

# MODERN TIMES

A STACK OF FRESH BRAKING, STEERING, AND SUSPENSION PARTS BRINGS THIS '57 CHEVY INTO THE 21ST CENTURY



**Making our old Chevys** ride and drive more like their modern cousins is a staple of this hobby, and one of the most popular areas to tackle is the suspension and brakes. Why? Simple, because a car with vague steering, mushy handling, and sketchy brakes is zero fun to drive. Let's be honest, even when new, our now classic Chevy didn't handle or stop very well. Add in decades of wear and the bad situation is even worse.

A good example of this would be Tri-Five Chevys such as the 1957 Bel Air. They weren't built for handling. They were built to get you from point A to point B in style and, by 1950's standards, comfort. They're as different from modern cars as a Model T is from them. Thankfully, they are also one of the most popular classic Chevys on the planet so there's a host of aftermarket parts available to get them up to 21st century driving standards. One option involves a full-replacement chassis and stacks of cash, while others are bolt-on simple and wallet friendly. Either way you go will get you better road manners. This time around

we wanted to dive into the simplistic goodness of bolt-on upgrades. To keep things extra budget friendly, we even resisted the siren call of double-, triple-, or even quadruple-adjustable shocks for non-adjustable gas-filled tubes of shock goodness that cost about the same as a decent steak dinner.

With all that in mind, we headed over to CPP with a 1957 project car that was in need of some suspension, steering, and brake system updating. So, follow-along as we stuff some of today's tech into a classic from yesteryear.



**1** No shocker here, just old parts. In this case, the '57 had front disc brakes, but the removal procedure is the same for drums.

**2** And that procedure was to remove it all, including the steering and control arms. The coil spring is under some tension so we used a spring compressor to keep everything, and everyone, safe.

**3** Here you can see the new CPP tubular upper control arm next to the stock stamped steel upper. Yeah, they look better, but more importantly, these new TIG-welded tubular control arms are considerably stronger than what GM put in the '57 over 50 years ago. The arms are made from 1.25-inch 0.120 wall DOM tubing and have thick 1.5-inch 0.188 wall pivot barrels. This ensures the pivots stay true even under stress. They come preassembled on new billet chromoly 4130 cross-shafts and pivot sleeves. These sleeves capture both sides of the bushing, unlike the stockers that are only retained on one side. As a result they're much stronger and resist flexion better. As a safety measure, they incorporate an interlocking shaft and sleeve design so that the bolts can't work loose over time. The fact that they came with new, pre-installed ball joints saved us time.

**4** Like the upper arms, the lowers are TIG-welded 1.5-inch DOM tubing around a central plate that supports the coil spring and lower shock mount. They came fully assembled with self-lubricating (no squeak) Duraleen bushings and Moog ball joints. In terms of geometry, these also add 5 degrees of caster while providing full wheel travel. For extra strength they incorporate 4140 alloy cross-shafts and sleeves.

**5** First up was dropping in the new Grade 8 hardware that will hold the lower control arms in place.

**6** The upper arm was put in place using the new hardware provided. In our case, the header had to be unbolted and slid out of the way. The driver-side lower arm was then slid on and secured with four Grade 8 nuts and lock washers.

**7** The front brake kit (PN 5557SWBK-D12-UG) came with almost everything needed to give our Tri-Five 12-inch disc brakes along with dropped spindles. The kit was pre-assembled and had 12-inch one-piece vented rotors, big-piston callipers, bearings, seals, dust caps, spindle nuts, hardware, and even brake hoses.

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The spindles in our kit provided a full 2 inches of drop without changing the car's steering geometry. This kit also works with most 15-inch and larger custom wheels.

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No need for fancy coilovers on this ride, but that did mean we needed to break out the spring compressor again to get the new CPP spring (PN FCS638-S) into place.

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We used a pole jack to hold the lower control arm in place until we could install the CPP spindle and lock it to both arms with the supplied castle nuts.

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Next was sliding in the new nitrogen gas shock (PN CPP-1001). At only \$39 per shock, this is a pretty wallet friendly way to go. For a few bucks extra they do have upgrade options if you want adjustability.

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Included with the drop spindle brake kit were these slotted, drilled, and zinc-washed 12-inch rotors. For less coin they offer plain, solid rotors, but these will keep looking great for a long time.

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The calipers in the drop spindle brake kit were these big-piston pieces. They are offered in several colors but we chose the understated black. The best part is that they use easy-to-find, off-the-shelf GM brake pads and rebuild parts.

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The key to getting "new car" steering is having the right steering box, so we chose CPP's 500 Series power steering conversion gearbox (PN CP50000-2). The 14:1-ratio unit was a direct replacement and lined up perfectly to the column without the need for any shims. The bolt-on aluminum cap allows for zero movement and, best of all, won't leak.

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The stock steering parts were pretty beat down so we ordered up new parts from CPP including Moog outer tie-rod ends (PN ES234RL), inner tie-rod ends (PN ES577-M), and aluminum tie-rod sleeves (PN ES577SP-AB), along with a new centerlink, idler, and power steering pitman arm.

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CPP offers quite a few choices when it comes to steering columns, including standard, tilt, and a slew of finishes from chrome to basic black. We went with a tilt column in black (PN TC-57-FB) and added the tilt column adapter harness (PN CP20117). Later we will run their leather-rim steering wheel (6794LSW) to top the whole deal off.



**17**  
To help our '57 handle better we added a front sway bar kit (PN CPP594), which included a 1-inch solid sway bar and the required bushings and mounting hardware. As an upgrade, we decided to try out their new aluminum sway bar mounting blocks (PN FBM25-25B).

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Our Chevy didn't have a factory sway bar so we needed to drill some holes for the bushing mounts. After installing the bar and bushings we marked the frame for the new holes.

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We then drilled out the holes big enough so we could get the supplied U-bolts through the frame.

**20**  
And here's the new front suspension, steering, and brakes with everything bolted up and ready to rock.

**21**  
The '57 had traction bars when it showed up but they were lower than the bottom edge of the rear wheels. CPP thought it was a bit unsafe so they fabbed up some replacements. Last we heard, these Trac Bars will be added to their catalog.

**22**  
The rear disc brake kit (PN CP2105-38-5434) came ready to work with our Currie 9-inch housing and included rotors, calipers, caliper brackets, rubber hose kit, and mounting hardware. To the base kit we added drilled, slotted, zinc-washed rotors (PN ARGX-8121L/R) and braided stainless brake lines (PN +RBH-S10). First up was installing the outer support for the rear caliper bracket.