, from the work I've done with Volkswagens, I knew there were much better ones available.

PICTURE 25 From the time I've spent photographing VWs being converted to motorhomes, I learned that the best way of making a stop to prevent a drill going through a box section and damaging an outer panel is to make a wooden block to fit around the twist drill itself.

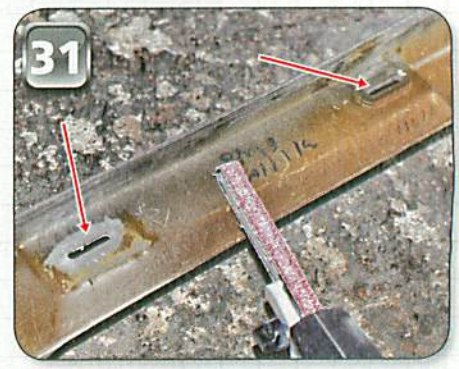
PICTURE 26 This is the clip. You can find them for sale by searching on Google or eBay for "VW T5 trim clip". Clip-sprung durch Technik, to coin a phrase.

PICTURE 27 You have to make sure the headliner is tight up against the rib to which it will be clipped , then push in the outer part of the clip until you hear a click.

PICTURE 28 Next, push in the insert with your thumb...

PICTURE 29 ...and finish off by hammering home. The insert can be removed by unscrewing with an Allen key rather than levering it out with the trim tool.

PICTURE 30 Here's a modification we added. The two grab handles from above the rear door were fitted to the sides above the passenger's and driver's doors. Unfortunately, fitting them in exactly this location meant that they interfered with the sun visor so they will have to be moved further back.



PICTURE 31 Another minor problem was that these raised areas on the side trims (arrowed) push the trim out further than it needed to be so each one was power sanded off to make it flush, allowing the trim to sit correctly after the grab handles had been refitted.

PICTURE 32 As we said earlier, where fixings would be covered by trim, self-tapping screws were used, with washers beneath their heads to spread the load.

PICTURE 33 All of those that would show, on the other hand, were nice VW trim clips. →

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→ ***PICTURE 34*** Since the original interior lights were no longer to be used (they were replaced by LED lights from MCL) we decided to fit remote switches, one to the radio housing on the front panel and one to the rear window surround. Dave had already run the wiring in place while the headlining was out and I had drilled a suitable sized hole for the switch. Dave connected and fitted the switch…

PICTURE 35 …and checked that the lights worked correctly before refitting the trim.

PICTURE 36 The side trim is now partly held in place by the rear window trim and partly by the seat belt mountings.

PICTURE 37 However, the steel clips that were originally fitted on the rear of the trim and which hooked over the roof rail could no longer be used because the headliner covers the rail. If you feel the trim needs more support, you may be able to use extra-long self-tapping screws through the trim and into the headliner behind it.

PICTURE 38 Properly finished, with the original SW trim back in place, the LaSalle Trim headliner really looks as if it belongs.

PICTURE 39 And at the front, you have those additional options of radio and speaker mounting positions.

At the time of writing, we still haven't refitted the sun visors, partly because of the grab handles that, at this stage, have not yet been repositioned and partly because the LaSalle Trim instructions state that they need cutting down in order to clear the radio housing. I'm going to try moving the grab handles and then seeing if the sun visors, which I think only lightly touch the radio housing, can be refitted as they are. Cutting, narrowing and glueing the sun visors sounds to me as if it will be difficult to carry out without it looking like a botch. It might be a job for a professional trimmer.

Overall, these LaSalle Trim headliners are well made, well finished and could well last the lifetime of the vehicle and am very pleased indeed with them. They do take much longer to fit than I expected – but I am a bit obsessive about getting things right. LRM

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