

I Got "Hitched" Again

I recently purchased another retro T'Bird to replace my leased Lincoln MKC. Since R'Bird 2 will be my daily driver after I turn in the MKC, I knew I needed to add a hitch to it to haul my cart around with me. The trunk of the Retro Birds is so shallow that my cart will not fit in without leaving the spare tire out – OK for around town, but not acceptable on a long trip. R'Bird 2 is virtually identical to R'Bird 1, except it has Supplemental Lamps that R'Bird 1 did not.

R'Bird 1 - 2010



R'Bird 2 - 2017



When I had R'Bird 1 back in 2010-2012, I was lucky enough to find an obsolete Thunderbird hitch, this time, however, there are just no Thunderbird hitches around, so I bought a Lincoln LS hitch, which is rumored to fit the Retro T'Bird. That makes sense, as the two carlines share a common vehicle platform.

Turns out there were a number of differences in the hitch designs, making the install of an LS hitch on a Retro T'Bird a bit of a challenge. For both installations, I made the receiver box removable so that there would be no visible signs of a hitch on the car unless the hitch was in use. First thing I discovered was that the arms of the side brackets on the T'Bird hitch were much longer than the LS hitch.

T'Bird hitch – 24705



LS hitch – 12253



This created an issue, as the forward mounting holes of the LS hitch did not touch sheet metal – they lined up with tooling holes in the frame. I circumvented this by installing $\frac{1}{4}$ " metal plates with bolts tacked to them into the tooling access holes.

The next challenge I discovered was that, due to the difference in load capacity (3500# for LS, 2000# for T’Bird) that both the receiver box and crossbar were of 2” material on the LS rather than 1 ¼” material. I wanted a 1 ¼” box to match my cargo carrier and to save weight. Upon doing my trial fit, I realized that due to the larger section of the crossbar, the LS hitch would not tuck in to the vehicle as tightly, resulting in a condition where the bumper cover could not be fastened back into its correct position. To fix this issue, Bob Lewis helped me build a fixture to modify the LS hitch to move the crossbar position up ½” in-car. A professional welder cut and welded the crossbar back in into the new location.

Fixture with bar upside down and ½” gap



Crossbar relocated UP (in-car position) by ½”



T’Bird 24705 hitch install RH side



LS 12253 hitch install RH side



View showing T’Bird hitch forward mounting point lining up with sheet metal; LS hitch forward mounting point lining up over open space of the large tooling hole.

I circumvented the open tooling holes by fabbing brackets of ¼" steel plates out of surplus sway bar spacers.

I didn't have **these**



So I made **these**



Once installed, my hidden hitches looked like this

R'Bird 1



R'Bird 2



And like this with the **receiver box** bolted on



After all of that , I have the flexibility to haul my cart, my bicycle, or my custom-built all aluminum trailer wherever I go.

