A while back we asked our customers for some ideas we could use for Tech Articles promising a free tee to anyone who gave us an idea that we used. Well, congratulations to Mike Swon of Darien, IL and William Mitchell of Swansea, MA for your ideas of an article covering tack strips and a headliner. In fact, the idea was so good we pitched it to Super Chevy for the magazine. They liked it so much they sent Calin Head over to the shop in California, shot photos of the install and published it. Our thanks to Calin for the lesson and to the Editors of Super Chevy for allowing us to reprint the article.

**Look Up and Be Proud**
*Step-by-Step instructions for all you DIY types on hanging a new headliner into a Bel Air By Calin Head * Photography by Author

One of the more common tech questions Danchuk Manufacturing gets is how to properly install a new headliner. While this task has usually been left to professional trim shops the hardcore DIY guys will still try it at home. About halfway through the job the tech lines blow up with questions about how to get all the wrinkles out.

Before this author worked here at the magazine I spent almost 10 years at a custom upholstery shop. My intent with this story is to show you the steps necessary to get your headliner install to look right. Hopefully I have broken it down into simple steps that won’t require any real expensive tools, like steamers. You will however, need a heat gun to relax the material, but if you don’t have one of these you could always use a hair dryer. You will also need a few screwdrivers, a couple clamps, scissors or razor blade, an awl, some sort of staple gun (air or manual), and if you are replacing the tack strip like we are a drill, 1/8” drill bit, pop rivet gun and pop rivets. One thing to note is the new headliner is sewn together with a polyester thread that will out last cotton threads used back in the day. We also picked up a pre-sewn set of sun visors, so we won’t need a sewing machine. For the installation we went straight to the Danchuk facility where I worked with Mike
Morgan. The Danchuk facility is definitely not an upholstery type shop so we were working in conditions most of you at home guys would be. The car has been completely stripped so we had to replace everything from the tack strip to the bows along with the headliner itself. If the vehicle you are working on still has a headliner in it then your job will be a bit easier. So lean back on your toolbox and read on and hopefully this story will help you get the results you want.

1.) The photo on the cover is everything needed to install a headliner into a ’56 Bel Air that has been stripped down to bare bones. The headliner has the proper perforation and color for the car, as do the visors. The long pieces of metal at the bottom are the bows and as you can see they are all different sizes. Not to worry they are marked so it’s pretty simple to find out where each one goes. Lastly are the black rolls of tack strip that fit into specific sized slots around the perimeter of the roof panel and give a place to affix the headliner material.

2.) The first step in the process will be to dry fit all the bows. Since they are numbered we knew where to put them, but there still is something to note. The mounting points for the bows have two mounting holes/positions. Since we don’t have any stock bows from the car we had to determine which hole, top or bottom would be the correct one.

3.) We recommend going with the top hole first to get the most headroom possible. What you want to look for is the following. Does the bow engage the notch at the top of the mounting tab, which keeps it from flopping front to back, and does it still look straight? If the bow looks distorted instead of having its natural shape you will have to drop down to the lower hole.

4.) There are two special bows in the ’56 headliner set, the middle and the front. The middle one is much thinner and is held in place by a bunch of sharp little tangs that are punched into the center support brace in the middle of the roof.

5.) The front one has these little brass grommets that go along with it. The grommets are a must as they keep the end of the bow from going too deep into the mounting point. The grommets are included in the bow kit.

6.) With the bows squared away we now needed to install the tack strip. The kit from Danchuk comes like this, all separately rolled and marked by length. We will be using the 4 rolled up sections for this job. The two short sets are used for the pinch welt that runs along the front edge of the rear interior panel. Just for clarification the 63’s go along the sides, the 60 goes along the rear window and the 50 is for the front.

7.) The two 63-inch pieces run above the side window opening. They fit into a channel and are held in place by these tabs.

8.) The front and rear window pieces were held on at the factory with heavy metal staples. Well, we don’t have that tool so we will be using pop rivets instead. Before we can install the new tack strip all the old staples need to be removed.

9.) Mike drills 1/8-inch holes about 3 inches apart.

10.) And then locks the tack strip down with large headed pop rivets as pictured on top of next page.
11.) Now that the car is ready to accept the new headliner the bows were taken from the car one by one and slipped into the listing of the headliner. The headliner we are using wasn’t marked front to rear so we had to kind of figure that out on our own. What we found was the front edge has the shorter section of material as opposed to the rear that had a much longer piece. Basically the front bow is much closer to the windshield than the rear bow is to the back glass.

12.) With all the bows carefully slipped in place the headliner was taken to the car. The center bow as mentioned earlier is held in by little metal tangs. The tangs pierce the listing and are then bent up holding it in place. Make sure to get the tang to pop through the very top of the listing as close to the bow as possible like you see here. Since the tangs prevent the headliner from being stretched side-to-side you will need to do it as you go. Punch the center ones through the listing then stretch the headliner to the side before sticking the next one through.

13.) Now you can install all the other bows. The listings will be a little longer than the bows so for now just bunch up the headliner to get the bows in.

14.) With all the bows in we use a few little clamps to hold the front and back edges up. What we have at this point is a very wrinkled headliner at the edges but the center should already start to look smooth.

15.) Now we need to carefully cut the listings back so the material can be pulled down. Get in there with your scissors and trim the listing just enough to let you stretch out the wrinkles. The bend in the bows is what creates the smooth arch on the sides of the headliner and the listing is what holds the headliner to the bow so trim a little at a time until its smooth. Trim too much and you will loose that nice arch and end up with a sharp angle.

16.) Once you have all the listings trimmed make a cut on each side of the sewn line. We will come back to this in a second.

17.) Now that the sides are somewhat smooth its time to apply a little heat with a heat gun or hair dryer to soften the material so you can put a good stretch on the headliner front to back. Use just a few staples to hold the material for now since you may have to come back and pull this more, but the idea is to get the center of the headliner nice and smooth from front to rear.

18.) Now we can finish off the sides. You want to pull on the seams like this till the sides look nice and smooth. If the sides are pulled just right, there will be no need to pull in between the seams. If you pull down on the center areas it will create a drooping between each seam. We like it smooth, but some like the slight drooping effect that pulling the center down provides, as long as there are no wrinkles either way will look good.

19.) Pop two staples right on the seam to hold the stretch and continue the process on the other bows.
20.) With all the bows now smoothed out turn to the front and rear window areas. If you stretched the headliner front to back enough then all you need to do is work out from the center towards the sides. If you have wrinkles that just won't work out you may need to pull the front to back a little more.

21.) When you get to the corners you will want to pull the material back and down as you pop staples in the tack strip.

22.) That should complete the pulling and stapling portion of the job. Now it's time install a few other parts. With a clean finger start pushing in on the material around where the dome light is. You will eventually locate the center hole and then see the three tangs that hold the dome light assembly in place.

23.) Now carefully cut an X in the headliner so you can fish out the wires. Also cut small holes so the tangs can protrude.

24.) Then plug in the light and slip it up into place. Use a set of pliers to put a slight twist on the tang locking the dome light in place.

25.) You can use the same poke, cut, and install procedure for the sun visors as well.

That's all there is to it!

If everything was done accordingly the headliner should look like this. There are still a few minor little wrinkles mainly from the headliner being folded up in a box. Those will relax over time. We hope this story gave you enough information to at least decide if this is a job for you. All we can say is make sure to use quality products like the ones from Danchuk, make any cuts a little at a time, and use the staples sparingly till the headliner is smooth, then come back and put in as many as you like.

ORDERING INTERIOR HEADLINERS *

Get 10% off any Interior Headliner order. If you don't have our catalog, call and we will ship one out to you to choose your color and application from the Interior section of our printed catalog. Or go to our website, www.danchuk.com, and click the “Interior Trim and Upholstery” listing in the menu on the left.

Interior Headliners are special order items that require 2-3 weeks for delivery. Headliners are shipped to you directly from our vendor, and may be subject to a restocking fee if returned. Returns accepted only if returned exactly as shipped. Please confirm application with Danchuk before placing order to avoid ordering incorrect item. 10% discount will be taken when placing order by phone. If placing an order on the website, the 10% discount will not be reflected at checkout, but will be invoiced with the correct price when we place your special order with the vendor. 10% discount valid on Interior Headliner order until July 20th.