



GET A BETTER READOUT

If your '70-'72 Chevelle's stock gauges aren't giving you the best info and looking tired, Classic instruments has the solution to your problems.

◆By Patrick Hill | Photos by the author

A'70 SS396 Chevelle. That's all you gotta say to think muscle car sportiness, brawn, and attention grabbing. On the outside it's all that in bulging cowl hood, rounded curves, quad headlights, and a tail that just says "suck my exhaust!" But on the inside, Chevy left a little too much option room, especially when it came to the gauges. A bench seat, column shift SS isn't a bad thing, so we're not knocking that aspect of low option. But when the only readouts you've got are a fuel gauge and speedo, with only the red flash of idiot lights to tell you something's amiss, a stock, bare bones Chevelle cluster can leave you wanting for more.

To offer '70-'72 Chevelle owners a quick and easy way to upgrade their clusters with a full compliment of readouts, Classic Instruments came out with their '70-'72 Chevelle/Monte Carlo gauge cluster, available in five different face styles. The cluster fits the stock Chevelle/Monte dash, and features three main gauge pods, one for mile per hour, one for RPM, and the

other with four min gauges that monitor fuel, oil pressure, engine temp, and volts. The cluster is fully electronic, and can be paired with Classic Instruments Sky-Drive GPS Speedometer kit, which eliminates the need for a transmission mounted pulse generator, and operates the speedometer off a GPS signal updated 10 times every second.

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Our subject Chevelle featured that bare minimum for an SS when it came to gauges, with only a fuel and speedo in the middle, and idiot lights for any of the peripherals. Besides making for a rather boring thing to look at, while cruising there was no way to know what was going on with the engine until it might be too late. Plus, we were tired of looking at the cheap parts store tach and accessory gauge trio a previous owner had thrown in. Wanting a little more than stock readouts, and not caring about the clock's absence, we decided to go with the Classic Instruments cluster that featured green lettering/numerals on a black face, to better go with our stock interior. Follow along as we show you how easy it is to install the kit.★



1. This was our starting point. Even though the car is an automatic, the lack of a factory tach is still a bit depressing, along with no oil pressure or temp gauge to give warning for trouble under the hood before it turns catastrophic.



2. Typical of most muscle cars lacking factory accessory gauges, the previous owner added these white face el cheapo ones along with a budget parts store tach on the steering column installed with a big hose clamp.



3. The first order of business is removing the dashpad. Just a few screws hold it in.



4. Next up, the steering column cover plate has to come off.



5. With the coverplate out of the way, we cut the wires to the tach and pitched it in the trash.



6. To give us more room to work, we removed the steering wheel before lowering the column out of the way. Sometimes you'll get lucky like we did and the wheel will pull right off the splines. If not, you'll need a dedicated steering wheel puller, available for rent at most local parts stores.



7. With the column lowered we unbolted the dash from the firewall, pulled it far enough out to disconnect all the related wiring, then took it all the way out.



8. You don't necessarily have to pull the whole dash assembly for swapping in the Classic Instruments gauges, but ours was looking pretty worn and tired, so we decided to swap it out for one of Ground Up Restorations new carriers, part no. IJ-70VC. Instead of silver painted plastic bezels, the Ground Up carrier features chrome plating on all the plastic, correct grain and accenting on the black surfaces, and side air vent assemblies pre-installed.



9. The original gauge cluster comes right out after removing a few screws.



10. The Classic Instruments unit doesn't come with the plastic lens face, and we forgot to order one (part no. IJ-902) from Gorund Up along with our dash carrier. The original was in good shape, so we decided to reuse it. To get it off, the plastic rivets holding it on were carefully ground down to free it from the gauge assembly.



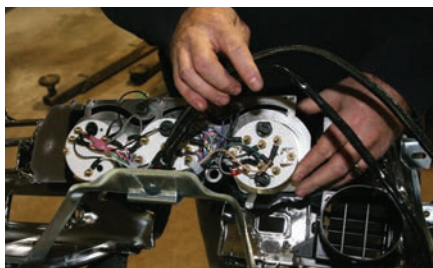
11. Before installing the lens on the new gauges, we made sure it was spotless and free of any dust or fingerprints.



12. The headlight switch is attached to the gauge cluster, and usually needs a special socket to remove its retaining nut. Sometimes you can get away with using a nickel for this.



13. Here are the old and new together. Instead of just two gauges and a trio of idiot lights, the Classic Instruments panel gives us six gauges. Before installing the cluster lens, make sure the gauge faces are completely clean of any packing dust or debris.



14. The Classic Instruments unit is a plug and play affair, no wiring necessary. The speedometer is set to a standard calibration from the factory, and adjusted after you drive the car to verify accuracy. If you go with the Sky-Drive unit, you won't even have to do that.



15. When you're reinstalling the headlight switch, take care not to overtighten the retaining nut. It's plastic and will break if you gorilla tighten it.

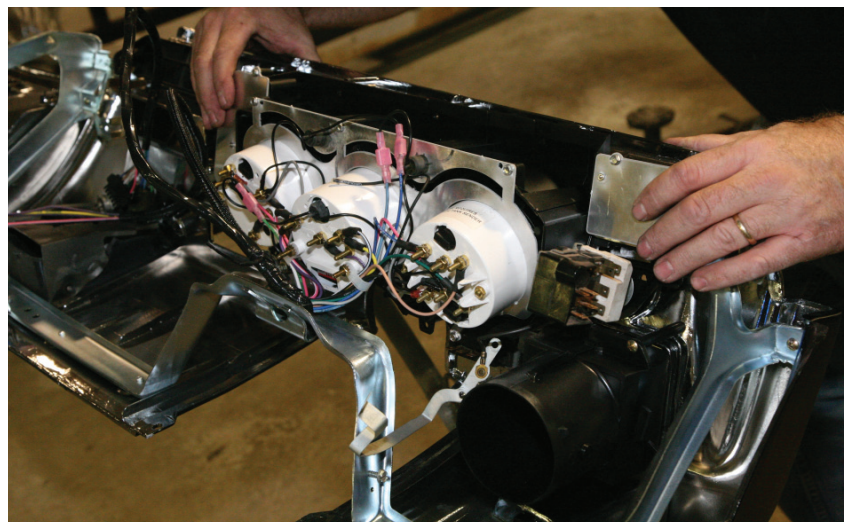
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16. After the cluster was installed, we transferred the rest of the switches and pieces from the old dash carrier, like the wiper switch and air controls. Since our '70 is a non-A/C car, this was easy.



17. We reused our lighter and ashtray assemblies, but if yours are dingy and not up to snuff, Ground Up offers them too, part nos. ICA-70 and ICG-70.



18. The Classic Instrument's cluster slips right in the factory holes, and secures using the same bolts and locations as the original cluster. It's prewired for neatness and reliability, so installation is a breeze.



19-20. To wire the Classic Instruments unit into the car, you start by cutting the factory plug off the wiring harness, then using the supplied connectors and wiring guide crimp on a new plug compatible with the cluster.



21. With everything wired and plugged in, we set the dash carrier back in place, connected the air ducts, and bolted it to the firewall.



22-23. With the work inside done, we turned to the outside. Included in the kit are new oil and temp sending units optimized for the new gauges, and an electronic pulse generator that plugs into the transmission (speedo cable port) that operates the speedometer.



24. After everything was buttoned up, we turned the key, and our new gauges sprang to life. After verifying that the temp, oil, and volt gauges were reading properly, we went out for a test drive with a chase car to check the speedometer's accuracy. The factory setting was spot on, so no calibration was needed. The new gauges look great, and seeing multiple readouts on the 396's vitals is much more comforting, and entertaining.