Classic Performance Products 378 E Orangethorpe Ave., Placentia CA 92870

Classic Performance Products Installing Tapered Wheel Bearings

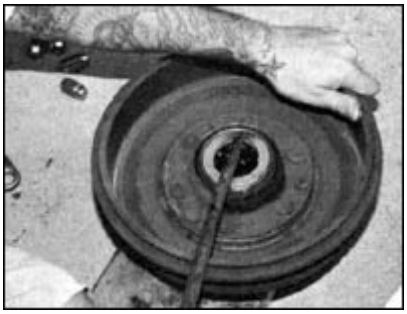
By Rob Fortier

I can remember the first time I disassembled the crank hub on my Schwinn Stingray for no apparent reason other than because I could and was introduced to caged ball bearings...or better yet, my garage floor quickly becoming acquainted with numerous bearings rolling in every direction! (I won't even get into the intricacies of the New Departure rear hubs!) From then on, I gave more respect to the reciprocating load-carrying devices each time I found myself dealing with them. My '55 Stepside brought back fond memories of my experimental youth, except this time around, I wanted to take advantage of a modem alternative-tapered roller bearings.

While ball bearings serve their purpose to effectively carry loads and prevent friction, they don't take as kindly to today's modem road conditions as tapered sealed bearings do. The newer style bearings can handle much more side load, which is very critical, especially with radial tires, and can deal with things like rain grooves, something that has proven detrimental to ball bearings. With this in mind, many companies have produced conversion kits to upgrade your front wheel bearings, and Classic Performance Products offers one of the most convenient upgrades out there.

Their newly designed kit consists of high-quality inner and outer roller bearings, races, and rear seals. And for well under $200, it's quite a deal for the benefits gained-better handling with longer wear life. After rebuilding everything else in the frontend (see CLASSIC TRUCKS August 2001), it was very apparent that the wheel bearings had lived out their lives on the '55. Follow along as I give new life to my reciprocating rollers and install CPP's tapered bearing conversion kit. You, too, may want to become a modem bearing convert!

The Classic Performance Products roller bearing conversion kit consists of both inner and outer roller bearings and races, as well as the rear dust/retainer seal. The axle nut and washer are also from CPP, while the synthetic grease is Red Line's CV-2 high-performance extreme pressure bearing grease-perfect for this job. (For more info on Red Line synthetic oils and lubricants, call 707-745-6100.)



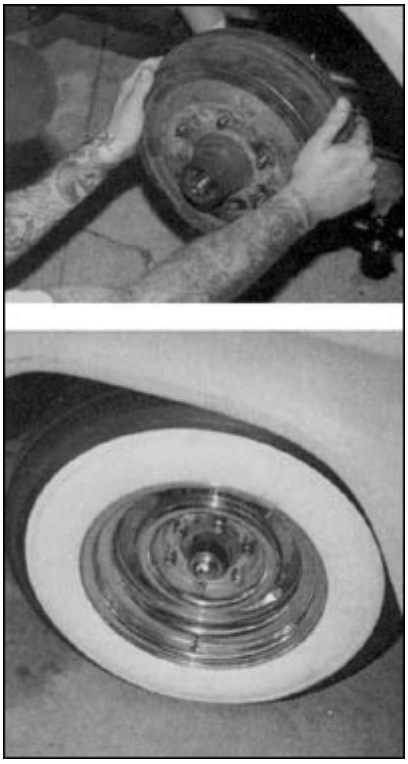
After the drum and hub are removed as one (at which time the front caged ball bearings and the inner race should fall loose), the rear retainer seal needs to be pried out. I found that removing the felt ring first allows the retainer to come out much easier.

A medium punch was used to (carefully) work the old races out. In this case, each race came out with ease; others may experience more difficulty removing them. Beneath the hub I placed a small piece of tubing with an inner diameter large enough to allow the race to come out without interference.

Once all the bearings and related parts were divorced from the hubs, I found that somewhere along the line someone had swapped certain bearings without changing the races, which could explain premature wear and excess slop. The outer left-side bearings actually had a plastic cage while all the others, varying in brands, were metal-caged.

Now the fun part, getting greasy! While II was offered the use of a grease-packing tool, I prefer the old-fashioned way and getting my hands dirty. Plus, the Red Line synthetic doesn't make as much of a mess, but a roll of paper towels was kept nearby nevertheless.

With the rear bearings all lubed up and packed with even more grease in the race, the rear retainer cover is carefully tapped in. CPP recommends using Loctite 640 "green" sleeve retainer to provide a secure adhesion of the seal.



The tapered bearings slid onto the spindle nice and snug like, which told me I was in for a better ride as soon as I tightened-up the axle nut, slipped a cotter pin in place, then knocked the dust cover on. I will admit that I did experience quite a vibration after the initial road test, but come to find out, all four of my "shiny" chrome wheels were badly bent. Needless to say, the stock wheels were dug up, painted, and put back into service. Now, I've got a smoother ride than I ever expected.

The job remained easy from here on out. The races were lined up in the hub, then started with a hammer by tapping around the perimeter until about halfway in. The old races were used to finish driving them into place.