

# HANDLING A BIG FISH

BETTER STOPPING AND STEERING  
IN A TYPICAL E-BODY

STORY TOMMY LEE BYRD

WHETHER YOU'RE RESTORING OR DRIVING AN OLD CAR, RUBBER DRY ROTS, BEARINGS WEAR OUT AND BALL JOINTS TAKE A BEATING ALL THEIR LIFE, SO THERE'S NO ESCAPING THIS ASPECT OF OLD CAR OWNERSHIP.

It will certainly improve your car's handling and general ride quality, and it can all be performed in your garage at home. Mopar relied heavily on torsion

bar front suspension in the muscle car era, so you'll be working with the same equipment, with most Mopar machines of the '60s and '70s. That doesn't

mean parts will interchange, but it's the same basic layout.

You'll need to find a source for restoration parts, which isn't

difficult with today's long list of aftermarket vendors. Rather than picking through the individual parts, it's usually easier to buy a complete rebuild, like Eric Layne, the owner of this '72 Barracuda did. He had Johnny Parton contact the folks at Master Power Brakes for a front suspension rebuild kit, and bought a disc brake conversion while he had them on the line. The brakes come with brand new spindles, and it's pre-assembled for super easy installation.

Parton also handled the installation of these parts, but it does require a few extra hands if you plan to remove the K-member. Parton went this route, as the K-member needed a few modifications to accommodate a Hemi engine. After bolting the modified K-member to the chassis, Parton spent a few hours installing piece after piece until the Barracuda was back on its wheels. Now that it's complete, the Hemi can be installed and Layne can start having fun with this '72 Barracuda, with added confidence, thanks to the fresh suspension and disc brakes.





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**1** Before the front suspension is disassembled, the engine bay is coated in degreaser and pressure-washed. It's always nice to have a clean surface to work on, rather than fighting with grease and decades of road grime. Disassembling the front suspension was an easy chore for Johnny Parton, as he's reworked a few Mopars over the years. With the K-member removed and everything out of the way, Parton can begin rebuilding each component. The loose undercoating can be scraped off and a wire brush will be used to clean the area as much as possible. It's a good time to apply fresh paint or undercoating to the area.

**2** When the Barracuda received its Lemon Twist paint job, the front portion of the chassis was treated to a few coats of black paint. Its regular black base coat, with two coats of clear, had a flattening agent mixed in for a semi-gloss look.

**3** All of the suspension components were sandblasted, including the K-member. The upper control arms are now fit with new ball joints, which are screw-in units. Parton spot-welded these into place just to be safe.

**4** The lower control arms are clean and ready for rebuilding. This is the most difficult part of the rebuild if the correct tools

aren't employed. The pivot shaft needs to be pressed out, as does the bushing and bushing shell.

**5** With the new parts installed, it's time to spend some time painting the pieces. Parton used semi-gloss black on the K-member and gunmetal on the control arms. Dupli-color Acrylic Enamel spray paint does the trick.

**6** After the lower control arm bushings are installed and the pivot shaft is pressed into place, the lower control arm can be mounted to the K-member. Parton installs the strut rod bushings and leaves the retaining nut loose for now.



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**7** Now is the time for a few helping hands. The K-member is heavy and awkward to hold, so it's a good idea to have someone on each side, while you get the bolts started. A jack can be used, but it's not quite as steady. With an impact wrench, Parton tightens all of the K-member bolts.



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You may want to use a long breaker bar to tighten the bolts if your air compressor at home isn't up to the task.

**8** The strut rod nuts can now be tightened,

so Parton used the impact wrench to take care of business in a quick manner. Attaching the torsion bar retaining nut was a team effort, but Parton tightened it and installed the cotter pin.



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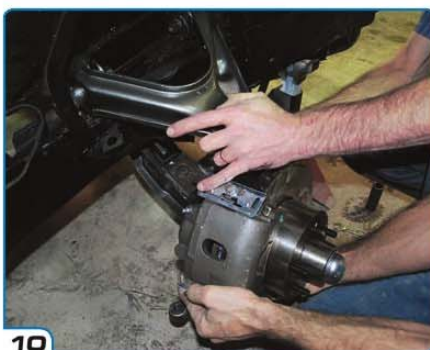
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**9** The Master Power Brake discs come pre-assembled with a new spindle, so installation is super simple. The kit comes with the calipers and brake pads already in place, so it's a matter of opening the box and bolting them up.

**10** After hanging the new spindle and brake assembly on the lower control arm, Parton slides the upper control arm into place. With help from his brother, Parton attaches the spindle to the upper control arm. The lower ball joint is in place right out

of the box, so he makes sure it's tight and installs the supplied cotter pin.

**11** The Master Power Brakes kit also comes with the rubber hoses, so Parton slides the clip onto the original tab, and attaches the hose to the hard lines. Then, he can tighten the fitting on the brake caliper to finish off the brakes. Parton can now install the shock absorbers and the sway bar. Parton puts the Barracuda on the lift to double check everything and make sure there's no interference. To get the car back on its feet,

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Layne chose a set of 15-inch rally wheels, which fit over the disc brakes perfectly.

**12** The front suspension is finished and it's great to see the car rolling on its new wheels. The new disc brakes and front suspension were all part of the car's restoration, and we're sure Layne is excited to go for a ride. **AE**