Another CJ picture guide to

replacing the key cylinder in a non-tilt steering column

by John Strenk

Well I'm sure it's happened to all of us one time or another. You park your jeep and go to turn off your engine only to find that your keys are not in the ignition anymore. If your lucky enough to have a CJ in good shape, the keys are probably laying under your foot. If not it's probably on the road somewhere behind you. In my case it was buried in a 4' pile of snow when they fell through a rusted section of the floor during plowing.

Also you may find you can start the jeep without the key. This is not a very effective way to prevent your jeep from being stolen or having your little kid start the jeep with it in gear. Can be very dangerous.

So you decide to replace your key cylinder and go to the catalog to order a new one. First thing you find out is that there are two different cylinders mentioned. Hopefully they mention a year or maybe they don't and then your in a little trouble. They made a little change around 1984.

You see there are two ways to ways AMC held the lock cylinder in place, With a clip or a screw.
Notice the slot in the top cylinder for a screw. These are usually found on steering columns with plastic housings. We will cover the difference a little later on in the article. But some plastic housing I've seen also has just the clip. I can't figure out any external way to determine which one you might have. But at least 84 and later have the screw type. If you have a metal housing, you can be pretty sure you have the clip style.

Well so much about buying the correct lock cylinder. Lets get on to pulling stuff apart.

As you might suspect, there area couple of special tools you need.

A Steering wheel puller, I made my own.
And a lock ring compressor tool.

You can get these at just about any Auto Part store and they are very inexpensive. And will save you tons of time.

First remove the horn button.
Just get your fingers under the lip of the button and pull up on one side. If you haven't disconnected your battery the horn will remind you quickly. Nothing you could damage but just play it safe and remove the battery cable.

Now get a 13/16” Socket and loosen and remove the nut.
If you have an impact wrench this step is pretty easy. If not just lock the steering wheel by putting the lock in the Lock position. Then get a breaker bar and while holding the wheel firmly, loosen and remove the nut and washer.

Now you can remove the swivel plate that holds the button on.
Note the position it is in and remove the 3 screws. Remove the swivel and insulators

Now remove the horn contact spring.
Now your left with the bare steering wheel mount.
Now attach your steering wheel puller:
And remove the steering wheel.

Yeah!!!

Now we are down to the Lock Plate. This is to lock your steering wheel into position to prevent someone stealing your jeep.
This one still has it's plastic cover in place. Notice the that one of the splines on the steering shaft is missing. This is important a little later in assembly.

Attach the lock plate press by screwing the center section onto the steering shaft.
Then tighten the press by the little nut on top until the snap ring is visible.
The tricky part.

Insert a screw driver under one end of the snap ring and pry it out.
Then with another screw driver, pry it up.
Now you can remove the snap ring all the way and remove the lock ring.

Now remove the horn ring.
Note it's position also. Important to install it the same way.

Remove that spring that was causing you all the problem with the lock plate
Remove the one screw holding in the turn signal arm.
And remove the hazard button by turning the knob counter clockwise
Remove the 3 screws from the turn signal switch.
If you have enough slack you should be able to move the turn signal switch over the steering shaft. Remove the harness plug on the column mount if you have any problems to give you a little more slack.
Now your finally down to were you can get to the little hidden clips to remove the lock cylinder.

There are two places to look for that will help you remove the cylinder. In the square area below, you can see the little clip you have to push down on to remove the cylinder. On some columns I have found there is some flashing left over the square opening that you will have to break through to get the cylinder out. Some later columns have a screw in the location designated with the circle.
If there is a screw were the the yellow CIRCLE is located then simply remove this screw and put the key in the ON position and remove the lock cylinder. If you lost your key, pull hard. It will come out. Sometimes a screw driver under the tangs will help.
This screw goes through the slot in the key cylinder like this:
If there is not a screw in the yellow circle, then insert a screw driver into the slot by the yellow SQUARE and push down on the little clip you see in there.
Put the key in the ON position and pull out on the lock. A little screw driver also helps.

Check inside to make sure the rack and pinion gear are OK.
Clean it all out with WD-40 or something.

Then insert the new lock cylinder into place until it snaps or if you have the screw hold down then replace the screw. Check the action of the new cylinder to make sure it moves the rack and pinion smoothly.

OK Now it goes back together.

Put the turn signal switch back into position and tighten the 3 screws. There is not much to worry about as it can only go into place one way. It helps to have the Turn Signal in the Right turn position to get access to the top screw.
Don't forget to put the turn signal lever back in.
Put the lock plate spring back in if you took it out.
This will be a good time to screw the hazard button back into place. Check to make sure it pushes in and pulls out freely.
Now put in the horn contact plate. Be sure to put it in the correct position or you can break the tower off the contact when your trying to figure out why nothing goes back together correctly.
It's position will depend upon the position of the steering shaft but just look at the splines on the shaft and look for the spline that is missing as you can see in the picture above. You will need to know this when you reinstall the lock plate in the next step also.

there is a slot on the top of the lock plate that the horn contact passes through AND it is splined in a certain way that one spline is missing so be sure to install it this way.
Now put the snap ring back on and pushed down a little.
Now attach the lock ring compression tool again.
Turn the nut on the compression tool until the snap ring groove is exposed. And push the snap ring into position.
Go get a drink and come back for putting on the steering wheel.

When you put the steering wheel on there are alignment marks on the shaft and the wheel. There is also a hole in the wheel were the horn contact tower passes through. There is a little adjustment in the horn button tower but it should pass through the hole in the steering wheel when the wheel is aligned with the steering shaft.
Put the wheel on paying attention to the alignment marks and horn contact post. You can push it down quite a bit but you will have to tighten the nut down later to be sure it's fully seated.

Now put the horn spring contact plate into position. It's not flat so be sure the high part in the center is up. If not, your horn will sound off randomly as you go over bumps. Align it so you can put the screw and horn ring insulators through the holes freely.
Now put the 3 screws through the plastic isolators and put it inside the horn ring.
Now put the horn ring into position over the steering wheel. Make sure the notch in the ring aligns with the alignment marks on the wheel. This is to put the horn button on correctly.
Put the nut on washer on and tight to 20-30 ft-lbs. Don't go too tight. I've seen the threaded part get stretched out of shape on the steering shaft.

Now put the button on making sure it's also aligned correctly.
Now connect the battery. Make sure the turn signals work and cancel when you turn the wheel. Check the horn to see if it works and pull the hazard switch out to be sure it works also.

Check the key cylinder to make sure it operates correctly.

Now your done and you can stop worrying about losing the keys or having someone start your jeep without being around.