



Disc-O-Tech

Our '55 Wagon Gets Rear Disc Brakes

By Kev Elliott | Photography by the Author

While converting from drums to disc brakes on the front of many older cars is a sensible upgrade, irrespective of performance gains, we opted to install discs on the rear of our project wagon too. Not only do we want the best braking we can get, especially when commuting in SoCal's stop-and-go traffic, and given that we'll finally admit we have a habit of late braking, but also because the wagon will be getting some use as a tow vehicle.

Classic Performance Products offers a kit to install their own rotors and Cadillac-style calipers with integral parking brake on the stock '55 rearend, as well as pre-bent brake lines. It really was a no-brainer, especially as we had already removed the axles to replace the bearings. The installation is pretty straightforward, though attention needs to be paid to adjust the parking brake.

This is a critical step with the Cadillac-style calipers, and in fact they will not work appropriately until the parking brake has been adjusted. If improperly adjusted, dragging or overheating brakes or premature pad wear can be expected. Regular use of the parking brake will compensate for pad wear and stop extended travel of the brake pedal. So if you have these calipers on your car, and are experiencing any of these symptoms, adjust your parking brake!

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• Classic Performance Products
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1. We'd already installed new bearings on our axles, ensuring to place the bearing retainer on first. With a new gasket and longer bolts (supplied), this bearing shim was placed over the bolts.



2. The axles were now installed in the housing. Note we'd also replaced the wheel studs while the axles were out.



3. A spacer and the caliper bracket could now be installed, and nuts installed on the 3/8-inch bolts passing through the retainer, shim, housing flange, spacer, and bracket.



4. The rotors were now installed on the axles.



5. The calipers were mounted, with the bleed screw toward the top.



6. With the caliper mounting bolts tightened, the axles were checked to ensure they rotated freely.



7. This kit is designed to fit inside 15-inch or larger wheels. Should you be installing it on a '55-'70 Chevy rearend in another application, it requires 7-1/2 inches minimum distance from the wheel flange to the car's frame.



8. These calipers have the provision for a parking brake, which we'll hook up to the stock linkage.



9. The brake hoses are supplied, and were installed now, but not tightened until their inboard ends are mounted to the housing. Ensure nothing can touch the hose through full suspension travel.



10. As mentioned in the text, parking brake adjustment is critical for these calipers to operate. We verified it required adjustment by checking the amount of slack. Prior to installing the cable, the lever was moved by hand in the direction of actuation, toward the front of the vehicle. More than 1/8 inch of play means adjustment is required.



11. The nut, lever, seal, and nylon washer were removed from the parking brake adjusting screw on the caliper. As a point of reference, the lowest tip of the adjuster hex nut was marked onto the caliper body. Using a 9/16 wrench with the nut reinstated, the shaft was adjusted in and out (moving the shaft opposite the direction it travels during operation) until the lever was clocked snug against the caliper stop—continually checking the mark on the caliper to gauge where the shaft is being set, as it's a blind adjustment.



12. With the lever set with minimal travel (less than 1/8 inch and with a tight feel), the lever was bolted back on.



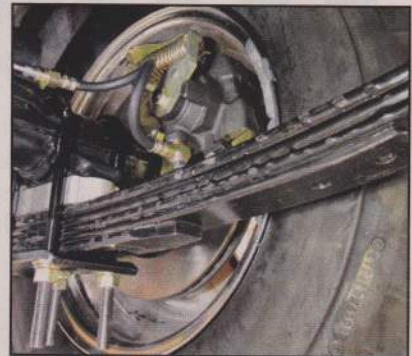
13. The parking brake cables could now be installed, with the spring and clips.



14. The new cable loops around the stock Chevy adjuster, the front portion of the parking brake assembly remaining stock. The parking brake tension could now be tested from inside the wagon.



15. Our wagon also received new brake lines throughout. Once they were mounted, and the hose tabs secured to the axle, all brake fittings were tightened.



16. The finished assembly, snug inside our Wheel Vintiques chrome five-spokes. We'll trim the U-bolts once we're happy with the ride height, as it may need taller lowering blocks.