

B-22 Fabricating a Replacement Dash Light Cover *By Bob Olbers*

AT SOME POINT in the distant past, the dash light retaining nut and metal cover from my Model 3 were lost. The original light socket itself is still present and functional.

My car still retains its original Masonite dashboard. Regular readers of this newsletter may know how reluctant I am to make new or larger holes in these “unobtainium” OEM parts, and since I couldn’t find a replacement panel lamp with a small enough base to fit the existing hole, I became determined to fix the original light installation. I was fortunate enough to discover an original retaining nut several years ago in a parts car at Midget Motors in Norwalk, but the cover itself still eluded me.

One day I was at my local big-box home improvement store’s plumbing aisle and I noticed some “3/4-inch” copper caps that are used to seal off copper plumbing lines. (Note that plumbing hardware is specified in terms of the inside diameter of the tubing, so after adding in the wall thickness, the outside diameter of the cap is about 1 inch.) I bought one of these, and was pleased to discover that it made a very nice press-on “interference” fit around the lamp nut.

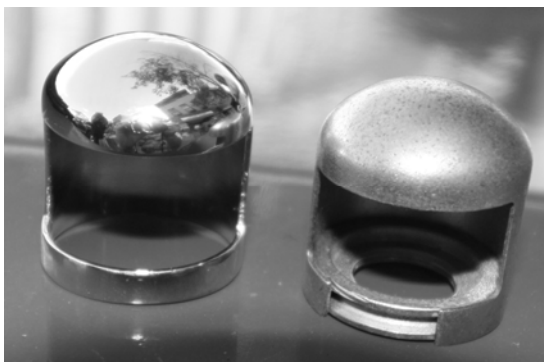
Thus encouraged, I called upon a machinist friend (every King Midget owner should have a machinist friend!) to cut a slot in the cap.



Next, I bought a doming punch set from Harbor Freight. This set contains a selection of punches with ball-shaped ends and a block with matching hemispherical cutouts. I used these to hammer the flat end of the cap into a rounded shape.

Once rough shaping was complete, I improvised a mandrel for my drill press with a bit of steel tubing, a spindle-sander drum, and some duct tape to get a good friction fit on the cap. Then I progressively smoothed the surface with sandpaper and abrasive pads, completing the job with a bit of Simichrome metal polish to get a quasi-mirror finish.

I used the cover like this for a few years, allowing it to mellow to a nice dark copper patina, before finally deciding to have it chromed this summer. I found a local shop that specializes in small jobs such as lamps and silverware. When the job was done, I brought the KM to pick it up and chatted with the husband-and-wife owners for a while before departing.



At the Jamboree, I borrowed an OEM cover from a fellow owner to take a comparison photo.

The real cap differs in a couple of details, such as an opening in the rim and a few small detents that mate with the groove in the retaining nut. None of the real covers I saw had a bright finish either, so I may have gone overboard with the chrome. On the other hand, I’m pleased with the result and can

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look at my smug reflection as I drive along.

A note: I used the ubiquitous “Nibco” brand caps for this cover. Recently Nibco has changed their smoothly rounded design to a pointier, sharp-edged one (I presume this requires less copper). While these can be formed into a dome, you’re probably better off if starting with a smooth cap. I did recently find some of these at my local Ace hardware store. ◻

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