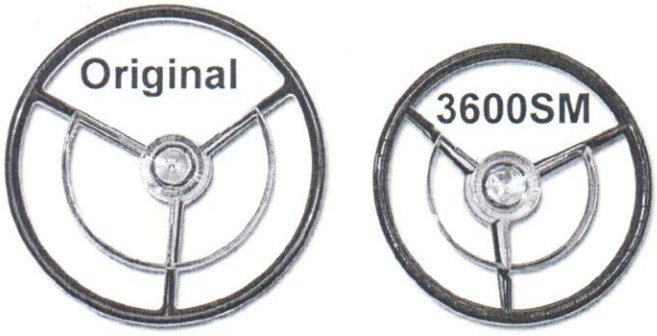
Installing a CASCO 3600SM Steering Wheel
On a 1956/57 Thunderbird

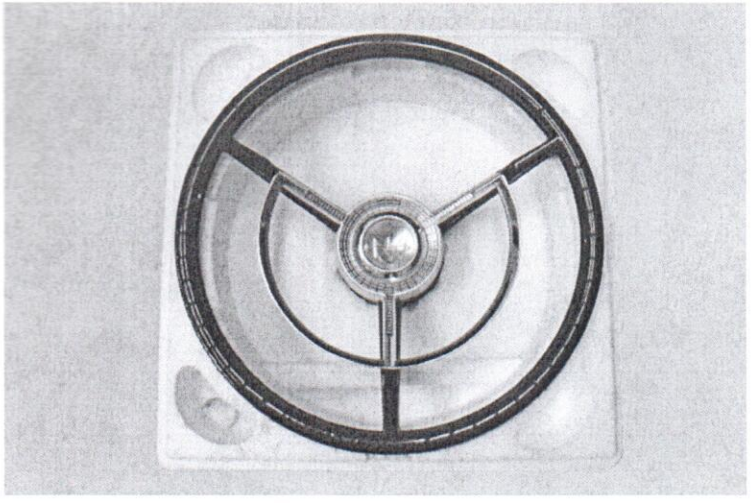


The 3600SM smaller steering wheel is a solution for those 1956/57 T-Bird owners who desire some extra wiggle room from the driver's position. The 3600SM is a scaled down reproduction steering wheel with matching horn ring that is 2" less in diameter than a stock 1956/57 Thunderbird steering wheel.

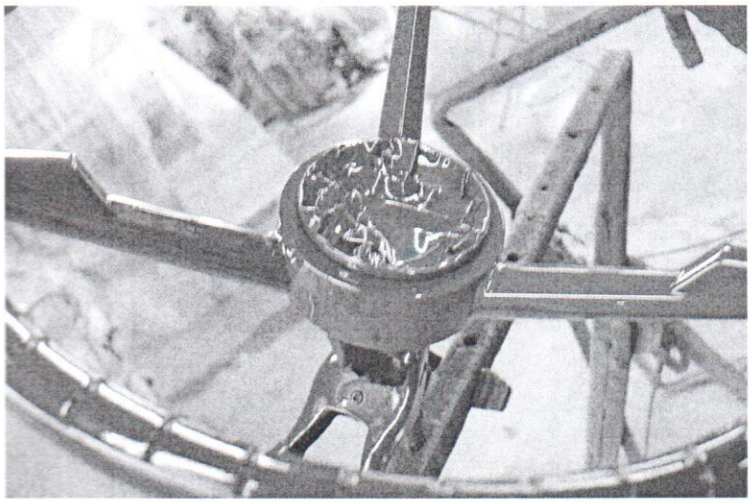
Image courtesy CASCO

The 3600SM steering wheel is also 1" less in height than the standard thunderbird steering wheel. This combination provides extra room for the driver, almost like pushing the seat a little farther back.

Image courtesy CASCO

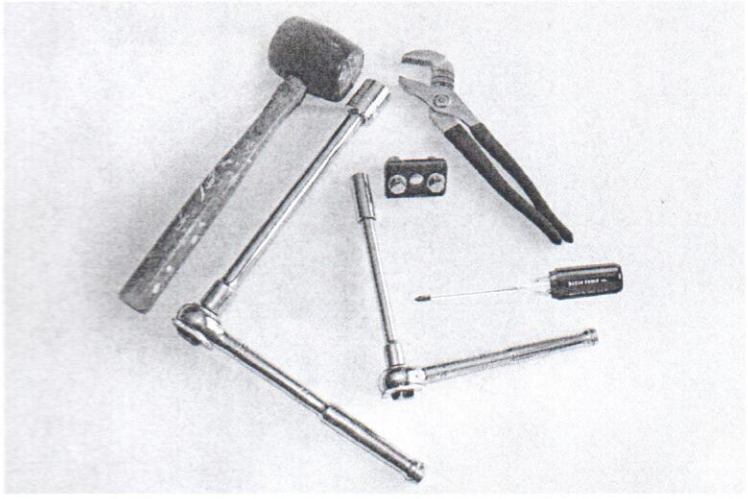


The 3600SM steering wheel arrives well packaged in a Styrofoam container, complete with horn ring and a generic center medallion. The small half-round clip shown in the lower left corner of the container gets installed on the back of the wheel hub and is used to automatically cancel the turn signals. If your interior happens to be black, you can install your new wheel. Otherwise, the wheel must first be repainted in the correct color.



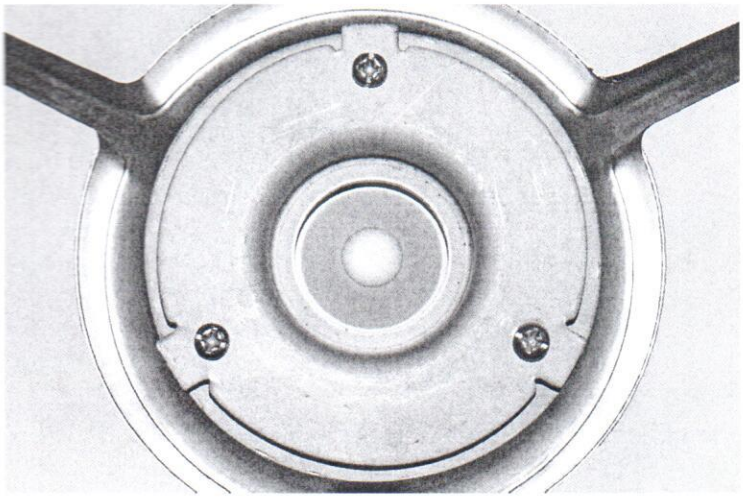
Remove the horn ring by pressing down evenly and then giving it a counter-clockwise twist. Retain the horn ring while the steering wheel is painted.

The 1957 T-Bird used to illustrate the installation process had a red interior, so the 3600SM steering wheel was delivered to a local body shop for a makeover using the correct flame red acrylic auto paint.

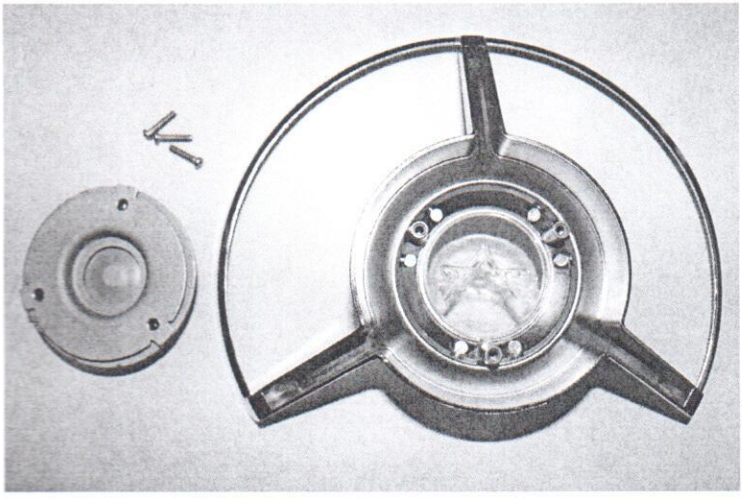


These are the tools used to install the new steering wheel:

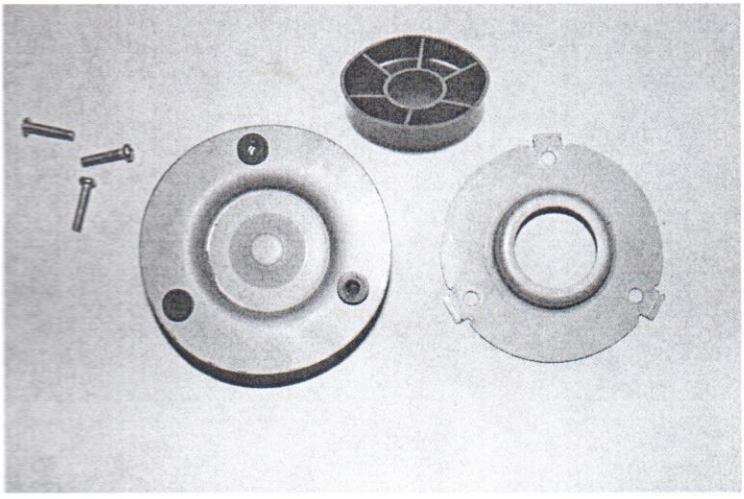
- Phillips screwdriver
- Homemade steering wheel puller per CASCO specs
- 15/16" socket with ratchet & extension
- 1/2" socket with ratchet & extension
- Large "water pump" type pliers
- Rubber hammer



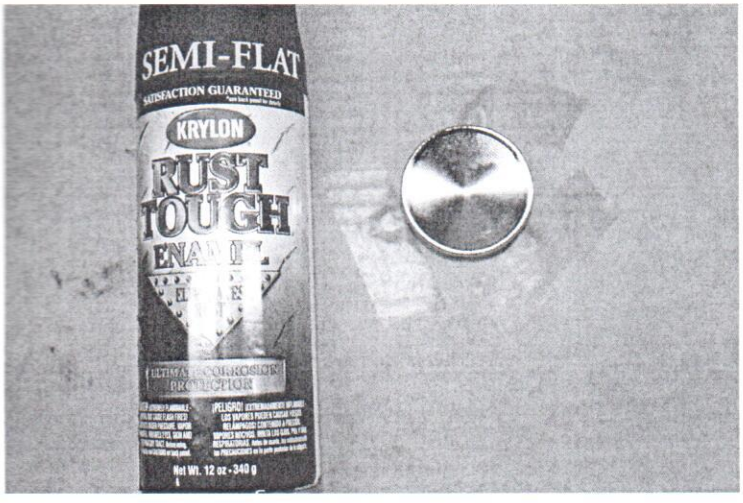
While the wheel is out being painted, it is a good time to install a correct 1956 or 1957 T-Bird emblem in the horn ring. To do this, flip the ring over and remove the three Phillips head screws.



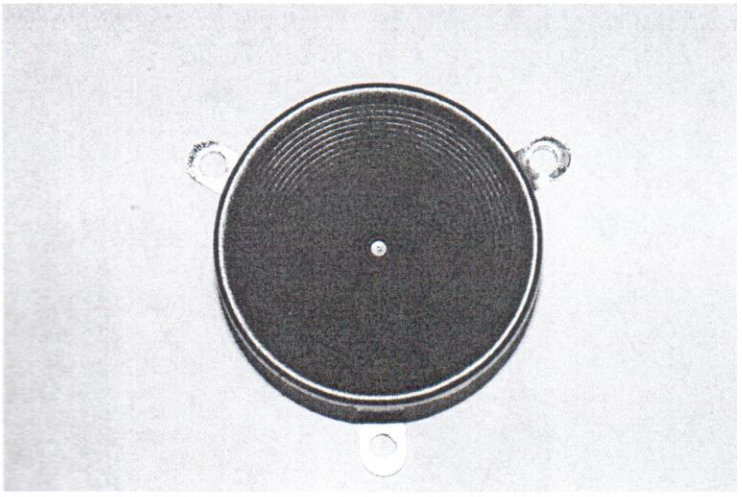
This is a view of the disassembled horn ring with the generic emblem still in place. This emblem can be removed and discarded. It will be replaced with a correct Ford emblem during the reassembly process.



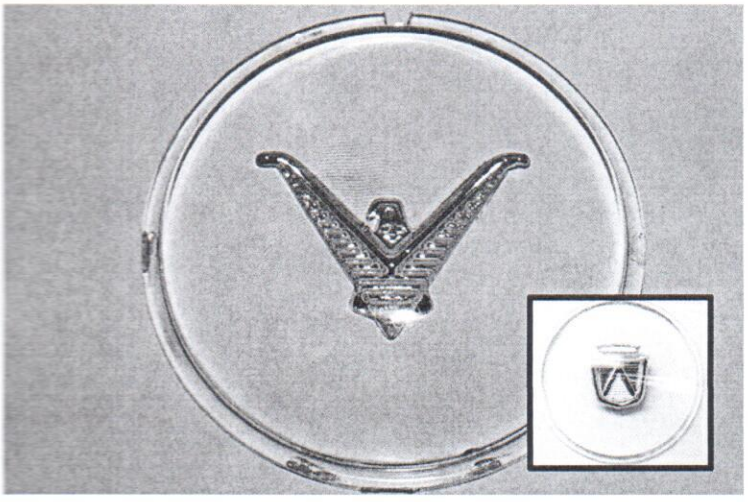
If you separate the components of horn ring hub assembly, you will find a large rubber insulating spacer as well as three rubber spacers. These serve to isolate the two circular metal pieces of the hub. This isolation is necessary for the proper functioning of the horn relay circuitry.



The other part of the horn ring assembly is a round conical-shaped trim piece that is mounted directly behind the center emblem. If your T-Bird is a 1956, the supplied silver color is correct. The example car was a 1957, so it was necessary to paint this piece black. Carefully scuff the surface with steel wool, clean it with solvent, primed it and then painted it. Semi-flat black spray paint from a rattle can works fine.

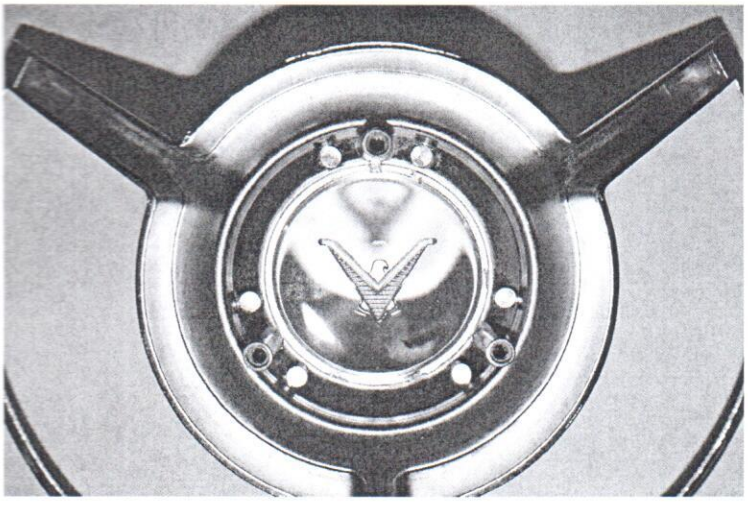


This is the round trim piece after painting. Be sure to let this piece thoroughly dry (24 hours or so), because the rim of this piece will be in direct contact with the back of the center medallion.

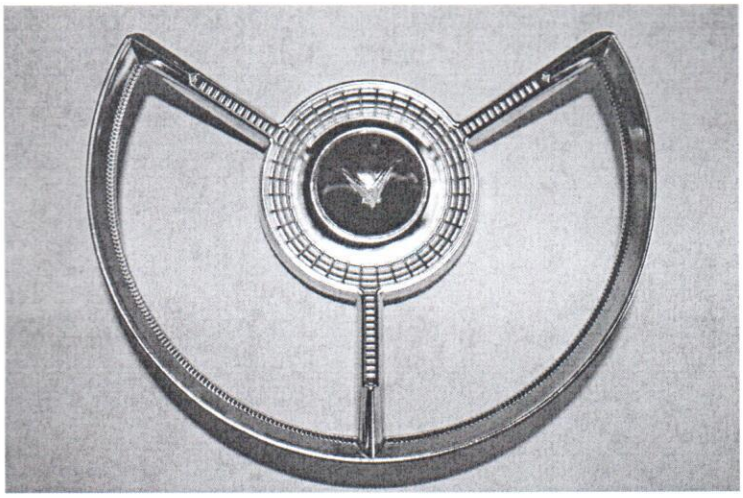


You can reuse the medallion from your original steering wheel, but why not buy a new medallion for the new steering wheel. The large image to the left is the 1957 medallion. The 1956 medallion is shown inset into the larger image. These are the CASCO part numbers:

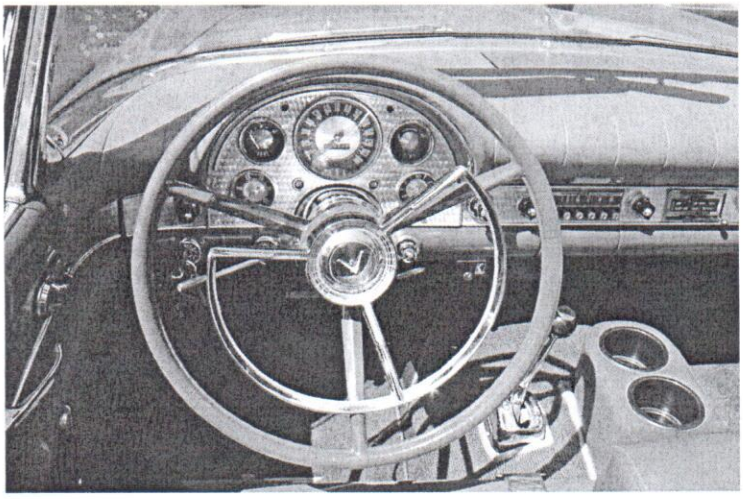
1956 Medallion: 13A806C
1957 Medallion: 13A806D



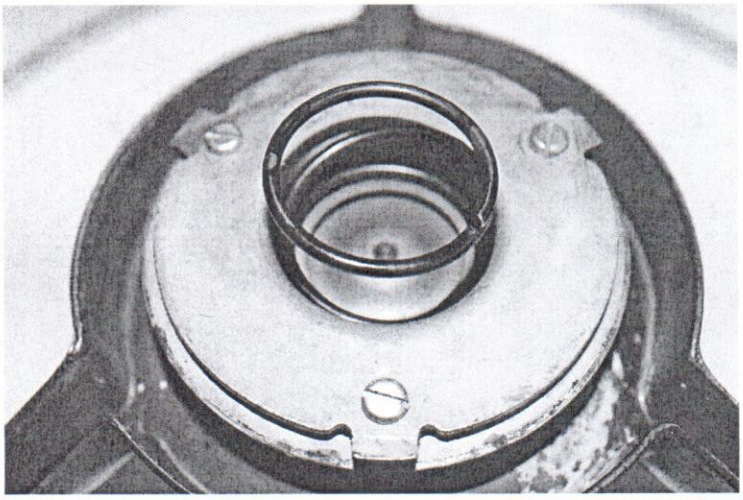
Next install the new Thunderbird medallion in the horn ring casting. There is a small notch at the top of the medallion which mates with a corresponding key on the casting. (You can see the notch at the top center of the photo). Install the conical metal piece over the medallion and then reinstall the hub assembly, being careful to align the rubber insulator and spacers. Tighten the three Phillips screws in sequence until the hub assembly is secure.



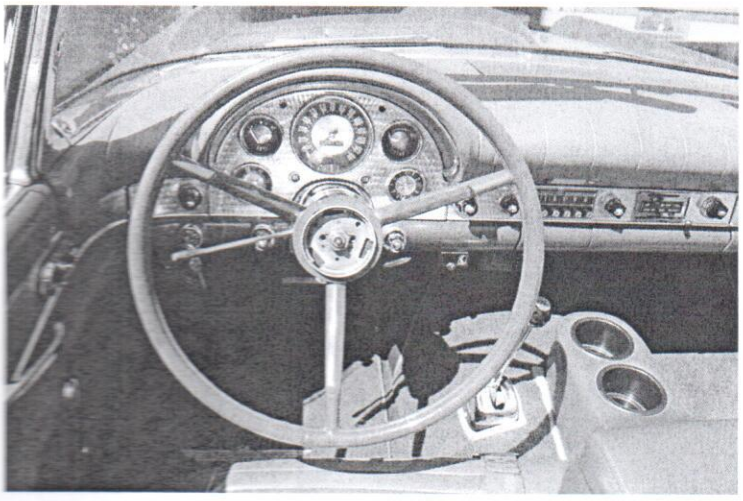
Flip over the horn ring and it should look like this photo. Other than the smaller size, the only thing that distinguishes the 3600SM horn ring from some originals is that it lacks the "Ford Master Guide Power Steering" legend under the hub. Ironically, the smaller steering wheel is probably only appropriate for those cars that actually HAVE power steering, but basing the repro horn ring on a manual steering car likely avoids a Ford licensing issue.



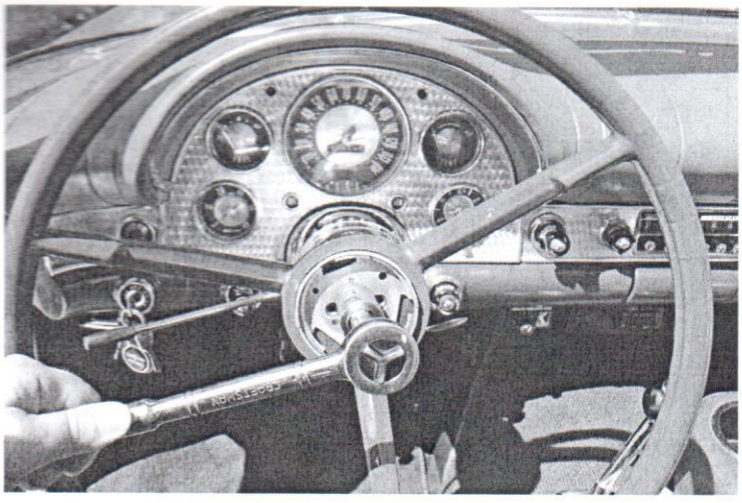
It is now time to remove the original T-Bird steering wheel. First, park the car with the wheels pointed straight ahead and disconnect the negative battery cable. Remove the horn ring by firmly and evenly pressing inward while simultaneously giving the ring a twist to the left. When it gets to the position shown in the photo, it should lift right off.



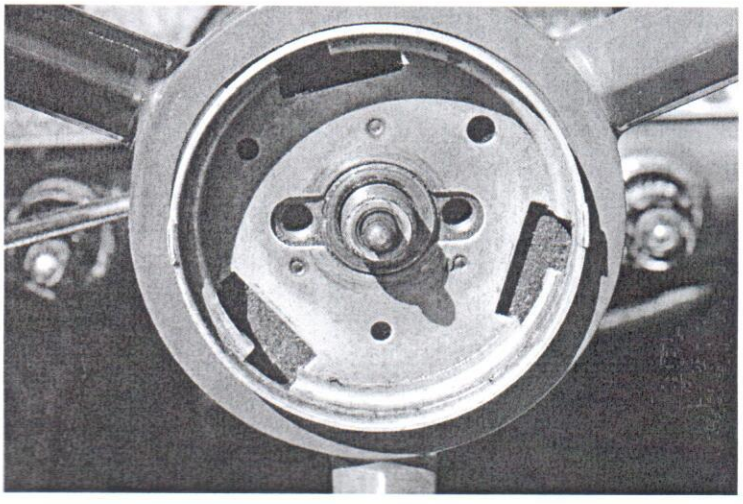
The back of the original T-Bird horn ring shows the horn ring spring. This part, CASCO No. 13A807, is not included with the 3600SM smaller steering wheel, so be sure to order one from CASCO when you buy the new steering wheel. This way you can store the original steering wheel as an intact unit, complete with center medallion and horn ring spring.



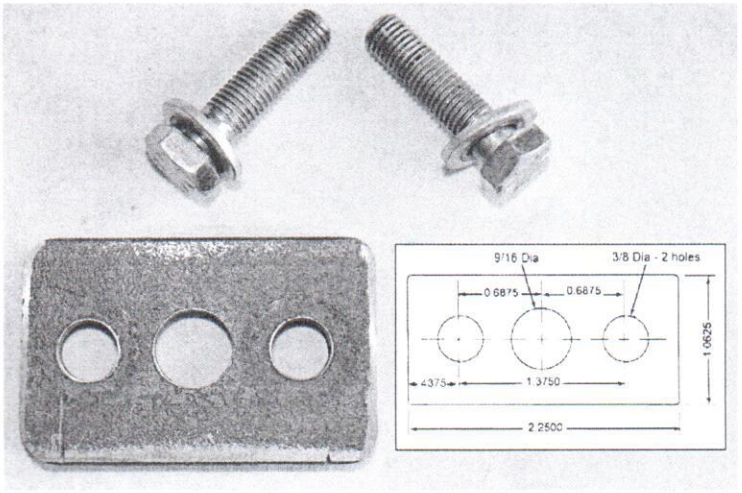
This photo shows the original steering wheel after the horn ring was removed. You can see the 15/16" nut that fastens the wheel to the shaft and a little metal button in the center of the nut, which is attached to the horn relay wire.



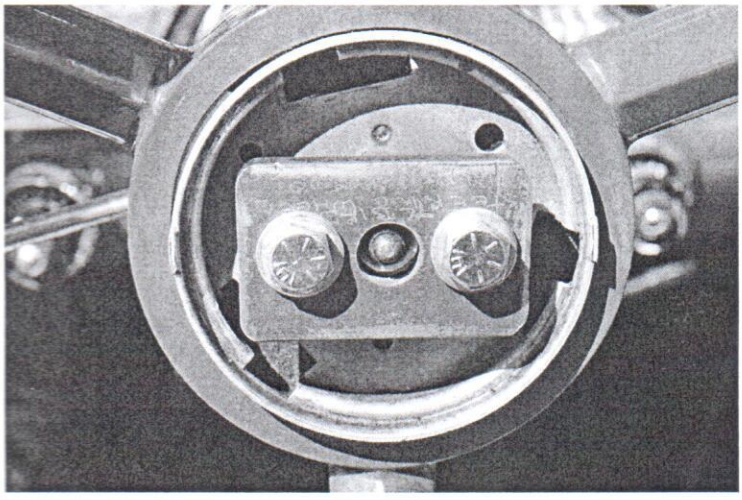
Remove the nut with a 15/16" socket wrench and extension, being careful not to scratch the paint on the steering wheel.



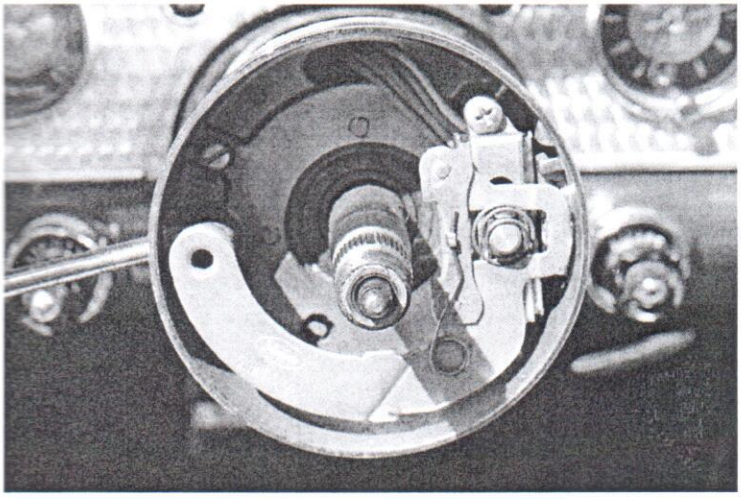
Here is a view of the original steering wheel hub after the lock nut was removed. You can clearly see the horn button contact in this photo.



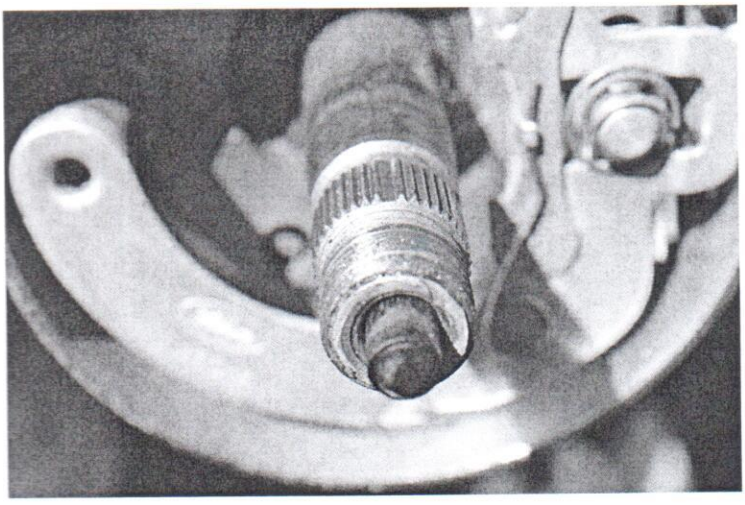
This is the steering wheel puller that was made from a diagram published in Issue 10, October 1997 of CASCO's ThunderEnlightening newsletter. A piece of ¼" thick steel bar stock and a drill press are used to make the custom puller. The large center hole is critical, because it enables the horn button wire to poke through without being damaged. The two hex bolts are 5/16-24 (fine thread), 1-1/4" long.



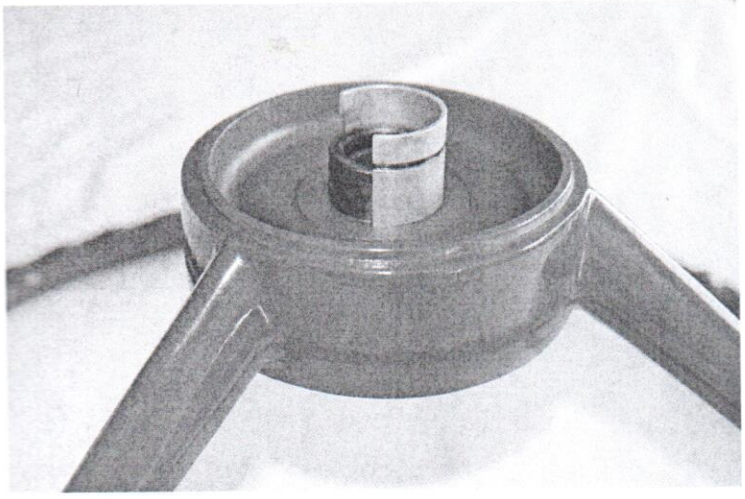
Here is the steering wheel puller in place, ready to do its duty. Each hex bolt is gradually tightened using a 1/2" socket wrench. Once one bolt feels tight, move to the other. Eventually the steering wheel will be loosened on the shaft and can be easily removed just by pulling it toward you.



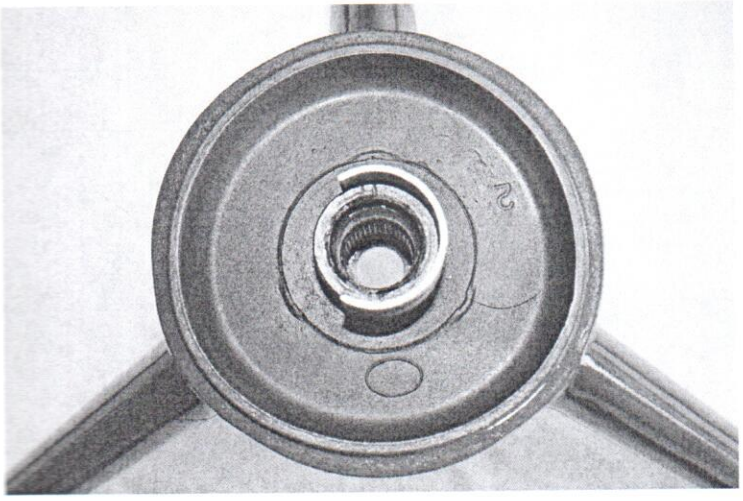
This is the steering wheel shaft and turn signal switch assembly after the original steering has been removed.



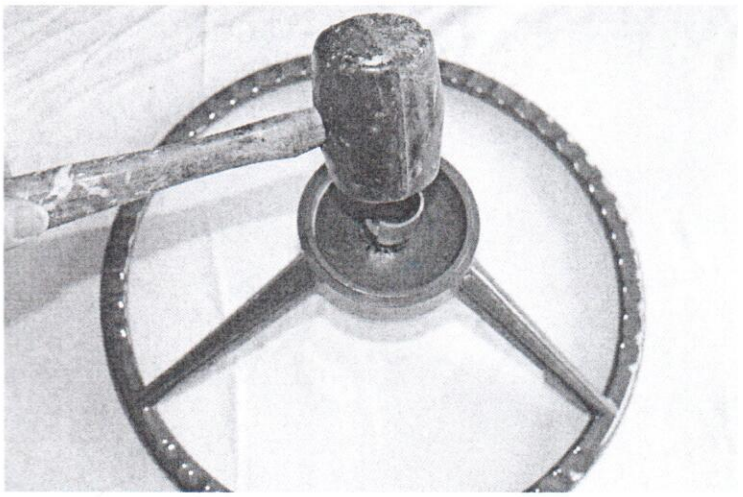
This close-up view of the steering wheel shaft shows that the shaft is keyed with a wider groove at the top of the assembly. This wide groove mates with a corresponding wider key on the steering wheel hub. The wheel can only fit on the shaft one way.



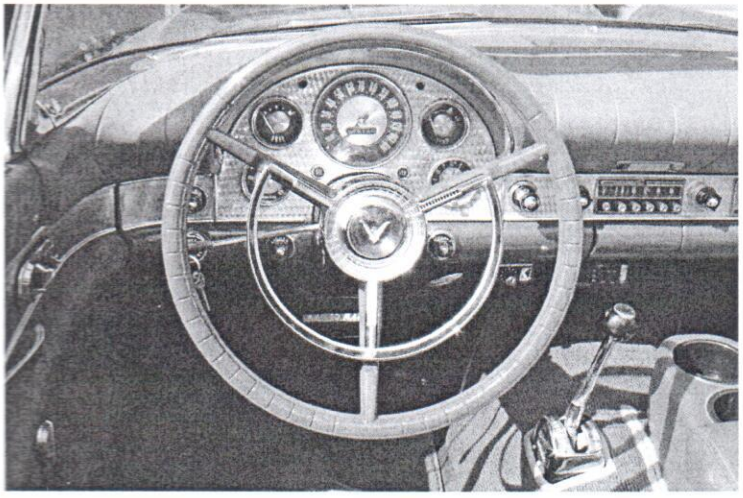
This is a view of the rear hub of the original steering wheel. You can see the half-round silver sleeve that is used to cancel the turn signals.



Here is another view from directly overhead. Position the new 3600SM steering wheel directly below the original steering wheel so you can install the half-round sleeve on the new wheel in the exact same position.

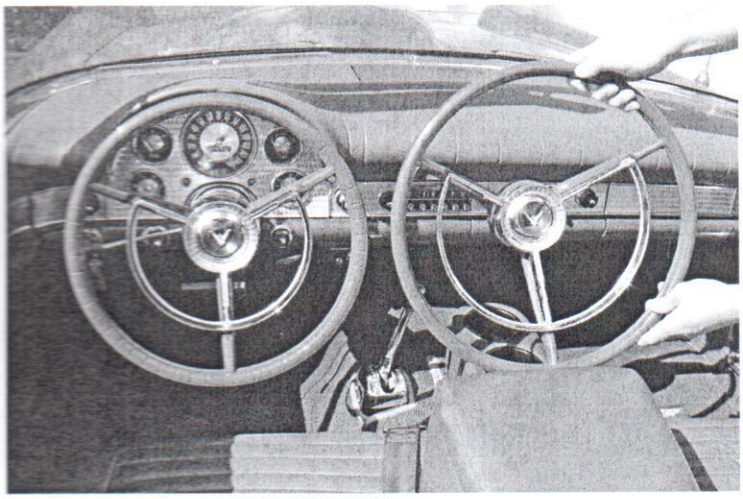


The new turn signal sleeve should fit tightly around the 3600SM steering wheel hub. If the sleeve snaps easily onto the hub and can be rotated using only moderate finger pressure–it is too loose. Remove the sleeve and carefully squeeze it in a vice to reduce the diameter slightly. Then carefully tap the sleeve onto the shaft with a rubber hammer. Once in place, use the large pliers to twist it into final alignment, using the original steering wheel as a reference.



Carefully place the 3600SM steering wheel on the shaft and rotate it gently until it drops onto the keyway. Then press down with moderate hand pressure to seat it on the shaft. Install the center nut and tighten it with a 15/16" socket until the steering wheel is fully seated. Wiggle it to ensure that there is no play. Lock the new horn ring in place by pressing down and twisting it clockwise until it snaps into position. Reconnect the battery and test the horn.

Here is the new steering wheel shown from a slightly different angle. It looks quite authentic. You can see that there is now significantly more space between the bottom of the steering wheel and the seat. The driving position is much more natural using the smaller steering wheel, especially for larger drivers.



Here's a side-by-side comparison of an original 1957 Thunderbird steering wheel next to the installed 3600SM steering wheel.

Other than the time that it took to paint the steering wheel and the center medallion background, the actual installation process is very straightforward. If you have a correct wheel puller, it should only take about ten minutes to remove the original steering wheel and install the 3600SM.

All photos by Brad Nogar, unless otherwise noted.