

Replacing early X3 interior pull handles

Cost - £41 (\$68 approx) ... Time – 2.5 hours approx

The early X3 (E83) from the first build to September 2004 was fitted with nasty black plastic door opener handles which were quickly superseded by a 'matt chrome' or Perlglanzchrom finish. Apart from being quite ugly, the early handles have much more flex, feel cheaper and have a tendency to break if pulled too hard. A broken handle in my August 2004 build date X3 is what prompted me to look at changing to the new style instead of just replacing the one broken handle with another nasty black one.

The 'mod' is quite cheap. In the UK, the parts cost £10.04 inclusive for each handle, and 21p for the axle, including taxes and postage. The parts list is as follows:

- Door Handle Left Perlglanzchrom 5141 341 5579 - qty 2 required
- Door Handle Right Perlglanzchrom 5141 341 5580 - qty 2 required
- Axle, Inside Door Handle 5141 341 3271 - qty 4 (optional)

Check out www.realoem.com for full parts information.

The new parts.....



The 'axles' are optional as the original ones can be re-used, but I decided to buy a new set just in case ... I have been in that gut-wrenching position many times where you break a small and insignificant part, or it goes pinging off into the deep recesses of the garage never to be found. For the price, it was worth it!

The tools you will need are:

- Long-shaft Torx T25 driver
- Long-shaft Torx T30 driver
- Trim removal tool – I use a plastic-bladed cooking spatula
- Snipe-nose pliers or strong tweezers
- Small flat-bladed screwdriver
- Small blob of blu-tak (more on this later)

Starting the job

I decided to start with the rear doors first, basically to give me an 'easy' door to start off with as I don't have rear side airbags. However the first job should be to disconnect the battery –ve terminal as to complete the task I had to work on door cards that had airbag modules.

This is what my door looked like before the mod.....



The first step (after removing the battery negative) is to remove the door handle trim, the blanking plug behind the pull handle, and the blanking plug to the rear underside of the arm rest. This will give you the four Torx screw positions. The blanking plug under the armrest is a real tricky git, and it took some effort to remove. It comes out at an angle, slightly downwards, and is basically a tube with two springy plastic clips that snap into a slightly larger tube that is in the armrest. The first one I didn't understand how to get out and the flat cover snapped off! (so I need to order a new one of these!!).

Once the covers are off, you can start removing the Torx screws using the long-shaft T30 driver.



Now it's just a matter of popping off the door card clips. Start somewhere along the bottom edge and insert your trim removal tool (spatula). It won't take much for the clips to start popping, and once you can get your fingers in between the door card and the door, start working up each side popping the clips as you go, until the card is just retained along the top edge. Now, starting one end, with some force pop the top clips off. They come straight towards you, do NOT try to lift the door card up. There are four of these clips along the top edge.

Once the door card comes free, lift it slightly so the lock button drops through.

Whilst supporting the card, unplug the speaker and also reach in the hole to unplug the window switch (not essential, but you won't strain the wires if you unplug it). Now swing the door card towards you and you will see the Bowden cable and retainer for the handle. To disconnect this, below where the right-angle former in the cable goes into the handle body is a small plastic clip. Pull this towards the cable and it will unclip, and pulling the inside door handle slightly swing the white plastic part up and away. The front edge clips into the grey body and you pivot the white bit up and out.



Above: Bowden attached to the pull handle



Above: Bowden cable now detached from the pull handle. Axle pin holding handle can be seen in the grey housing.

Once the card is disconnected from the car, you can then proceed to detach the handle. Using the small flat-bladed screwdriver, pop the axle out holding the handle in. You can see a cutout in the fibre lining of the door card to aid removing the axle. Push it out from below and using the snipe-nosed pliers, extract the axle. Once it's out, you can then feed the old handle out from the front of the door card.



Above: showing the old handle and now empty housing.

Now, using the correct new handle, feed that into the housing from the front of the door card and insert the new Axle pin (or re-use the old one if you must). It may take a bit of wiggling of the handle to line up the holes. Now, it's important that you push the Axle fully home until it clicks and is flush with the top of the housing. Failure to do so may mean that the axle works its way out and the handle will come loose!



Above: New handle inserted, and new Axle pushed fully home in housing

Once you have the handle in place and it moves freely, you can re-attach the Bowden cable. It's basically the reverse of the removal process, however you need to make sure the handle is fully closed (in tight towards the door), then insert the front edge into the clip and swing the rear down and in. Push sharply and the cable will click into place into the new handle and the white retaining clip should clip to the grey housing. Check it's in tight, and then operate the handle a few times. If you follow the cable to the door, you will see the mechanism, and pulling the handle you should feel the normal resistance and see the mechanism operate.



Above: The 'door' end of the Bowden cable. The red part is the retainer clip and the black part with the silver bit through it is the end of the cable and lock mechanism. The black part should move up and down when the handle is pulled.

Now it's a matter of re-attaching the speaker and window cables. Make sure they aren't looped round anything. The Bowden cable has a clip on the door card, and it needs to be re-seated in this clip before the door card goes back on.

Replacing the door Card is the reverse of its removal. Make sure you feed the popup lock button into the hole (don't leave it hanging inside the door!) and starting at the top edge, align the card to the correct position, and push it onto the clips. Giving it a smart 'smack' with the side of your hand will make sure it's seated correctly.

Now, to ensure you don't damage any of the door card plastic clips, I suggest getting on your knees and using your fingers between the door and the door card, position the clips into the holes. When you are happy they are all lined up, give the door card several sharp whacks where the clips are, and you should hear them pop back into place.

Replace the Torx screws and ensure they are done up nice and tight. Once these are in, you can then replace the plugs and the handle cover. That's one door done. It looks good!!



Now you can work on the other side – same as before.

The only difference with the front doors is that there is an extra screw under the 'Airbag' decal (see below), the screw under the door pull is a different size (T25), and you are working very close to an airbag!! It is this screw I used the blu-tak on to ensure it was retained on the end of the Torx driver both when removing, and when re-installing as it can easily fall into the gap behind the door card and you'll have to take the card off again to get it out!



I didn't actually disconnect the airbags when working on the front doors, as doing the rears had given me enough information and practice to be able to remove the Bowden cable and handle without taking the whole door card away from the car.

I supported the door card on a small set of steps to ensure I didn't strain the airbag cable, I DID unplug the speaker, but only to enable me to rotate the card through 90 degrees to make it easier to get at the underside of the Axle to push it out.

Once all the doors are done, and you have checked that the handles all work (and you've had a coffee), you can re-connect the battery.

You will lose all your programmed radio stations, clock, trip counter, and you MAY get the orange 4x4 symbol lit. The easiest way to cancel this is, with the engine running turn the steering from one lock to the other. The 4x4 light should then go out.

You can now marvel at how much nicer the new handles look (and feel).