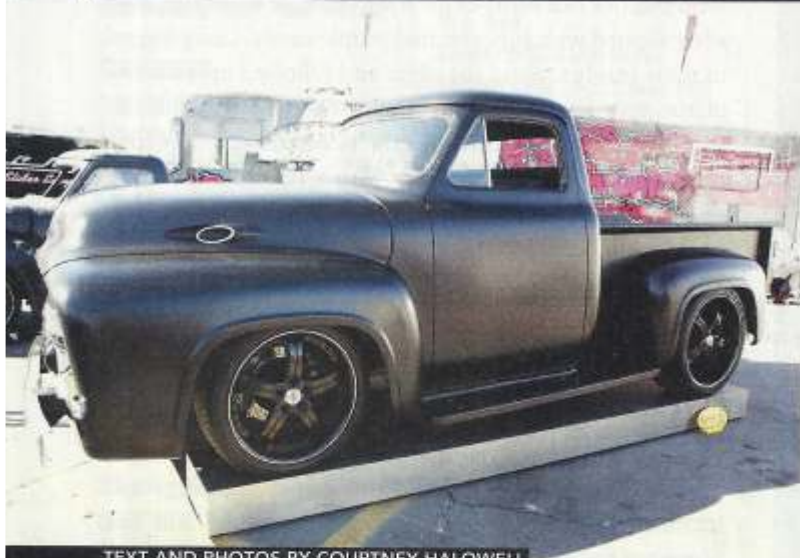


TECH:

COOL RUNNINGS

Installing a Vintage Air Front Runner Along With A/C in Sly's Effie



TEXT AND PHOTOS BY COURTNEY HALOWELL

At the 2009 SEMA show, West Coast Customs had a couple of chopped '55 F-100 trucks on display that they had recently built for a new Sylvester Stallone movie. One was obviously the "hero" truck that they used for close-up shots where the truck had to look and run great. The other truck was actually a stunt truck that they had pieced together that had been blown up, shot, jumped and generally crashed. Sly formed a bond with the hero truck and asked for it as part of his payment for doing the movie. He had a couple of requests: he wanted air conditioning installed, and he wasn't keen on the fact that the truck wouldn't charge when the engine was at lower rpms.

The charging problem was no real surprise because the 347-ci Ford engine (based on a 302-ci block) had been fit with an engine accessory setup that was meant for a NASCAR engine that ran at really high rpms all of its life. The crew

from West Coast Customs decided to solve both problems with one call, so they picked up the phone and called Vintage Air. They ordered one of the Front Runner setups for the small-block Ford engine and also ordered one of their direct-fit air conditioning units for the '55 F-100.

To say that the kit fits like a glove would be an understatement. It was really easy to install, but there were a lot of components, so it still took a while. The only thing that we had to rely on a professional for was to vacuum out the system and charge it with R134 refrigerant when everything was installed. The only reason we had to do that is because we didn't have the correct equipment to do that part of the job. Plus, it never hurts to have a person who deals with air conditioning systems on a daily basis give the system a quick inspection to make sure everything is tight and all of the parts are installed properly.



These are all the parts from Vintage Air for under the hood, including all of the Front Runner components, water pump, alternator, power steering pump, air conditioning compressor, lines, condenser and receiver dryer.



All of these components are the parts from the firewall back and include the bulkhead cover, electronic heater control valve, vents, controller and the big plastic box that houses the heater core, evaporator, expansion valve, blower motor and all of the ducts that direct the air where you tell it to go.



OK, here was issue number one. For a street-driven vehicle this setup wasn't spinning the alternator and the power steering pump fast enough at cruising speed on the freeway. Notice that the grille and radiator were removed to make it easier to clearly see what was going on with the front of the engine.



Because the center of the dash had already been shaved, they decided that the vents and controls for the Vintage Air setup would fit great in the center of the dash.



That meant that the center console would have to be removed and set aside until everything was installed and then it could go back in.



While the center console was being removed, the accessory system, timing cover and fuel pump drive were being removed from the Ford engine.



The next order of business was to prep the new Vintage Air timing cover that has all the mounts for the alternator, air conditioning compressor, power steering pump and water pump built right in.



With the crank seal installed and the gaskets between the block and the new timing cover, it is slid into place on the front of the engine.



More black RTV is applied to the mounting surfaces of the new timing cover and the water pump. The gasket is applied, and the water pump is bolted into place.



The harmonic balancer is the next item to be reinstalled.



Then the air conditioning compressor is bolted up and the hard lines are installed.



The new alternator is mounted to the Vintage Air timing cover/engine accessory mount.



It is just a matter of bolting stuff up at this point, like the serpentine belt tensioner and the water pump pulley.



The power steering pump is the next item that gets bolted to the front of the engine.



Now, depending on which harmonic balancer you have it may require a spacer to get the crank pulley out where it lines up with the rest of the pulleys. This one did, yours may not.



The Vintage Air kit comes with a smooth cover for the air conditioning clutch, and it simply installs with the three provided bolts.



At this point the serpentine belt is installed and the cover is installed on the tensioner.



And with that we can see what the complete Front Runner system looks like. Not only will the alternator and power steering spin fast enough to work properly, now the truck has an air conditioning compressor and the benefit of a single serpentine belt.



Before the under-dash box can be mounted, a few things need to be installed first. Here, the electronic heater control valve is being installed on the heater side. There are two heater lines, intake and return.



There are two lines that run to the evaporator, the inlet actually runs through the expansion valve and the return just runs straight out of the evaporator back to the compressor.



Because there are four lines that come from the box under the dash through the firewall, a body saw is the easiest way to cut out the hole that they will come through.



The under-dash heater box is carefully lifted into place and then bolted to the straps that mount it to the stock bolts under the dash.



Once the lines are pulled through the firewall, the provided bulkhead cover is installed.



Back inside, the duct hoses are attached to the top of the heater box.



The spot where the holes are to be cut for the vents and the controls are measured out and cut.



The vents just basically snap into the dash and have little ears that lock them into place. They are very simple to install and they look great in this truck.



The section that had to be cut out for the controls was cut with a body saw, and a hand file was used to clean up the edges.



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Mosco actually wanted to test the wiring on the controls in a position where he could easily get to it, so he connected all of the wires while the controls were still uninstalled.



After everything checked out, Mosco unplugged the wiring, installed the controls in the dash, and then plugged in all of the wiring again.



Once everything inside the cab was buttoned up, the heater hoses were run from the bulkhead to the front of the engine.



The next item to be installed was the condenser. It actually just bolts onto the factory core support and uses existing holes!



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Next is the receiver dryer that attaches to the condenser on the inlet side, which attaches to a hard line that feeds through the core support on the other side.



Mosco wants to make sure that the lines don't move, so he adds a couple of line clamps to the hard lines on the core support.



The final step is to run the hoses from the bulkhead to the compressor on one side and the receiver dryer on the other side.



And that's about it for the Vintage Air parts. Sure, the radiator and grille still have to be reinstalled, but that's just more nuts and bolts.

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