

HIGH TIMES

"High spot". These are, without question, the two most important words when it comes to steering precision in our classic Mopars. No, this isn't the place you go to smoke weed. This term refers to the one—and only one—point in the rotation of your steering box's wormshaft where there is zero, or near-zero play. This point is supposedly, and usually is, at a point exactly halfway between the two limits, clockwise and CCW. If



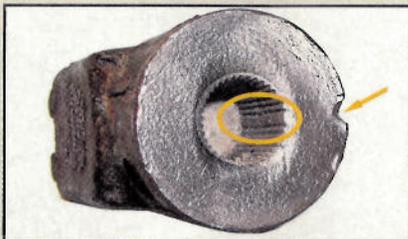
To check that all components of the steering system are lined up correctly, begin with the steering wheel pointing straight ahead.

your car has one of many defects which result in the car driving straight ahead when the steering box isn't on the high spot, you'll have a lot of free-play or lash while going straight and binding at some point other than straight ahead. In other words, the steering wheel will be acting strictly in an advisory capacity. That sucks.

There are several way this can go quite wrong. As our cars get older, and knowledge as to how to correctly assemble, check, and set up the system fades, more are more cars have woeful



At this point, the steering wheel's master spline *must* be at 12 o'clock. If there's any doubt about this (maybe some idiot filed a new, incorrect master spline, or an after-market wheel adapter, which frequently have no master spline index, was installed incorrectly), remove the wheel nut and have a look (you can see the column shaft master spline without pulling the wheel as long as you remove the nut).



Now move down to the engine compartment and confirm that the coupler's master spline is also at 12 o'clock. Later coupler bodies have a notch that's aligned with the master (arrow). Not sure? Pull the coupler up a bit and check the splines on the boxes wormshaft. Don't guess.



At this point, the wheels should be straight ahead and the amount of visible thread approximately equal on *all four* tie rod ends. If not, your front end alignment guy did a "workaround" because something's not right. Possible problems are an incorrectly assembled pot coupling (inverted, more on that next issue), the aforementioned steering wheel installation snafu, frame, chassis, or linkage damage, or, more common than you might think...



...a twisted chuck (steering box) sector shaft. Nasty!

steering. Even worse, young Mopar guys assume "that's the way it is." Not true. Set up up right, these cars were as good as many new cars and better than anything else from the '60s and '70s. Check the accompany photos and captions for the details.

LIFEBLOOD

Power steering requires—duh!—power steering fluid. Not ATF! Keeping the fluid cool is also important if you want long component life, it can also help reduce low-RPM assist loss by maintaining fluid viscosity. Generally, the factory provided coolers only on cars destined for heavy-duty/fleet operation, and on cars with steep rear axle gears. The junkyard is full of small coolers which are easy to install via a bracket mounted to the pump, and plumbing couldn't be easier: Just splice it inline in the return (low pressure side) hose.



(1) It's not a bad idea to flush and change the fluid every couple of years. Do this by disconnecting the return hose from the pump, capping off the pump nipple, and sticking the hose in a bucket. With the engine at the lowest idle RPM, keep filling the pump until at least a quart of new juice has replaced the old. The factory fluid is great, yet synthetic probably has some advantages, particularly if you don't run a cooler. Red Line's seems to be the most widely distributed. (2) The factory used coolers on cop cars and taxicabs, and musclecars with high numerical axle ratios. Not a bad idea. They install easily, all you need is a homemade bracket attached to the pump or pump brackets, and a bit of extra 11/32" (not 3/8") return hose. The junkyards are full of them, even 2nd-gen Neons had 'em (mounted in the airstream beneath the K-member, or buy new as P/N 5272334AD). If you get desperate, the aftermarket offers quite a few (Fluidyne unit shown). (3) One low-buck aftermarket trick seems to have some merit: A return-line fluid filter, which is an easy install—A-1 Cardone's filter (which we found at A'Zone) simply slips into the return hose (again, 11/32" only). Sticking a large magnet on the bottom of the pump reservoir is another useful, life-extending idea.