

# Wide Whitewalls ON A DIME

## 3 WAYS TO GET WIDE WHITES WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK

BY MATT SPROUSE

A well-chosen set of tires, when used with the right wheels, of course, can make or break a desired style. Considering the options available today, an enthusiast can essentially choose which era in automotive history he or she would like to replicate. Whether it's radials or bias plies, redlines or whitewalls, "pinner" whites or wide whites - the list goes on - choosing the correct tire based on the style you're trying to achieve is of the utmost importance.

When presented with the decision of which period we wanted our project '62 Oldsmobile to characterize, it didn't take long to settle on the style of tires it would have. Without a question, wide whites, all the way.

With little budget to work with, we quickly came to terms with the fact

that we couldn't outfit our Olds with a top-of-the-line set of new whitewall tires. Knowing there are a number of NSMC Members working on a tight budget, we set out to find alternative ways to achieve our desired style of wide whitewall tires.

What we found were three vastly different ways of achieving essentially the same look without having to kill your budget to do it. We tried all three options and over the next few pages, we'll outline the steps we took and explain what we found during our pursuit for budget-conscious wide whitewall tires.

So, follow along to find out how to outfit your street machine with wide whites without having to break the bank to accomplish it.

### 01 GRIND 'EM

A previously common way of achieving the look of wide whites was to grind off the thin layer (about 1/16-inch) of black rubber on what is known as a "pinner" whitewall tire, exposing the wide ring of naturally white rubber beneath. In years past, it wasn't uncommon for a tire retailer to widen and buff whitewalls for their customers, but this practice has since stopped. This is an easy, and relatively quick, way to turn a common set of whitewall tires into a set of wide whites.



We started with a set of used whitewall tires. This process will work with any tire featuring white rubber, whether they're whitewalls or tires with raised white letters. This option would be a good one if you already have whitewall tires on your street machine that you would like to make wider.



Using a junk tire, we cut through the sidewall to show just how wide the ring of naturally white rubber is on the average whitewall tire. As you can see, a very thin layer of black rubber covers much of the available white rubber. The cutaway view shows that grinding back the thin layer of black rubber will have essentially no effect on the strength of the tire's sidewall.



To determine the width of the tire's white rubber ring, we used a small rotary grinder to remove some of the black rubber.



After exposing the full width of the whitewall, we measured and found that our whitewall would grow from 5/8-inch to nearly 2 inches wide.



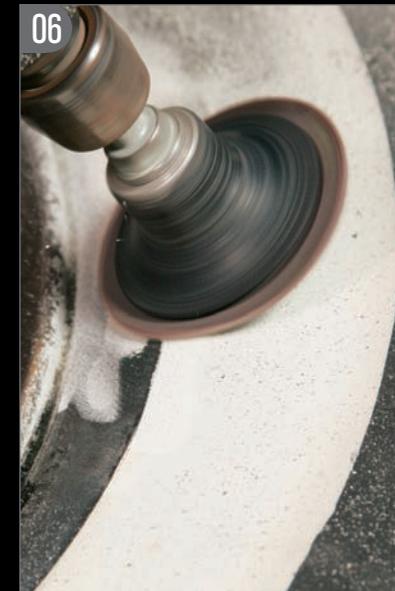
After removing the thin layer of black rubber, we noticed manufacturing imperfections around the edges of the whitewall. While these are visible up close, they are hard to see from a distance.



To compensate for the manufacturer's imperfections, we set our radius tool so that the rotary grinder would be approximately 1/8-inch inside the previously determined edges (step 4) of the whitewall. We then lightly scribed lines around the tire before grinding off the remaining black rubber.



Using 180-grit sandpaper on a pneumatic 5-inch random orbital sander (ROS), we gradually removed the thin layer of black rubber.



To remove the black rubber from the inside radius, we used a smaller pneumatic 3-inch right-angle die-grinder.



We designed and built a tool to help us keep our trimming edges as consistent as possible all the way around the tire. To do it, we drilled the wheel's bolt pattern in a piece of plywood and attached it to the wheel. In the center of the plywood, we fastened a 5/8-inch threaded rod with a nut and washer on either side of the plywood. Using a hose clamp, we attached our rotary grinder to a strip of 10-gauge steel that we slid over the threaded rod. We secured the strip to the threaded rod by clamping it together with a washer and nut on either side of the strip.



After successfully exposing the wide whitewall on our cheap used tire, we scrubbed the tire using Westley's Bleche-Wite, to remove any remaining rubber particles. The result is a wide whitewall tire that looks great and cost very little other than a bit of time with some sandpaper and bleach.

## Smooth Sidewalls

Shaving door handles and trim is a must-do for many enthusiasts, but what about the sidewall lettering found on most modern radials? Shaving the unsightly lettering from the sidewalls of your tires is a simple means of enhancing the looks of your tires and is a great way to prepare them for some whitewall treatment.



To remove the majority of the lettering, we used 180-grit sandpaper on a pneumatic 5-inch ROS.



After removing the lettering, we buffed the sidewalls with 400-grit sandpaper to ensure they were smooth all the way around.



We wiped the freshly shaved sidewall with Armor All tire cleaner to help restore some of the oils in the rubber and to give the letter-free tire a like-new shine.



## 02 PAINT 'EM

Another way enthusiasts have achieved the look of wide whitewall tires on their street machines is by painting their tires white, most often with spray paint. Unfortunately, the sun and the rigors of driving take their toll on spray painted tires and they quickly lose their luster.

In our search for whitewall options, we came across an Icelandic company that sells a product specifically made for painting white-walls. Known as "White Tire Paint," the product is a liquefied rubber compound that adheres to the tire never fully hardening. The paint, even when completely dry, remains elastic enough to survive as a part of the tire.



To start the process, we wiped the tire down with Westley's Bleche-Wite to ensure the tire was free of any dirt or oils. It is important to clean the tires before trying to paint them.



We outlined our desired whitewall area using common painter's tape. After painting, you must score around the painted edges to prevent tearing the paint upon removal of the tape.



Using a brush, we applied a moderate amount of the whitewall paint to the taped off area.



After letting the first coat cure for the recommended 24 hours, we applied a second and third coat in 24-hour increments as the manufacturer suggested.



With the curing process complete, we removed the tape to find a beautifully painted wide whitewall tire that was ready to hit the streets on our '62 Oldsmobile.

### SOURCE

White Tire Paint  
Nokkvogur 30  
104 Reykjavik, Iceland  
International +354-895-2400  
www.tirepaint.net



## 03 PORT-A-WALL 'EM

The final option for outfitting your street machine with the wide white-wall look without breaking the bank is one that was popular decades ago, disappeared, and has recently made a bit of a comeback to the custom car world. While they received criticism in the past, often due to improper installation, Port-A-Walls, when installed correctly, offer the look of wide whitewall tires for a fraction of the cost. With the proper care and attention paid to curbs when parallel parking, Port-A-Walls should withstand multiple cruising seasons. They are available through multiple distributors in a variety of sizes and are quite often available on websites like eBay and others.



With the tire deflated and separated from the wheel, we fit the Port-A-Wall around the wheel and centered it accordingly.



With the Port-A-Wall installed correctly and laying flat against the sidewall, we re-inflated the tire to the appropriate pressure.



To make sure our Port-A-Walls seated properly, we separated the bead of the tire from the wheel and cleaned the mounting surfaces.



From anything further than "up close," the affordable Port-A-Wall looks strikingly similar to an expensive wide whitewall tire.

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