

**H**igh-steer arms, crossover steering, heavy-duty steering pumps and hydraulic assist reservoirs are all nice additions to steering, but what about everything above the steering box? It doesn't matter how much beef you've added to your steering system if you can't properly get input into the steering box. Off-roaders don't often think about improving the steering equipment they're closest to in the vehicle, which is kind of funny, really—you'd think the stuff that was staring you in the face would be the first to get the attention.

Well, after wearing out our second rebuilt steering column and have some unnamed company's steering shaft collapse and come off the steering box while off-roading, we decided it was time for some serious upgrades above the box. It was easy to figure out who to call—there is only one company we know of that offers everything we needed to replace. Flaming River had the steering shaft, steering column, adapters, wiring harnesses, and steering wheel that we were able to install straight into our Chevy truck with no fabrication needed. We can't guarantee they'll have a direct fit kit for every vehicle, but they have a multitude of various joints and adapters to allow you to put a high-quality custom job in your ride. **OR**



## SECURE YOUR STEERING GEAR

### High Quality Components Above the Box

BY JERROD JONES | PHOTOGRAPHY: JERROD JONES



**1** We started our install by laying out all of our new Flaming River pieces so we knew what we were replacing and what we were keeping, as this directly affected how delicately we were going to rip everything out of this '73-'87 Chevy.

Once we realized that Flaming River had provided us with absolutely everything needed above the steering box, it took us about two minutes to remove the old stuff.



**2** We ordered a black powdercoated 30-inch-long, 2-inch-diameter tilt steering column to replace our existing one. We could have got a polished stainless steel column, but we thought that might look a little too fancy in our old Chevy. We got the floor-shift style column since we had installed a B&M floor shifter some time ago and did not need a lever on the column, but we made sure to get a column with the ignition tumbler on the side since we did not have an ignition switch in the dash.

The column was a bit shorter than our original column, but that made no difference since we were adding a new steering shaft as well.



**3** The connections were the same on the original GM column and the new Flaming River column (only rotated 180 degrees), so there was no need to cut wires and use adapters to get the signals and ignition to work.



**4** Flaming River gave a universal position column adapter to allow us to place the new steering column at any height we desired in the dash and firewall. We actually ended up moving the steering wheel a little closer to the driver's seat since the seating position has been pushed back farther from the dash.

The adapter holds onto the column with allen set screws.



**5** Even with our column hanging further into the cab, there was still more than enough of the column to grab onto and tighten down at the firewall. Our column has a "DD" output. GM vehicles (and most other vehicles, for that matter) use either a splined shaft or the DD shaft.



**6** To cut the correct length steering shaft, we place the Billet-Joints on the steering box and the steering column and measured the length. This measurement does not have to be exact down to the millimeter because Flaming River uses a slip shaft for trucks.

When ordering the Billet-Joints, make sure to know the correct spline or DD diameter on the column and steering box. Ours was a 3/4-inch spline coming out of the steering box, but we originally ordered a 13/16-inch spline joint that we had to swap out.



**7** Flaming River's GM DD slip shaft comes in either 30- or 38-inch lengths. The slip part is covered by the protective collapsible boot, and there is a grease fitting to keep things moving smoothly. Yes, frames are not supposed to flex very much, but trust us, they do, and the smooth slip shaft feature is great for preventing the shaft from pulling off the steering box when collapsed and elongated during frame-twisting off-road situations.



**8** Once we had the desired length measured for our set up (this should be the last step by the way—make sure to get everything else tightened down in place before making this measurement and cut), Dennis Gregory at Xtreme Unlimited in Oceano, California, made the cut on the DD shaft.



**9** The Billet-Joints have allen set screws to hold the steering shaft to the column and steering box. It's recommended that you use a drill to make a dimple in the DD shaft where the allen screw goes.

The nuts on each allen screw should be tightened after the allen screws are threaded in to prevent the allen screw from loosening and backing out.



**10** We also got the satin aluminum steering column dress-up kit that comes with a new tilt lever, signal lever, and hazard lights button. It gives an extra bit of appeal to the new column kit.

## Securing Your Steering Gear



**11** We hated to even set this steering wheel on the ground to shoot this image, because we can't imagine messing up such a nice wheel. The 13.8-inch diameter Cascade wheel has a flowing spoke design and is wrapped in black Italian leather. The ergonomic grip at the "ten" and "two" positions make it nice to hold onto.



**12** Gregory tightened the Cascade wheel onto our 6-bolt polished, tapered wheel adapter, and then reinstalled the horn button into the middle of the wheel.



**13** The new steering column came with a new ignition tumbler, so Flaming River obviously provided keys. They also provided one of the coolest little key chains we've seen. The shifter on the key chain steering column actually moves too!



**14** Now that we put in such a nice steering setup, we've feel guilty not cleaning up the rest of the truck, so we've decided to put some time into this old Chevy 4x4 that we own. Maybe you'll see a story on it in the future... stay tuned.



In the meantime, we're having a ton of fun driving the truck around with the new steering stuff. The tilt column makes it a ton easier to get out of the suspension seats in this truck, and the smaller diameter steering wheel makes the truck a bit more fun to drive.

### Sources

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