Shaved Door Handles

Introduction:

In keeping with the "custom rod" theme of my car, I wanted to further smooth off the body lines by eliminating the outside door handles. 90% of the time, my car is parked with the windows down. So it's nothing to just reach in and open the door from the inside. It's the other 10% of the time when the car is parked unattended, that I need to be able to completely close it up and then get back into it without the outside door handles.

The following information is by no means a step-by-step manual of what it takes to perform this modification. Rather it is more of an overview of what is involved, with a more detailed description of what I did.

There are many kits available from vendors such as www.summitracing.com , www.ballsrodandkustom.com , and www.stylinconcepts.com . Or, you can simply make your own kit. At the very least you'll need two 15lb electronic solenoids, two weatherproof pushbuttons, two standard Radio Shack four-prong relays, two door poppers and enough wire and hardware to complete the job.

Here's What I Did:

I went with a kit from Summit made by VPA Corporation. (P/N VIA-81160 DP). $159.95. If you go to www.summitracing.com and under the keyword search type in "shaved door handles." You will see listings of several kits available. Unfortunately none of them show up as links so I can't post them here. I chose this system because it works remotely from supplied key ring remotes. Plus, the kit includes the door poppers. I'll talk more about door poppers later.

I did not want to hide mechanical buttons outside the car that could be found by the wrong person. This kit will also control up to ten functions, which is actually overkill. But it can be expanded later on for items like a power trunk, power windows, etc., all operated remotely. If all you want to trigger are the doors, you could go with (P/N VIA-80158DP).

The instructions are very clear and offer many different wiring diagrams for the relays based on various items that you might want to include in the system later on. Plus, their troubleshooting tips are excellent. I truly speak from experience here.

Installation:

In order to install the solenoids, you'll need to get inside the door so the door panel needs to come off. Next, you'll disconnect and remove the outside door handle and door lock. Pay strict attention to the direction that the rods operate inside the door to open the latch when the outside door handle is still operable. This will determine how you need to mount the solenoid. Also notice the orientation of the rods that operate the outside and inside door locks. Once these are removed, you will want to secure the lever on the inside of the door latch so that it remains in the unlocked position. There is nothing worse than having a "locked" door and absolutely no way to unlock it since the hardware no longer exists. You will want to leave the inside door handle pull rod connected to the latch.

It was determined that the solenoid for my '68 was to be mounted in such a way that it will pull the latch lever up. So, the solenoid was mounted pointing down using the supplied adjustable mounting bracket.

But, I drilled two holes in the trailing edge of the door about two-and-a-half inches from the top. They are just above and to the inside of the factory rubber bumper in the doorjamb.

With the supplied short cable, I connected the solenoid to the door latch lever.

These solenoids are externally grounded and I grounded the (-) wire to the door itself. I ran the (+) wire down and away from the path of the window and followed the path of the factory wiring harness (mine is an XR-7) the rest of the way into the interior and under the dash.

Repeat for the other side.

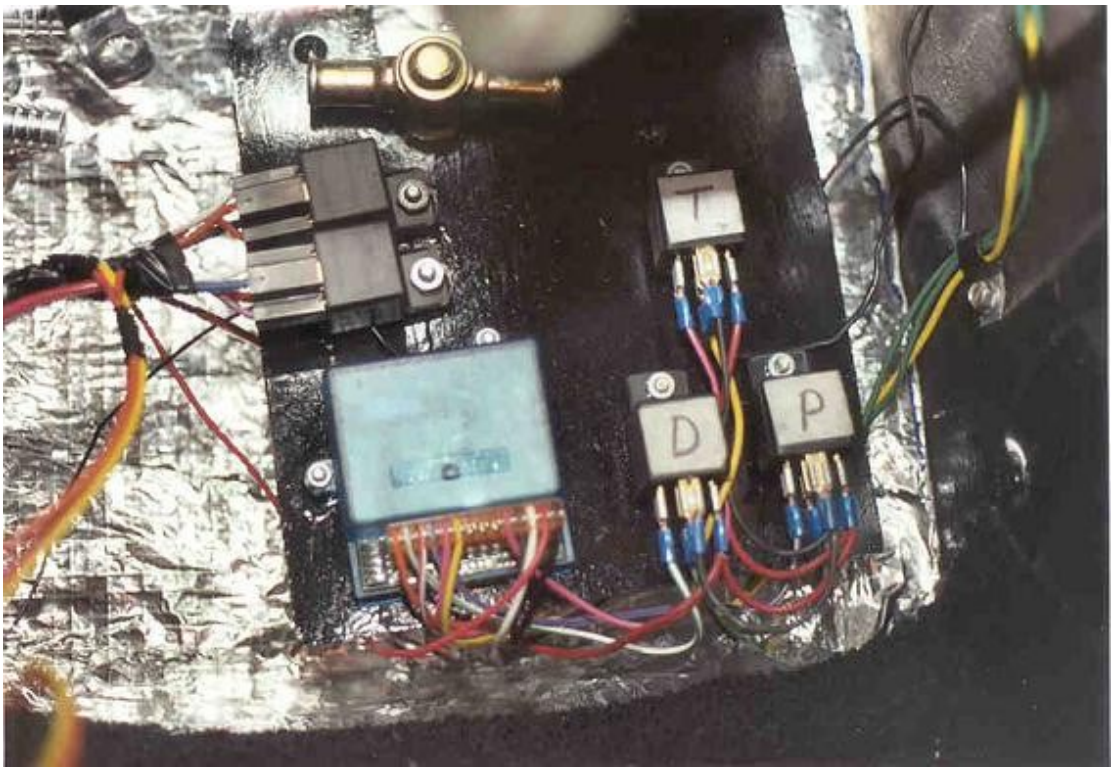
The door poppers are stainless steel spring-loaded devices that will push the door open past the safety catch on the door latch. Without them, you will have to trigger each door twice each time you want to open it. Early cougars are pretty limited as to a place to mount the poppers. I mounted mine low but where there was the most metal in the doorjamb. My dad mounts his to push the front hinge of the door open in his GM cars since their door hinges are a different design.

Given the design of the Cougar door, the popper was not long enough to reach the edge of the door. I molded in a small block of metal into the doorjamb to cure that problem.

This set-up pops the door to open about 12 inches when the solenoid is triggered. So far I have used the remotes from about 20 feet away but I think they'll operate from even farther.

Repeat for other side.

My remote control system uses what I call a “brain box” to trigger functions. In addition to this, you’ll have a relay for each function you are triggering. All of these relays need to be mounted. (In my case, two doors and a trunk.) I made up this panel that I mounted up under the dashboard to contain all of this equipment. Here is where you might need to get creative in mounting depending on your application.



The “brain box” is the blue box on the lower left. It decides which relay to trigger based on the number pushed on the remote control. I followed the wiring diagram supplied with the kit. But, basically you will want to wire the relays so that they operate from a constant battery source. This way they will operate from outside the car without the key on. The “brain box” also has a small antenna wire, which needs to be placed so that it does not come in contact with any metal.

Some Things To Consider:

As is the case with most modifications like this one, you will want to have a back up plan in place in the event the system fails. If your battery goes dead, the system will not work. Since I can open my hood from the outside and jumpstart the car, I am not that concerned with battery failure. GM owners with interior hood release cables will sometimes run remote battery jumpers outside the car as a backup. You could also do this if your battery is in the trunk and you also shaved the trunk lock. Quick connect jumpers like the drag racers use would work well in these cases.

You could also run mechanical buttons hidden outside the car someplace like underneath in a wheel well. These could be your main entry into the car or as a backup for the remote control system, assuming the battery is still charged. I have heard of some people who have had trouble with the remote control system when ambient interference (like power lines or radio station towers are present) caused the system to stop working. I do not have hidden buttons and choose to keep my back-up plan to myself for obvious reasons.

The kits available are universal and usually require a little backyard ingenuity to work for each application. This also means that you would most likely be able to adapt these kits to operate however you feel you would like them to.

Conclusion:

I hope that my descriptions of these procedures made sense and give you a good idea of what's involved before you might consider undertaking this modification. I feel it made a big difference in the appearance of my car and it is definitely a big conversation piece at shows when people notice that the door handles are gone.

However you decide to finish the bodywork that now needs to be done is entirely up to you. I have had people say that they would like to keep the outside door handles in place and operational. That won't work because the rods that connect the outside handles to the inner latch will conflict with the operation of the solenoids. Besides, why would you want to go through all this work just to keep the outside door handles on?

Have Fun!!