

I Don't Do Windows

July '08

Scott Langley (2 WINDY)

Someone asked me recently if I knew how to fix door windows that are hard to roll up and down. My answer was "yes" and "no". "Yes", I thought I knew how to fix them; "no" because I tried it once before and made them worse! The timing of the question was perfect because I was having trouble with my own power windows running very s-l-o-w-l-y as a result of the last time I tried to fix them.

If your windows are running slow, or are hard to crank manually, don't let them go too long that way. It puts added stress on the regulator, rollers and cable. Replacing one of those is no fun at all. I think I've figured out how to get those windows going smoothly again, so here's how I did it along with a few other window-related tips.

When you look at them closely, you realize that the window tracks on the Miata are pretty exposed when the window is down, which of course, is most of the time. Wind blown dirt and grime builds up in the channels, sticking to the grease used to lubricate the tracks and rollers. It creates a gummy mess! Once they get gummed up, the window gets harder to move, whether you have power windows or not.

The first item of business then is to get those channels cleaned out. You'll need to remove the interior door panel to really reveal all of the mechanism. It's not hard at all. The exact location of the fasteners may vary by year, but the process is the same. Start by opening the door and removing all visible screws, including the one in the cup behind the interior door handle. Next, look around and remove all plastic push fasteners you find. Just pry them up with your fingernail and pull them out. Lastly, peel up the little bit of felt-like material in the bottom of the door pull and remove the screw hidden under there. Now pull the bottom of the panel away from the door until the fasteners pop, then lift the panel up to disengage the panel from the door. If it doesn't let go, you probably missed a fastener somewhere. If you have tweeter speakers in the door panel, you'll need to disconnect the wire from one end or the other, then set the panel aside.

Now you've got a half-naked door in front of you. You can probably see most of the mechanisms behind the clear plastic. Next, you get to peel back the plastic. It's just stuck on with gooey black adhesive and will pull off slowly. You don't have to completely remove it, but peel it back so you can get access to the window tracks. That statement makes sense when you have the naked door in front of you. Beware of the black goo, it's pretty nasty and sticks to everything.

Ok, now you're ready to clean. Brake cleaner does a great job of breaking down all the grease; you can spray it directly on the tracks, guides and rollers. You can find brake cleaner for a few dollars at any auto parts store. Run the window up and down a few times so you can see what moves and what's stationary. Once you've got all that cleaned up, spray some cleaner on a q-tip and run it through the window channel that runs alongside the triangle window.

Now the cleaning is done and we're ready to lubricate everything. My opinion is that any sort of grease is just going to attract dirt and gum things up again. I found a product called "Lock-eze" at the parts store. It's a spray on lube that dries quickly and leaves a dry graphite lubricant behind. It's actually intended for use in lock mechanisms, hence the name. I'd expect any other "dry" lube to work just as well. Spray a liberal amount on everything that slides, glides, rotates or moves. Also spray a little into that channel alongside the triangle window. You're bound to get some on the glass, but that should clean up easily. Run the window up and down a few times to spread the lube and makes sure everything's working.

By now, you should notice a big difference in the effort needed to raise and lower the window. Those with power windows may want to unplug the electrical connectors and use a little contact cleaner on them to ensure all the power is getting through. It's not a bad idea to do that on the

window switches themselves as well. Once all this is done, it's time to reassemble the door panel. As the manuals always say: "installation is the reverse of removal". Be sure to hook the top of the door panel onto the door first before popping the fasteners into place!

Another point about power windows: I've read that in the NA cars ('90-'97) the contacts in the power window switches get pretty dirty and cause problems. There are instructions on www.miata.net that describe how to disassemble the switches for cleaning.

As always, be careful, work methodically, use the correct tools and you'll be fine. It's a great way to bond with the car and learn how it works!

The fine print: Your mileage may vary. Not responsible for accidents. Use at your own risk. Shown with optional equipment. Some equipment available at extra cost. Offer not valid in all states. See dealer for details. If you can find a better car, buy it.