

Dash Vent Repair

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It's about to be AC season again and you know what that means... floppy dash vents. 🚫
I've been using my AC already and the vents took a step up in looseness over what I remembered from last year. My biggest problem was that the left vent flap would blow shut. Used to be that it would blow closed with the fan on 4 once the system got cold, so as soon as the car cooled off a little I had to slow down the fan. Now it just blows closed as soon as cold air starts blowing, even at speed 2. 🚫

Also, the foam seals have been rotting and pieces have been blowing out through the vents for several years. This means that air leaks around the flap when you want it closed off. I decided I had to fix these problems before hot weather, and take pics for grins.

First I removed the radio and headlight switch and popped out the three vent heads in the dash, then removed the main dash trim panel. Then I was able to remove the screws that hold the left vent in place. The trick to removing the vent is to dislodge it from the plastic air duct. I was able to reach through to the duct and hold it while I pulled the vent out. It has a tight grip!

Here you can see the rotted foam around the edge of the flap. Also visible is a previous attempt at fixing the flap from blowing closed, a rubber band behind the link arm. This made the flap almost impossible to operate.



There is a gap all around the flap where air leaks through, especially in the corners.



You must very carefully pry open the housing a little to remove the wheel that operates the flap. There is a wide o-ring tire on the pivot for the wheel. This rubber ring provides the drag. With age it is slick and maybe shrunk a little.



Time to go to Home Depot. I took the old oring and wheel with me and selected the parts below. Two of these orings should do the trick.



And some foam weatherstripping.



The two new orings are slightly wider than the old tire, which is good.



You can see them in position with the wheel installed. The flap linkage is not connected in this pic.



You don't want to try to remove the flap, so just cut a strip of foam and work it into place. You have to hold it against the flap before allowing the tape to stick to the housing or else start over. Hold the flap shut tightly while doing this.



Cut it off at the pivots with a razor knife and peel off the paper.



Do the same thing on the back side along the top of the flap.



Now for the center vent. Here's what it looked like before.



Removing this vent would have induced great suffering, so I worked on it in place. The flap was not blowing shut, so I skipped the oring replacement. I may have been able to get the wheel out with the vent in place but did not try. First, open the flap so that it is flat. Then apply a piece of foam along the top edge from pivot to pivot, so that it slightly overhangs the flap.



Then close the flap and apply a strip of foam against the bottom front edge like you did on the left vent. Here is what it looks like with both pieces applied.



Now for the problem with the vent heads that flop or have to be wedged in place. Unfortunately, there is not a good easy repair for this. The head pivots on two pins on the vent housing. One end of the head has a fixed plastic clip. You can see, at 5:00 and 7:00 in the picture, thin plastic strips connecting the clip to the body. This allows the clip to spring open a little as you snap it in the vent. If one of those thin connector strips is broken, that end will be loose, but it should not affect the drag very much. If anything, it would cause that end to not stay snapped in well.



The other end has a tension spring applying pressure to the clip. This is to provide the drag that holds the vent head in position. One of my vents was floppy, and I found that one end of this spring had been dislodged from the clip, I'm sure by me on a previous repair. Putting it back in position cured my floppy vent head.



I could see some wear marks on the pivot pins and inside the clips. I'm sure that new parts would have more drag, but if mine get any looser I think I will try to bend the spring ends a little to increase the pressure on the clips. For now they are not loose enough to fall, they are just a little too easy to adjust. Fortunately, this can be easily worked on at any time since removal does not require any disassembly of the dash.

I have not yet had to work on the right side vent. Thankfully, that vent can be removed from the front easily without other disassembly.