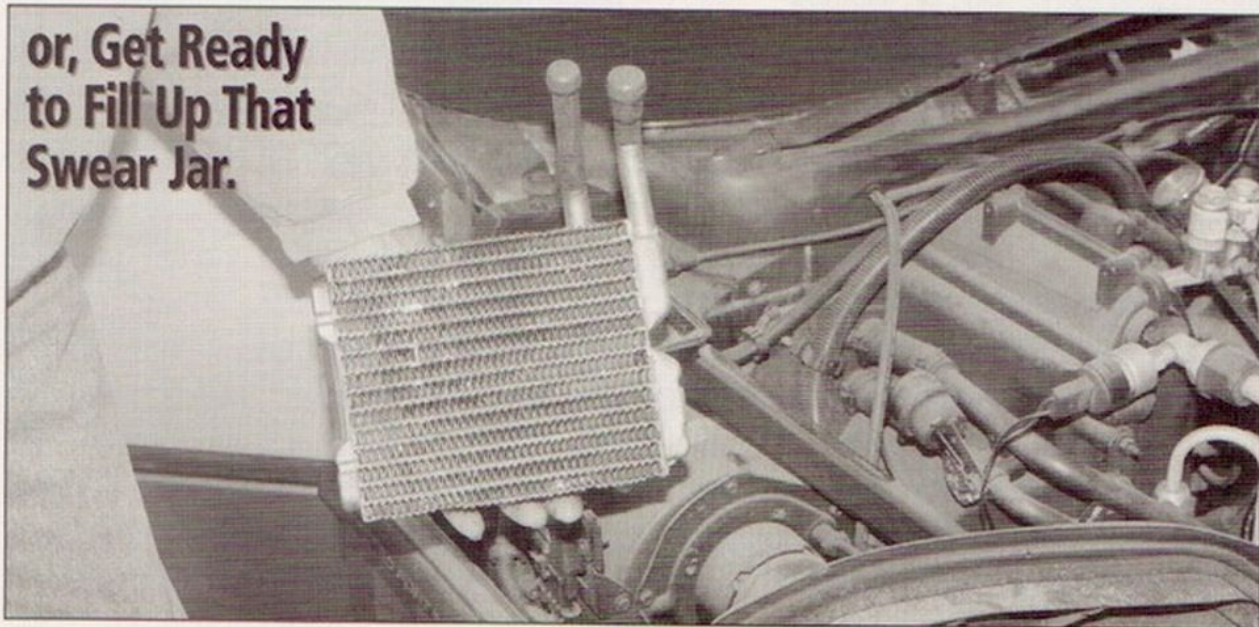


# Something You Shouldn't Try At Home

or, Get Ready  
to Fill Up That  
Swear Jar.



By PJ Rentle

Photography by Terry Cole and the author

When I was a kid, my father and I restored an automobile together. The car was going to be for me, and my dad wanted me to have something I could take pride in. At the time, I wasn't very experienced, so if something stumped me, my dad bailed me out. There were times when I would sit for hours and watch him fix what I muffed up. That meant watching things get taken apart. Sometimes the parts were bent and scratched, and I didn't necessarily want to know about it. Other times, I would go in the house and go to bed. In the morning, everything would be put back together. As I got older and more experienced, things changed. If I got stuck, I had to work it out for myself. That meant that I would do the taking apart, the bending, and the scratching—all of which added to my frustration. Sure, my dad would still help me, but if I quit to go to bed, so would he.

I learned two things from that experience. The first one is that there's nothing on a car that can't be fixed, as long as you're willing to do the work and deal with the frustration, and have the proper tools. The second is that sometimes the best way to avoid the frustration that goes



along with the work is to shell out some hard-earned bucks and have an experienced technician to do it for you.

Which brings us to the subject of this article. We

Before you do anything you must, of course, disconnect the battery.

had an '85 Corvette with a leaky heater core. (Editor's note: No, not PJ's infamous "Blubonic Plague." The "Plague" is an '84, and about the only thing that doesn't leak is the heater core.) No problem, right? A quick flip through our GM Service Manual led us to believe it was an easy fix; they only dedicated a page to the entire procedure. This will be a piece of cake, we thought. Actually, we knew that it wouldn't be a walk in the park, because we were going to have to remove a ton of stuff to get to the core. But it couldn't be that hard!

Six hours later, we have pulled the entire dash and everything behind it on this pristine, low-mileage '85, deposited about \$400 bucks in the ol' Swear Jar, and still hadn't gotten the core out. Unfortunately, this is the case for '84-89 Corvettes. In 1990, The General revised the dash and firewall so that the heater core comes out through the engine compartment, which is considerably easier—and a lot less frustrating!

We're going to show you some of the ups and downs involved and why you should think seriously about leaving this job to the pros. The biggest problem in working on a car like the Corvette is that it's cumbersome. There's absolutely no room to get your hand and a wrench in the same place, at the same time. If you can, you'll find there's no room for leverage. No, it's not an impossible job, but it will take more patience and skill than even the more experienced at-home mechanics have. If you need a heater core in your '84-89 Vette, take my advice and drive it to the nearest dealership, do not pass go, do not collect your \$200—better yet, take the \$200 and give it (along with a few bills more—it's a six-hour job at most shops) to the technician. You'll be much happier for it. 🛠️



## Corvette C4 Heater Core Removal

### SOMETHING YOU SHOULDN'T TRY AT HOME



The instrument cluster is the first item to come out. Be sure the tilt lever is removed first.



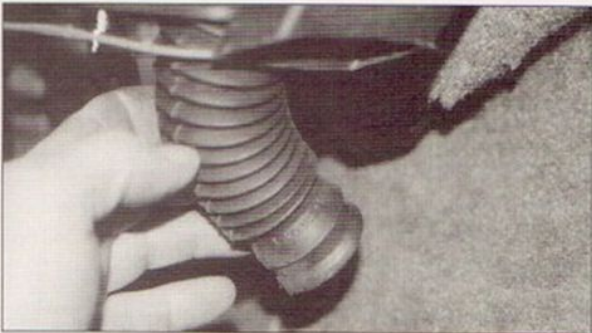
Next, the dashpad is made ready for removal. There are five screws under the leading edge, and two in the defroster vent at the base of the windshield.



Now the lower carpeted panel needs to come out.



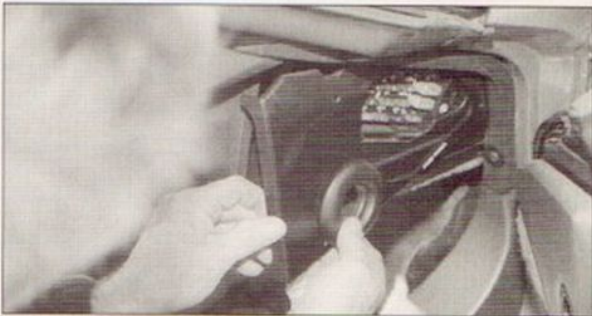
To remove the dashpad, grab it at the defroster vent and pull back. If you love your Corvette, this is going to be a really hard step for you because it'll feel like the dashpad is going to break before it snaps free. The manual didn't tell us how to remove the pad, but thankfully we figured it out before we destroyed it by trying to pull it up.



With the lower portion of the dash removed, we now have easy access to remove the driver's side defroster ducts. The manual told us that we needed to remove this piece, but didn't tell us exactly where it was, or what it looked like.



After a good firm pull, the dashpad was out. Getting to this point required about three hours of frustration and trying to decipher the GM manual (we never really found out what a "Hush Panel" is), and about \$93 in the "Swear Jar."



Moving to the passenger side, we found that the carpeted panel cannot be removed the same way the driver's side was, so we needed to gain access from the top. We began by removing the trim panel for the fuse box. Right about now, we're thinking that we should abandon this project — but hey, we're troopers, right?



The next item slated for removal was the AC duct (arrow "A"). However, the manual forgets to mention this brace (arrow "B"), which is in the way.



## Corvette C4 Heater Core Removal

### SOMETHING YOU SHOULDN'T TRY AT HOME



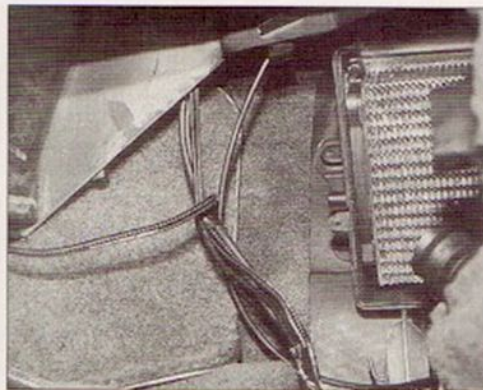
Now that the brace is removed, the AC duct can finally come out.



The next time you want a serious head rush, try hanging upside-down under a dash, using all of your strength to break loose a bolt that's been seriously torqued down. You'll feel just like that guy in the movie *Scanners*!



We had the most fun (yes, I'm being sarcastic) pulling out the ductwork for the floor vents. If your Vette is equipped with an aftermarket stereo, we suggest that you take the time to remove it—otherwise, you'll rip out wires when the duct is removed.



Finally, the heater core cover can be removed, exposing the core (on the right). We stuck this picture in just to show how little room there is!



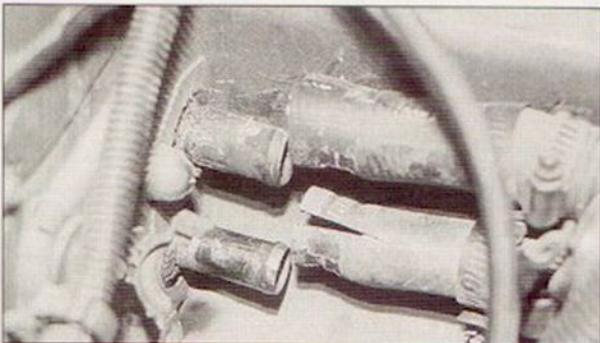
The side window defroster duct can now be disconnected, which leaves us room to remove the ECM. The manual, of course, doesn't say how, it just says "remove ECM." Although we got it out, it would have helped to have a pair of arms about a foot longer, as well as another set of elbows!



Although the manual didn't specify it, we had to remove the left side dash cushion, otherwise known as "The Loaf." Again, we needed a pair of "custom arms" to handle this job.



Trying to remove this brace, which goes from the passenger side door pillar to the inner dash structure, almost stopped us in our tracks. It was next to impossible to get a wrench on one of the bolts, and when we got there, it was on so tight, we thought it had been welded on!



We used a single-edged razor blade to cut the hoses to the heater core. Don't bother trying to save these pieces. If the heater core has rotted out, there's a good chance that the hoses aren't far behind.



## Corvette C4 Heater Core Removal

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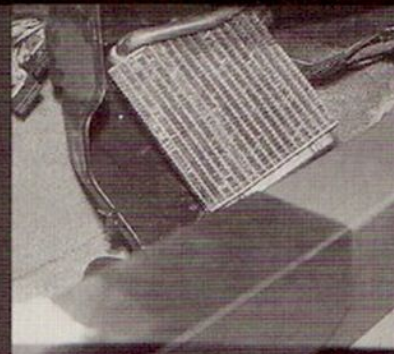
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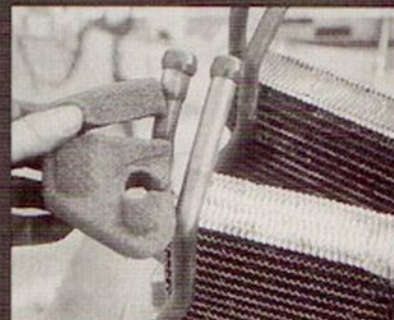
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### SOMETHING YOU SHOULDN'T TRY AT HOME



Finally, the heater core can be unbolted and removed. By the way, this is day two—or is it day three? We're not sure because we're suffering from exposure.



Be sure to transfer the firewall seal from the old core to the new one. This seal will keep noise, wind, and the weather out. We made sure not to forget this, because we don't intend to go through this job again.



Here's the pile of parts we removed from the low-mileage '85. Working from sunup to sundown, the whole process may take 3-4 days—if you're lucky, and have all of the right tools. Bear this in mind if you are considering tackling this job.

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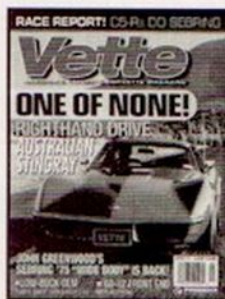
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