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1947-53 Chevy Truck Straight-Axle, Steering and Brakes

By Grant Peterson

As I delve deeper into the rebuilding of my '53's frontend, I occasionally stop and ask myself, why am I putting all this time, effort, and money into such antiquated mechanicals? For a few bucks more, and depending on my fortune for the day, with an equal amount of added labor I could throw a fully independent modern suspension under the truck-and in doing so gain disc brakes and nice, smooth rack-and-pinion steering, as well. It doesn't take long, though, to remind myself just why I'm sticking with a so-called prehistoric I-beam axle (with drum brakes, nonetheless) in the first place: because I vowed not to turn the Chevy into a contemporary concoction, but rather make the best of what I had. Sort of like an old Harley-Davidson, if you will. From the get-go, the job at hand seemed fairly straightforward and just as easy to accomplish. Well, as most things go for me, simplicity soon turned into a struggle. While everything I'd ordered from LMC was fine and dandy, it turned out that

With a set of good, used steering arms, I could now proceed with the remaining work that followed the suspension portion, the steering and brakes. To the best of my knowledge (which isn't always saying much!), replacement tie rod ends aren't available for AD Chevy trucks; besides, I'm not sure I'd want to keep those archai joints in use to begin with. All manufacturers today, including LMC, offer the updated tie rod end similar to what you'd find in a Ford, which means you also have to swap out tie rods to accommodate it. Same goes for the drag link, but if you're dealing with a modified setup (i.e. lowered) and want to adjust appropriately, you might have to get a little creative, which is just what I did. Typically, heating the steering arm on the spindle to correct drag-link geometry is the common way to go about it. Since I didn't have a torch at the ready, but did have a shorter pitman arm from a later Chevy truck (which was used with an adjustable drag link from CPP), I decided

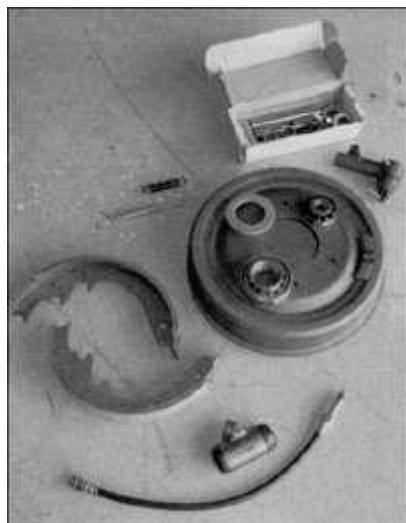
The extra effort isn't really all that much for me, but for those accustomed to the way their truck steers with the stock pitman arm, you may want to consider the previously mentioned method. As for the brakes, well, even if you've never done a complete drum rehab before, these relics are easy to rebuild. When it comes to replacing the drums, though, you will have to perform a little additional labor, as the stock ones are riveted to the hubs. If your drums still have a decent amount of meat left on 'em, just send them out for a quick turning before replacing the bearings and races. And speaking of which, since LMC offers the old-style caged wheel bearings, if you're in the market for a sealed Timken-type setup, try CPP for a conversion bearing kit. And with that, my non-IFS frontend venture was complete. While I'm not making any claims that my truck rides, handles, steers, or stops like it would had it been equipped with a Mustang II-type suspension, it does ride, handle, steer, and

many of the items it didn't offer (nor did anyone, else, really) needed replacing. As you Jay have noticed in last month's installment, the situation with the worn-out spindles was overcome thanks to Bowtie Bits well, it also came to the rescue when I realized that my steering arms had the pivot balls welded on at some point back in time, making removal nearly impossible without ruining the tapered ends.

to give that a try. While this indeed will level out the drag link, obviously a shorter pitman arm will have a somewhat ill effect on the driver in that the steering throw will be increased-more turns of the steering wheel lock-to-lock compared to the stock setup. Knowing this, I made sure I was comfortable with the added chore behind the wheel before moving forward (and turning!).

stop way better than it did beforehand. Plus I have a few extra bucks in my pocket left over to put toward rebuilding something else I could just as easily replace with something more expensive and modern!

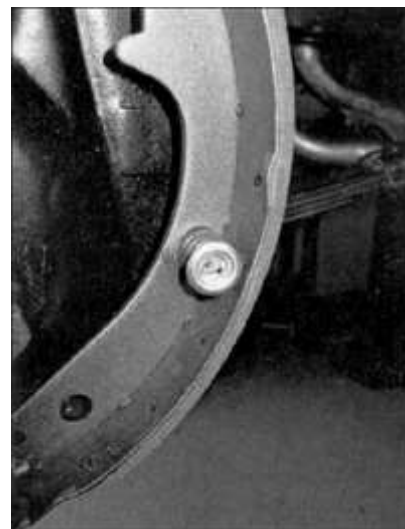
(Note: After putting a few miles on the truck with the new steering setup, I started to notice more of a difference with the shorter pitman arm. As such, I will be looking into "reducing" my added steering wheel rotation in the near future, most likely with heating the steering arm and or modifying the stock pitman arm.)



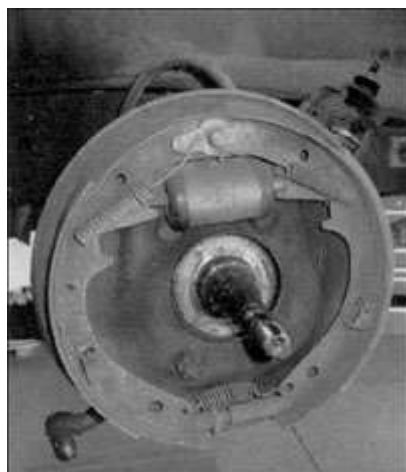
When parts shopping, it's nice when you can limit I your resources, and LMC is a great place to start. For the frontend rebuild, LMC had pretty much everything we needed in the way of the stock replacement parts.



Some people can R&R a drum brake with their eyes dosed, but for those of us who aren't quite as proficient, take note (even photographically if necessary) of where everything goes.



... they get replaced with the modern-style coil-spring retainers LMC supplies with its rebuild components.



The passenger-side brake didn't look all that bad, except for the fact that the secondary shoes were used both front and rear (the primary or forward shoe should have the shorter lining



While mentally inventorying all the various components, don't let the old



Screwdrivers and pliers might have sufficed in the past, but having a basic brake-repair toolkit at your disposal is strongly recommended. They're not that expensive, plus they greatly decrease the possibility of putting your eye out with a dislodged spring!

surface). At least everything was intact when the drum was removed.

horseshoe-type retainer clips throw you off...



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