



Give Your VW Radio a Kick: Installing Speakers in the Kick Panels

“Tunes” in the car are important, but where to put the speakers? Most people install them in the doors, cutting a large hole in the door trim panels and running the speaker wires through the forward door post and into the door. Our friend Dave (from Rob and Dave’s Aircooled Volkswagen Pages) decided go the kick panel route for his speakers, mainly because he was loath to ruin the new door trim panels by putting the speakers in the doors.

Move Speakers to Your Interior

While researching the success of others with this question, Dave received a very informative and useful post regarding the installation of speaker kick panels from James W. Lindsay (Sharkey’s Garage) in Vancouver, British Columbia. Following is his advice (with a few additions from Dave). Basically, fitting speakers in kick panels inside your Volkswagen’s interior is far better, for a number of reasons:

- Slamming your doors causes undue stress on speakers mounted in the doors, usually causing the speaker mounting hardware to loosen up over time (or worse, pull out and/or distort the hardboard that most VW door panels are made of).
- You don’t have to deal with pinched wiring at the leading edge of the door. I’ve had difficulty getting wiring that runs into the door to stay put and look good, instead of pinching and sticking out of the gap when the door is closed.





- The speakers are pointed more directly at the passengers inside the car, instead of at the ankles of the front seat occupants.
- Using speaker kick panels doesn't ruin your door trim. Nor, do you have to cut out any of the metal structure of the actual door.

How It's Done

Test fit the panels into the car first, making any necessary cuts to improve the fit. Next, you may have to cut the holes for your speaker(s). Some [speaker panels](#) come with holes already in them. When properly installed the panels offer a maximum of 2" mounting depth – make sure your speakers fall within this measurement!

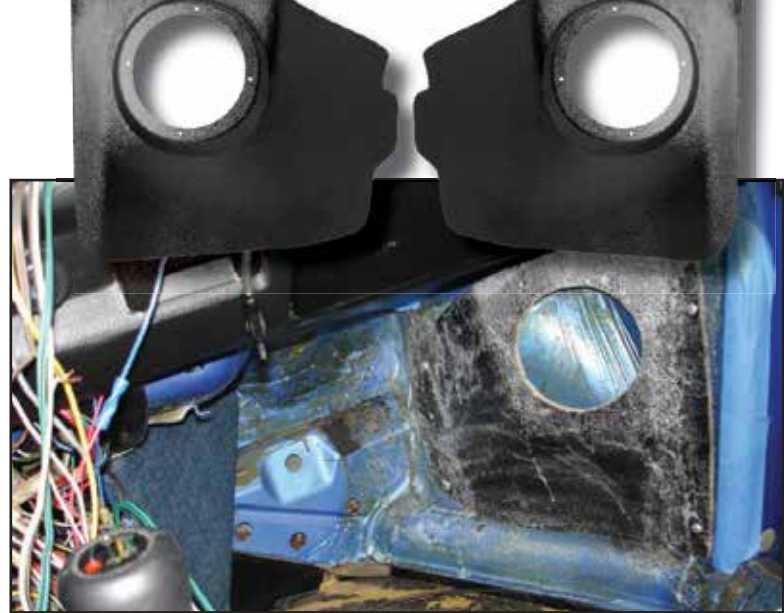
Once you have the panels installed, you have a few paths to choose from:

You can pull the carpet back and install the panels in place against the body of the car and install carpet over them, then cut a hole through the carpet to match the hole(s) in the panels. Next you install the speakers with the attaching screws running through the carpet and through the panel.

OR —

Carpet the panels while they are out of the car (allowing for excess carpet to extend past the edges of the panels) and then install the panels.

The first method is usually the way most people go, but it can be very difficult to get good results. Rob and Dave recommend letting an auto upholsterer do it for you if you go this route. Since the panels aren't flat, the carpet



Welcome to the DON'T side of Do-It-Yourself!

What looks like a quick fix to your sound problems¹ is actually pretty dangerous. This brings new meaning to the expression "get your foot out of it!" The next time you need to hit the brakes, your foot could get stuck in the left hand speaker grille. Plus, you could easily damage your new speaker and grille by pressing too hard on the accelerator pedal. A better solution would be to build your box over the kick panel².





with punch up along one of the two raised creases in the panel. This will require making a careful cut along one of the creases and cutting out a narrow, triangular piece of carpeting, so that the two edges butt up against one another. This can be rather difficult to do with the panels in the car, due to the limited space.

Dave went with the second method – bonding the carpeting to the panel and making the necessary relief cuts to get a nice fit while the whole thing was outside the car. Then he test-fitted the panels inside the car and cut away any excess carpet (leaving about a 1" overhang where the panels stand vertically near the door pillar, and about 5-6" along the bottom where it follows the contours of the heater channels and slips beneath the front passenger floor carpeting).

Finally, before installing I had the top and vertical edges "serged." Serging is a process which binds the edge of carpeting with heavy thread to keep the carpet from unraveling. The edge of your VW carpeting should have a heavy serged edging. Anyone who specializes in making custom home carpet mats should be able to do this for you. If you can't find someone to perform this task, an automotive upholsterer should be able to stitch a narrow band of cloth or vinyl around the edges instead. It is up to you as to what looks best, although it is a bit cleaner looking to match the serging on your current carpet panels.

If neither of these options is particularly appealing to you, you can also simply install the speaker kick panels without any finishing or painting. For a more custom look, you can certainly prime and paint them. Just look for special paint that will adhere to the material of the speaker kick panel.

The Finishing Touch

Mounting the kick panels was accomplished using a combination of screws and Automotive Goop(tm). In most cases, you should be able to get a [screw kit](#) to finish the job. Be sure to note where the screw tips will end up before picking locations to drill! Once the screws are in place, the glue can do the rest. Dave used long strips of wood to hold the panels in place while the glue dried, using the natural bow of the wood to apply pressure. Don't forget to run your speaker wiring first! It is also recommended to use a screw with a larger washer. Some door panel screws from the late VW Bus will work fine, as they have a washer pre installed.



This article was used with permission from:
Rob and Dave's air-cooled VW pages
 And is reprinted here as a FREE service
www.vw-resource.com

