

How to add a 3rd brake light to your '64-'66 Barracuda *by Neil Brommell*



All photos can be clicked for a larger view

Introduction

Recently I was rear ended by a minivan whose driver exclaimed; *"I didn't see that you were stopped."* The \$2000 damage sealed the decision to add a 3rd brake light, the kind you will find centered above the trunk or in the rear window of most modern cars. Truthfully, the tiny dim brake lights on our cars are not that visible. Retrofitting our cars with safety upgrades is not for everyone, but here is my experience with adding a third brake light to my 1965 Barracuda.

The best light from another car that can be easily fitted to an early Barracuda is the 3rd brake light from a 1986-1992 Saab 900 2dr hatchback (*Fig.1*). The entire assembly is made by Hella. The lens is large and the housing has a foam gasket to rest on the window as designed for the Saab. It takes a 1156 reverse light bulb, and the mounting hardware can be easily modified to mount it in your car. I'm sure other lights will work, but this one is an easy fit, lights up very bright and looks like it belongs!



What's involved? You will need to drill 3 small holes to mount the bracket, run a wire and add an electrical connection, that's all.

What you will need:

- 1 - Hella 3rd brake light from 1986-1992 Saab 900 2dr hatchback, complete with original wire bracket, 3-holed mounting plate and wiring harness (*Fig.2*)
- 3 - #8 X 9/16" small sheet metal screws
- about 20 feet of 16 gauge automotive electrical wire
- assortment of male/female automotive electrical connectors
- 7/16" high speed metal drill bit
- tools - screwdrivers, drill, bench-mounted vice



I suggest reading this entire article first, before you do anything, then proceed in the following order:

Part One: Mounting the light

The mounting plate must be screwed to the body of your car. It holds the wire bracket which in turn supports the brake light up against the inside of your rear window. The wire bracket is relatively straight; you will have to custom bend the wire bracket to fit the inside contour of the Barracuda a little better. Place the wire bracket in your vice and bend at the existing bend locations. Check it against your car with the brake light and mounting plate in place.

Remove and bend again, then check it again until it holds the brake light snug up against the inside glass of your rear window, with the mounting plate fitting snug up against the lower body rail inside the trunk area (Fig.3, 4, 5). Bending this wire bracket to the correct contour and fit is probably the hardest part of the entire third brake light operation. You may have to bend and check a few times until it's right. I got mine snug, but not entirely tight against the glass, that is the best I could get it. When cargo hits the light, it will shift position, but it's perfectly fine; maybe it's better that way so it doesn't get broken should it get hit? You may get yours better, it's all about how well you can bend that wire bracket.

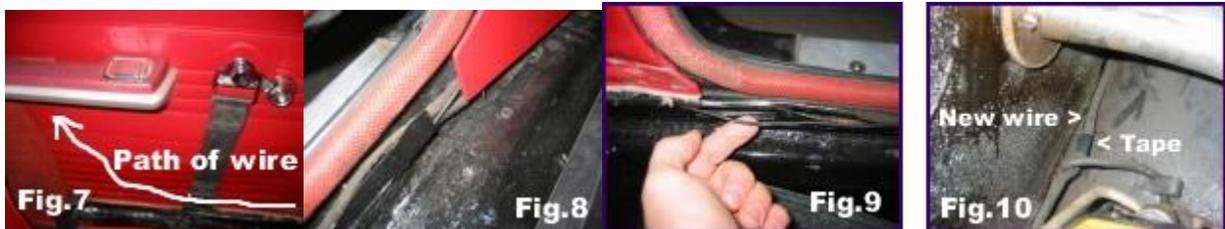


Once you are confident the wire bracket is bent to the correct contour, your next step is to drill 3 small holes to hold the mounting plate in place. You want the holes smaller than the diameter of the screws to ensure they screw in snug. Hold the wire bracket with brake light and mounting plate exactly where you want it and mark the position of the 3 holes with a marker or pencil. Remove the light and drill the holes (Fig.3). Do not over-tighten the screws. If you do and they become loose, you will have to replace them with larger diameter screws. Once the plate is attached, it can be flexed down a little and moved around, this is normal. Now run the wiring harness through the existing hole and out into the trunk as shown (Fig.6).



Part Two: running a new wire

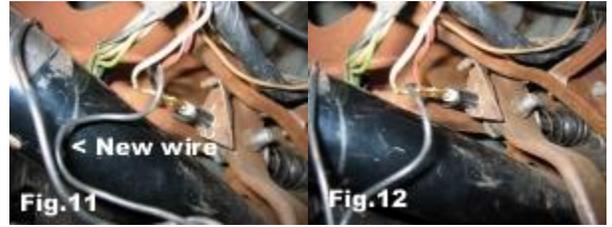
First you will need to remove the drivers side kick panel, inner carpet/kick plate and rear passenger side panel. You will need to remove the rear armrest and window crank before removing the rear side panel. Once all this is removed, it's time to run the new wire. It will connect under the dash to the brake pedal switch and follow the existing wiring harness to the back of the car where it will be wired into the new third brake light (Fig.7, 8, 9).



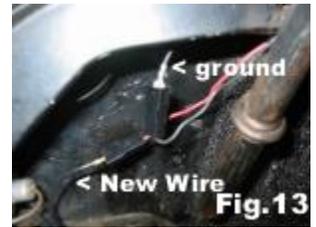
If you have difficulty getting the wire over the wheel well hump, use a stick or stiff piece of house grade electrical wire to help you. Tape the 16 gauge wire to the stick and 'fish' it over the hump. Lightly tape the wire to the existing wiring harness at regular intervals to keep it in place (Fig.10). Leave some slack at either end, enough that it won't end up too short when you go to connect it.

Part Three: Connecting it

Once the wire is in place, you will connect it under the dash. Carefully weave the new wire up and around to the brake pedal switch. Find the white wire, the one on the side of the switch AFTER the switch engages (the front of the switch). Unplug this wire from the brake switch. Then, remove the connector from the end, attach the white wire and your new wire together at the ends, then add a new connector to the end. Re-attach the connector (now with two wires coming from it) to the brake switch (Fig.11, 12).



Now, in the trunk area, attach the newly run wire to the red wire on the new brake light. The black wire on the new brake light is a ground wire and needs to be attached somewhere on the body of the car. On my car I found an existing hole along the inside of the trunk (along the beam shown in Fig.13) and I attached it there with a small round connector and a small bolt (Fig.13).



Optionally, if you want your third brake light to blink on and off, you can splice a standard 552 canister style turn signal flasher into the new wire.

You are finished! When you hit the brakes, everyone will see you are stopped! Congratulations on your new light. One small tip, always keep an eye in your rear view mirror and assume the car behind you is an idiot and is not going to stop; this is your best defense against a minivan up your butt!

Final Thoughts The idea of a third brake light is not new. Others have thought of this. Some have mentioned using LED's.

Neil Brommell, 2002

