

Replacing Side Bumper Strips

*Edward F. Sowell
1976 XJ-S
August 10, 2005*

Background

The original XJ-S did not have a protective bumper strip along the sides and was therefore subject to door dings. These dings are very and hard to repair because of the ridge. After my wife did it to our 1976 XJ-S in our garage (the day after it returned from the paint shop), I had them installed at a local body shop. They consist of aluminum channel riveted to the body and vinyl insert strip. The inserts come in various colors.

After installing mine I noticed many other XJ-Ses with the same product. Since they are not listed in the parts book dealers must have begun installing them some point. Some people on the XJ-S Lover mail list have removed them, thinking they destroy the beauty of the car. I happen to like them, so when they eventually became dull from weathering and various waxes and polishes I decided to replace the vinyl inserts that fit in the aluminum channel attached to the car. It turned out to be an extremely easy project with a satisfying result.

Finding New Material

Finding the new vinyl insert material will probably be your biggest challenge. I got mine on www.eBay.com, where they used to come up from time to time. However, searching for them there can be difficult because they are called different things by different people. Mine were advertised as “Exterior Vinyl Door Trim,” but later searches using that phrase produced nothing. If necessary, just search on “XJS” in eBay Motors. There will be page after page of hits, but it won’t take long to sort through the hits and see if any happen to be listed. Or, go right to a retail source:

<http://www.customautotrim.com/products/moldings/rivet.htm>. Unfortunately, their color selection is very limited. (If anyone finds a better source, please let me know!)

When you find what you like, buy enough to have some left over just in case you make a mistake or have to replace a section later.

Removal

Remove the old strip by grabbing near one end between thumb and forefinger and pulling. Fingernails help. See Figure 1. If you've bitten yours to the quick worrying about more weighty matters such as an overheating engine, you may need to use pliers to get enough grip.

Use a toothbrush to clean the channel, Figure 2.



Figure 1 Removing vinyl insert



Figure 2 Cleaning channel.

Installation

First, cut a clean, square end at one end of the roll of new vinyl insert material. A utility knife with new blade is called for here. Uncoil and straighten somewhat more than you will need for the section you are replacing, but **do not cut try to cut it to length now.**

The lips of the insert must be pressed into the channel. Start at one end of the channel. While pressing the cut end up against the channel end cap, turn the upper edge of the cut end *towards* you so you can catch its lower lip in the lower lip of the channel, Figure 3. Then press really hard on the top edge with your thumb. The upper edge will then snap into place for about an inch.



Figure 3 Installing the vinyl insert

Now, hold the remainder of the new insert material in one hand and twist its upper edge *towards* you, while at the same time using the other hand to press another increment of the upper edge into the channel. Keep working along in this manner until you get within about six inches of the right end of the channel.

Now you have to cut it to length. The temptation is to just eyeball it and whack it off but you will get a better result by first marking it and then cutting. You also have to be careful not to nick your paint. Hold the vinyl insert up to the channel and make a shallow cut where it will fit against the end cap. Then, put a thin piece of wood, e.g., a shim or paint stirring stick, under the vinyl insert to provide a firm base for finishing the cut, Figure 4. Be sure to cut it square. Keep in mind you can always trim a little off if too long, but if cut too short you have wasted a sizeable length of new rubber.



Figure 4 Finishing cut

To finish up use the same twist and push technique to press the remainder of the vinyl insert into the channel. Repeat for other sections.

This is really easy once you get the hang of it. However, it's hard on your thumbs so you might want to spread the job out a bit to give them a rest.

Results

In Figure 5 you can see the bright new inserts side by side with the old grungy ones.



Figure 5 Old versus new.