

Center Pin Maintenance by Dan Dobbins

Since purchasing our '62 Lark from Keystone Chapter member Mike Margerum in August of 2003, the center pin has been replaced twice. The center pin is that rotating steering mechanism on the front cross member that allows the bell crank to turn the tie rods on most Studebaker cars from the '50s and '60s. The gizmo that most of the unwashed forget to grease every oil change. Recently, I noted a vertical movement of the bell crank. Again.

I replaced the center pin a third time with a unit I had rebuilt myself, using new bearings and shims. Three days later, vertical movement. Oh barnacles! I knew the center pin apparatus was good, so why the vertical movement?

After emailing Dave Thibeault, the Prince of Parts, I was informed that the pinch screw in the bell crank that secures the bell crank onto the center pin should be torqued to at least 75 foot pounds. That was new information that is not contained in the rebuilding instructions in the shop manual. It is, however, included in the torque specs at the front of the shop manual.

Following his and the shop manual's counsel, I torqued the grade 8 pinch screw to 80 foot lbs. The vertical movement disappeared and the overall steering mechanism was restored to factory specs.

The problem was that I had been tightening the pinch screw of the bell crank with a 3/8th inch drive ratchet instead of a 1/2 inch drive torque wrench. It needed more torque than I had been applying.

That sucker is tight, now!

Moral: Check the torque of the bell crank pinch screw before you replace the center pin if there is vertical movement in the bell crank and then tighten it to 80 foot pounds. Your center pin may not be defective.



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