Model A Ford Closed Car Roof Installation

Introduction
I always attempt to stay close to Ford's original nomenclature. To clarify any confusion we are talking about what is often referred to as the ***top***. Ford referred to the overhead as a ***roof*** on any and all models with roll-up side windows. Roadsters, Phaetons, and Open Cabs were the only models that utilized a ***top***.

A Tudor was selected for the roof installation because it is the most difficult to install due to the compound curves. It also serves as a good example since most if not all the techniques and principles apply to the simpler seamless roof covers.

It is strongly recommended this be made a summer project if at all possible. The aid of direct sun to heat the artificial leather during installation will make all the difference for the novice and and save incredible energy and effort for anyone. The project shown in the following pages had to be done during cloudy 50° California days and required considerable energy and determination.

Using tacks will be one inconvenience to the novice. Staples simply aren't appropriate here. Try to find or borrow a tack hammer. You should be able to find one for under $15. Using any other type of hammer will prove to be difficult. When installing tacks, "pin tack" or set them in about 1/3. NEVER drive them all the way down until all tacks are in final position and no further adjustments are required. Use a good punch for the final third when near sheet metal to avoid chipping paint. In most cases you will be tacking through elongated holes in the body into wood. Inspect the wood behind all these areas. Bad wood or open spots in new wood seem to always be in a crucial tacking area. When tacking through the elongated holes I nearly always place the tack near the right end of the hole so I know there is access to the left of most tacks when installing mouldings or hidem. It saves a lot of time not having to probe for access to wood.

A small bead of sealer can and probably should be used between the cover and body at least on horizontal areas. The header area and rear corners are the most susceptible to leakage. Original mouldings reduce the risk of leaks considerably. This sealer is applied below the roof cover as it is tacked by working an area of

about 6-8 inches at a time. Don't use more than necessary as excess sealer may squeeze out from under and make a mess that may be impossible to clean off the exposed painted areas. I have no recommended sealers at this time. I do however prefer to stay away from silicon sealants.

Follow the arrows at the bottom of the page and subsequent pages to follow the project step by step or choose individual segments from the table below.

Roof Cover Installation - Tudor Sedan	
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Page 3 - More Preparation	Foundation, padding, and cover
Page 4 - Final Preparation	Padding and Protection
Page 5 - Beginning the Cover	We start tacking
Page 6 - Tacking In Stages	More stretching and tacking
Page 7 - Completing the Tacking	Still more stretching and tacking!
Page 8 - The Final Stages	Trimming the roof cover
Page 9 - Finally Finished!	A quick look at the finished project
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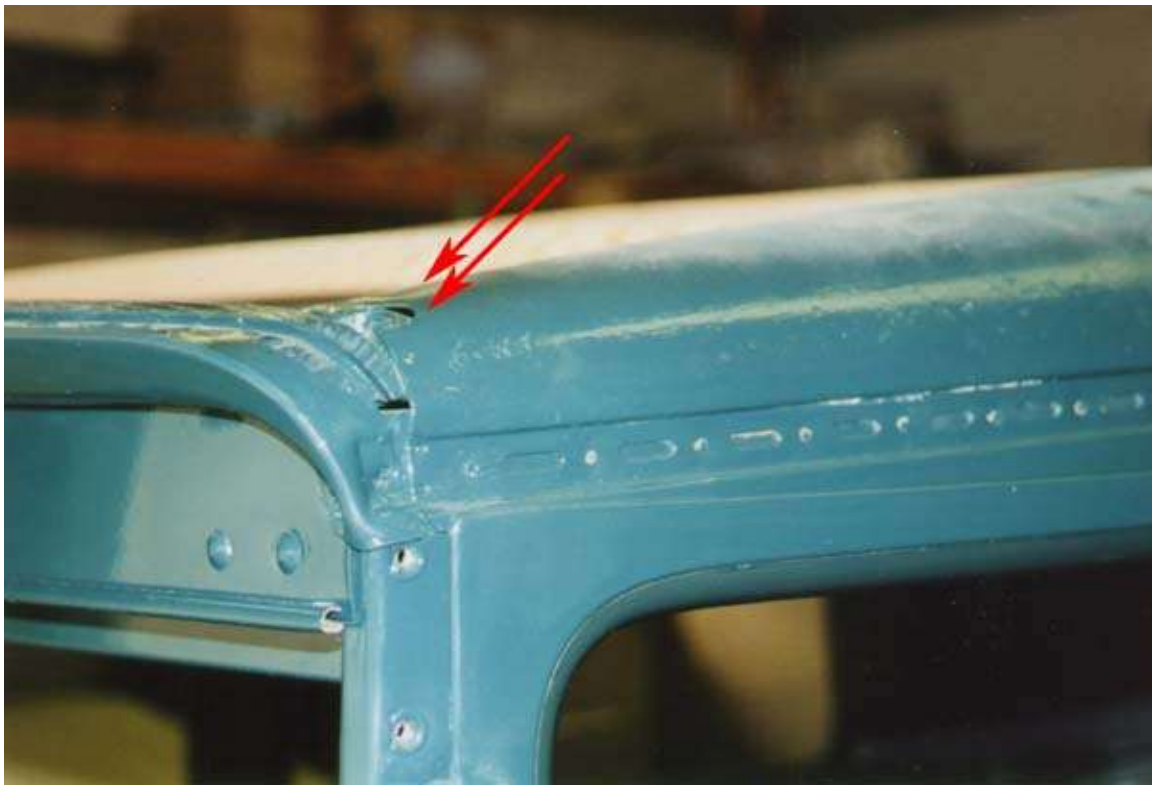
Model A Ford Closed Car Roof Installation - Page Two

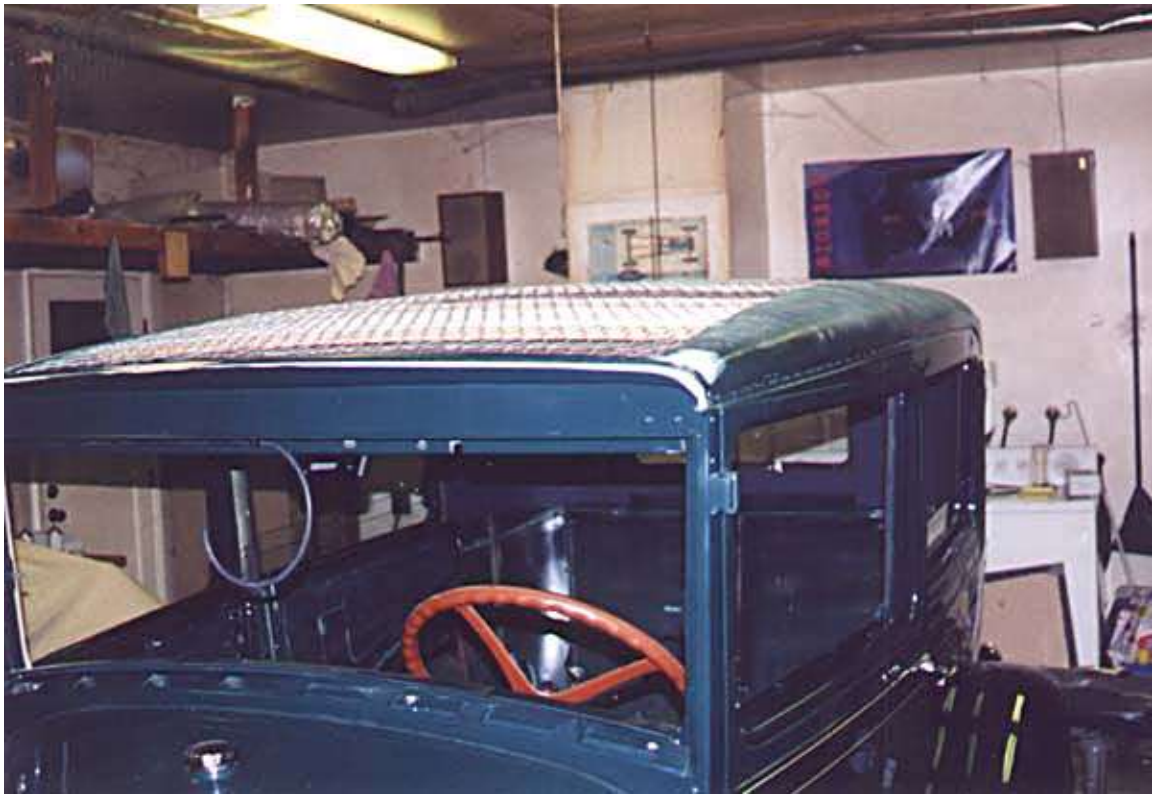


Installing A cover over small dents, ridges, etc., is much like painting over bad body work. It will show! Originally the roof panel over the doors fit smoothly within a recess cut into the header wood. A small dent is shown by the upper arrow and should be filled. A special plug was installed in the hole shown by the lower arrow to bring it up flush. If these were overlooked prior to painting, the the surface can be lightly scuffed with #80 grit paper (for adhesion) and an application of polyester filler can be used to smooth it out. Also pay close attention to the joint in the roof panel over the rear of the door. This is a common problem area.

This photo shows the correction done to the area mentioned above. It was simply roughed to final shape with #80 grit paper

This is your last chance to correct any problem with the roof ribs. View carefully from both front and rear of the car. The ribs should match the curvature of both the header and rear roof panel. An arch too tall will give an awkward ballooned look to the center of the roof which is not uncommon among restored cars.

Check the ribs from front to rear across their centers. A firm but somewhat flexible strap such as a yardstick laid flat can help identify any high ribs that will show later. It's not unusual for the center rib inserted into the steel support to be too thick and therefore higher than the rest. Correct it or it will show!



The light strip across the top of the header panel is a strip of GOOD masking tape. This helps provide minor protection of the paint as well as a better surface for marks such as the required center mark for the roof cover alignment.

The 1" poultry wire shown was used on Fordors and Victorias, but not used on a number of Coupes and Tudors. I strongly recommend the use of poultry wire for a foundation or the location of the ribs will show through. Not shown is the anti-squeak strips attached to each rib prior to the poultry wire. A variety of materials were used including a thin paper backed cork. Strips of most any fabric will do the job. It will also be helpful if your top wood is the usual 1/8"+ below the level of the perimeter metal to allow the installed poultry wire to be very slightly below that surface.

The poultry wire is first pulled tight front to back, working outward from center. Next, the wire is drawn tight side to side starting at center and working in both directions and alternating from right to left sides. The wire should be stapled every 2-3".

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We placed a layer of light cotton duck fabric over the poultry wire. This is optional but further improves the foundation. It also allows a better opportunity to see any high spots or bends in the poultry wire. Push lightly on the high spots and the wire will level nicely.

For the padding we use cotton wadding. The width of the wadding available today isn't wide enough to cover the roof opening. The solution is to cut two lengths slightly longer than the width of the opening. The mating edges are then trimmed very neatly so the pieces can be butted with no overlaps, openings, or lumps. If the edges of the strips are neat and true enough this can be skipped.

Some people choose to use foam rubber for the padding. Although easier, I don't

recommend it. It's nearly impossible to achieve the quality appearance and it will tend to degrade with time.

When installing the roof cover, any more than about 5" extra on each end tends to get in the way. Measure the roof front to back at the tack holes VERY carefully. Allow 10" extra on the cover material and cut off any excess.

Fold the covering in half lengthwise and mark the center at each end. A china marker is ideal. Avoid using ink from writing pens anywhere near a car!

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The cotton wadding is positioned over the opening and carefully smoothed out. The seam or split between the sections of wadding is placed BETWEEN two roof ribs. This reduces the likelihood of the seam ever showing through the covering.

After the wadding is laid out and smoothed, the excess is carefully trimmed. On models such as Tudors and '28-29 Coupes the sides and rear are trimmed up to 3/16" from the edge of the metal roof. The front on all models and sides and rear of other models have a raised bead or ridge that bridges the roof covering. The wadding is cut up to 3/16" behind these ridges so it doesn't pull over the top of these ridges and cause lumps in the covering.

Please note the tape and paper paint protection. Also note the centerline mark for locating the roof covering.

The last and possibly most important bit of preparation! A couple loose wraps of thin tape allowing the fingers to bend somewhat will save those knuckles!

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With the roof cover still folded in half, carefully place it in position with the fold near the center marks on the body. Care must be taken to not shift or otherwise disturb the cotton wadding. Roll the other half over and double check your center marks. Adjust if required, again being careful of the wadding.

Pin tack either front or rear with 3-4 tacks at center (see "Using tacks..."). Fewer number of tacks may pull out or rip through the cover when performing the initial stretch. Stretch and tack similarly on the opposite end. Pull just enough to see the pull marks down the center. If the weather is cool and without sun this will take a little pulling. If you are working under summer sun you will want to pull easily and carefully.