



GETTING

When you have to make that shift on time, every time, nothing beats a B&M ratchet-style race shifter

SHIFTY

Scott Taylor

Getting your auto to perform on the dragstrip isn't rocket science. You can get a shift kit installed or do it yourself, or maybe add a high-stall converter to make sure your engine is in its powerband before you leave the start line.

However, getting the shifts right is the most critical part of racing on the dragstrip or wherever it is that you choose to race. A missed gear shift by even 100rpm can cost you a tenth or more on the dragstrip, and that could be the difference between an 11.00 or 10.99, which we all know is a world apart when you're telling your mates down at the pub.

Having a 10sec car is much better than having a low-11sec car from the wow perspective, so sometimes you need every tenth of a second that you can get.

Or maybe your car shifts at 4000rpm when you leave it in drive, but you know you can

drop a whole second off your times by shifting at 5500rpm.

It might be that you just like making your own decisions regarding the shifts. After all, there isn't much in this life that we can control, so you might as well make your own decisions sometime.

Whatever your reason, there's a lot to be said for making your own shifts, but this isn't the easiest or most consistent thing to do with the stock-standard Commodore shifter.

If you try too hard, you'll end up going two gears forward instead of one, but then if you push too softly you might miss that critical moment and have the engine over-revving, which can cost you time on the quarter as well.

So, what you need is a shifter that you can bang as hard as you like but only shifts one gear at a time, and this is where ratchet-style shifters are perfect.

Shifters such as the B&M Pro Ratchet you see here are perfect for racing your street car, but not so complicated that they are a major pain when you're just cruising around.

With a manualised automatic transmission like we have in V6 Vengeance, shifters such as the Pro Ratchet make the VN a breeze to drive around the street, but really shine when we go to the track.

Not only can we make sure what gear the VN is in during the burnout, we can also pick exactly where we need to shift for the best quarter mile times or, if we need to, adjust them accordingly.

That ratchet action is infallible and missed shifts have become a thing of the past, which means the car's consistency is perfect and we can measure the gain or loss of every modification perfectly.

Getting the shifter into the Commodore isn't a two-hour job though; well, not if you want to do it right. The standard shifter has to

- 1 The stock shifter is about as ordinary as they get and not suited to racing at all
- 2 Removing the surround is simply a case of lifting it off; a screwdriver can be used to gently pry it up
- 3 We found that removing the whole lower console made access a lot easier, and frankly its the only way to go
- 4 The shifter plate is retained in the floor by a bunch of rivets that need to be drilled out

be removed and the best way to do this is to drill out the rivets holding the shifter plate in place. Replacing the shifter plate with a new flat plate makes life a hell of a lot easier when it comes to mounting the new shifter and it frees up your positioning choices.

On our set-up, we chose to mount the shifter in a position where we could use the original shifter location and just enlarge the hole in the surround so we maintain the same feel as the factory set-up. You guys and girls can choose your own locations, but have a look at our photos and you'll see what we mean.

It is imperative that you read and understand the instructions that come with the kit before even starting to install the shifter. If you stuff it



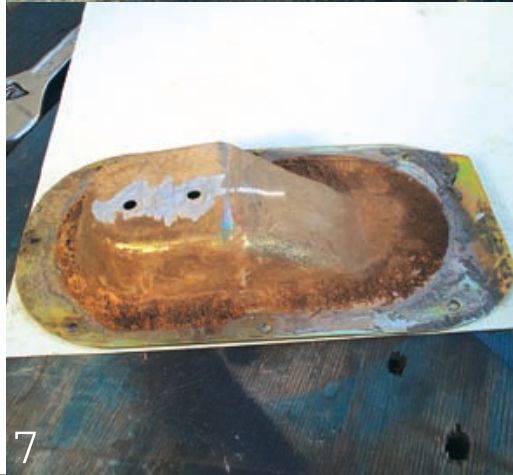
- 5 Once the rivets are all drilled out, you can pop the plate and shifter off
- 6 Here's the shifter plate out of the car. We need to pull it apart to use it as a template for a flat plate
- 7 Scribe around the plate to mark out our new plate, and don't forget to mark the holes to drill. Use a jigsaw to cut a new plate
- 8 With our new plate in place, we made sure all the rivets fitted into their respective holes before we locked any in



up, you can damage the shifter and/or the cable.

The only area where we recommend that you diverge from the instructions is where they say not to cover the shifter cable with anything. We have found in the past through personal experience that the shifter cables are extremely sensitive to heat. While we recommend that you route the cable away from heat sources, we also recommend that you run tubing over the cable to keep the heat out.

Replacement cables are not cheap, and a melted cable can lock the transmission in one gear, which can really ruin your cruising experience, so slide some fuel hose over the cable to protect it. Whenever we've done this,



- 9 A new flat surface to work with will make attaching the B&M shifter all too easy
- 10 Sitting the new shifter in place with the console revealed that we would need to do some trimming
- 11 Mark out the shifter location and the holes you need to drill
- 12 This pin needs to be removed for a four-speed auto or moved to the forward position for a two-speed box
- 13 Fit the console and then fit the shifter cover in place
- 14 Attach your new shifter linkage to the side of the transmission, but make sure you read the instructions and mark the right hole to use or you will damage the shifter
- 15 B&M says not to cover the shifter cable, but we say use some fuel line or something similar to keep the heat away from the cable. This is the only place you should deviate from the instructions
- 16 The black and grey wires need to be cut, fitted with the right connectors and attached to the lower switch
- 17 Cutting the plastic surround to suit is tricky, but with a little care, you should have no issues. We used a hacksaw blade with one end wrapped in tape to protect our hand – yes, we'll fit the missing screws later

we haven't had a problem, but whenever we've chosen to run the cable bare, sooner or later we've had to replace them.

So, check out the photos, take your time and do the job right. Put aside a whole day for this job and make sure you have all the power tools and bits and pieces you need (like rivets), which will save you a mid-job trip to the hardware store.

What do we think of our shifter? We love it; it has made racing V6 Vengeance a much easier job than it was with the factory shifter and has removed one more variable from the equation. That means we're more consistent. Who knows, it may help us a lot when we go for that next bracket-racing trophy? SC

