

Headliner How-To

Contributed By: Costas Papayanopoulos

I recently re-upholstered the headliners of my '87 GW (no sunroof). Since this is a common problem and it comes up frequently as a topic in the group, I decided to write a note on the subject.

I would appreciate any comments/corrections and I plan to edit and re-issue this as a possible how-to on the IFSJA site: **editor's note ' TOO LATE! (grin)**

GW HEADLINING REUPHOLSTERY - -----

GW headliners are upholstered with a foam- backed fabric which tends to sag after a few years. The problem is in the foam which deteriorates and separates from the fabric. With nothing to support it, the fabric starts to form what looks like "bubbles" which gradually spread.

There is no reasonable repair for this common problem other than to replace the fabric. Depending on how you go about doing this, the job may cost anywhere from about \$50 to \$300 and up.

The GW headliner consists of two pieces. If one starts sagging it's a good bet the the other will follow shortly. So it is a good idea to re-upholster both pieces even if only one has a problem.

Before you start, try to determine the condition of the headliner itself. This is the board on which the fabric and foam are attached. It sometimes gets badly warped because of roof leaks and may need to be replaced. It is made of a cardboard-and-plastic material that is probably hard to find. This material seems to have just the right amount of stiffness so that it conforms to the shape of the roof without sagging.

REMOVING THE HEADLINERS - -----

Start by removing the headliners:

Start by removing the two small plastic trim pieces at either end of the rear metal trim strip nearest the tailgate.

Remove the screws that hold the metal trim in place and remove the trim.

Remove the cargo light lense by twisting it. Remove the cargo light screws. Push the light through the opening in the headliner. Remove the metal screw clips from the headliner.

Remove and disconnect the cargo light switch.

Remove the coat-hanger hooks.

Carefully pry the the center plastic trim off.

Carefully push the headliner downward and then unhook it from the side "J" moldings one side at a time. Remove it through the tailgate opening.

If you are repairing both headliners, remove the screws that attach the visors, unplug the electrical connector from the right visor and remove the visors.

Remove cabin lens and screws, unplug and remove the light.

Remove the front metal trim piece and the plastic corner trim pieces at its ends.

Finally, remove the front headliner the same way you removed the one in the rear.

INSPECTING THE CONDITION OF THE HEADLINERS AND ROOF -

You can now check several things:

Is there evidence of serious roof leaks? There could be leaks through the hardware used for attaching the roof rack. This is the time to fix them.

Along the roof there are several cross-members ("bows"). These should be tight against the roof. Loose bows can cause roof noise and they should be adjusted as described below.

You can now inspect the headliners. Are they severely warped or otherwise damaged?

If they are, you'll need to either make replacements or to purchase brand-new headliners (with fabric attached).

DECIDING HOW TO REPAIR THE HEADLINERS

Depending on your budget and the type of damage, you now have several choices:

If the headliner(s) are severely warped or otherwise unusable, you can either purchase new ones from Jeep (the local dealer quoted \$240 for both pieces) or you can try to build them from any material that has similar properties to the original. (I do not have recommendations here. Others have suggested masonite, plastic or wood paneling but in my opinion these materials would not work very well. Keep in mind that the headliners are subjected to humidity and temperature extremes).

If the headliners are OK you can re-upholster them yourself or you can have them done at an auto re-upholstery shop.

For a first-class job you can have the re-upholstery shop also re-cover the visors.

TOOLS, MATERIALS AND COSTS

A re-upholstery shop in the New York area charged \$150 for re-upholstering both headliners and the visors. The headliners were \$50 each and the visors \$25 each. The work was excellent and the GW roof now looks like new.

Having the shop do the entire job including removing and replacing the headliners would have cost \$250.

If you want to do the re-upholstering yourself you'll need the following:

Two pieces of foam-backed fabric. These are \$30 each from Pep Boys. This should be more than enough for both the headliners and the visors. There are other materials you may be able to use but the foam-backed fabric is the best.

One or more cans of high-temperature spray adhesive. The 3M company makes a good adhesive which is about \$9 per can at Home Depot.

You'll also need:

An assortment of screwdrivers.

A torx tool, if the bows need adjustment.

A 2-3 inch wide spatula for removing the old foam.

Spray primer and topcoat for painting the metal trim, if needed.

REPAIRS - -----

If you are making new headliner boards, you can use the old ones as patterns.

Carefully trace the outline and openings of each board. Try these out before you apply the fabric to make sure they fit.

If you are re-using the old ones, you have to first remove the old deteriorated foam backing and adhesive. One way to do this is to use an 2-3 inch wide spatula with a stiff blade. Remove both adhesive and foam with slow and firm strokes.

Once you get the hang of it, you should be able to remove everything in a single pass with the spatula. Even so, be prepared to spend quite some time in this step.

Follow the manufacturer's directions for gluing the fabric to the boards.

The visors can be covered in a similar way. If you have access to a sewing machine that can handle the job, you should sew the edges about 1/4 inch from the edge or you may be able to do it by hand.

To adjust the roof bows, loosen the torx screws, insert a screwdriver through the hole in the bow and push the bow up against the roof. screwdrived

INSTALLATION - -----

Re-installation is simple:

Position the front headliner and install one side in the "J" molding.

Install the dome light.

Gently pull down at the center of the headliner and insert the other side in the "J" molding.

Make sure the front edge of the headliner is correctly positioned.

Install the rear headliner making sure that its rear edge is correctly positioned.

Install the center trim and coat hooks.

Install the visors.

Install the front and rear trim pieces and end caps.