

SPACED OUT

Funky backspringing, tire clearance or mismatched bolt patterns are all "problems solved" if you employ quality wheel spacers

text and photography by the J staff

Wheel spacers have become a common sight on both street and trail Jeeps in the last several years. And for good reason. They provide quick and inexpensive solutions to what are otherwise infuriating and expensive problems.

In the Jeep realm, one of the biggest reasons to install wheel spacers is to provide the necessary clearance when installing larger wheel/tire combinations, usually in conjunction with lifted suspensions. Bigger tires, made possible by a lift kit, will often interfere with suspension components. A surefire way to cure this problem is to install wheels with enough backspringing to move the tire away from the affected components. The downside, of course, is that a set of specialty-sized rims is going to cost a huge bit more than a simple chunk of machined aluminum.

Another way wheel spacers come to the rescue is when trying to fit wheels to axles with incompatible lug configurations. Maybe you picked up a set of six-lug wheels for a song, but your axles are 5-luggers. Or perhaps you've got a set of 5-on-5.5 wheels but 5-on-4.5 axles. Wheel spacers are made to put the squash on such mismatches.

Taking a cue from the sports car set, wheel spacers can change the stance on a vehicle with OE rolling stock by simply moving the wheels outward. This not only adds some visual aggression to the package, but the wider track width enhances on-road stability—not an undesirable commodity on short-wheelbase Jeeps.

Although wheel spacers are increasingly a part of the Jeep enthusiast lexicon, many folks still have questions. To get you the



(Left) Spidertrax wheel spacers are made of 6061T6 anodized aluminum and machined to exacting tolerances to fit specific vehicles. XJ, KJ, ZJ, CJs, YJs and TJs are available in 1.25-inch thickness. JK, WK and Commanders are 1-3/8 to 1.5 inches thick, depending on the application needed. **(Right)** Spidertrax wheel studs come pre-installed and include the necessary lug nuts and thread-locking compound.

answers, we thought it would be interesting to go to the source.

Recently we talked with Tom Kinston of Spidertrax in Longmont, Colorado. Spidertrax has built quite a reputation in off-road circles for their innovative aftermarket products. Although their product offerings are diverse, they may be best known in the Jeep community for

their premium wheel spacers. Understandably, Tom had quite a bit to say about wheel spacers, as well as a few tips for those looking to these products for solutions to their own concerns.

What are the more common reasons folks turn to wheel spacers?

"There are two reasons that surface almost

every time someone needs a wheel spacer. First, many [drivers] are simply looking for a wider stance. The second, and most common, is people installing aftermarket lift kits and bigger tires find out the hard way that proper tire clearance is a big issue.”

Wheel spacers are often used to compensate for incorrect wheel offset or backspacing. What are the limitations when using spacers for this purpose?

“The Spidertrax Wheel Spacer Kit works great for correcting improper wheel offset, but its single limitation is the amount of offset that can be corrected. Since the Spidertrax Wheel Spacer Kit is vehicle-specific, the thickness of

each spacer is predetermined and not adjustable. This allows for not only a perfect fit every time, but that safety is ensured with each installation. So, for example, the Spidertrax Jeep TJ Wheel Spacer Kit comes in one thickness—1-1/4 inches. This will allow the installer to safely correct the wheel backspacing this exact amount, but no more or less.”

Is there ever a benefit to using wheel spacers versus acquiring a wheel with the correct offset/backspacing for a particular application?

“Simplicity, cost savings and availability are the three main advantages of running the Spidertrax Wheel Spacer Kit versus correctly backspaced wheels. From a design and engineering standpoint, there is no question that running a correctly backspaced wheel is the ideal solution. Unfortunately, custom backspaced wheels are often costly and come in limited styles. The Spidertrax Wheel Spacer Kits, being vehicle-specific, make adding offset to existing factory wheels easy, cost effective and safe.”

How do you determine the correct size spacer you need for a particular application?

“There are three main factors that come

into play when we design the spacer thickness. The starting factor is the minimum spacer thickness that will allow the spacer to be installed without vehicle modification. The next factor analyzes the overall strength of the OEM mounting setup (stud size, number of studs, hub centric options). The last factor analyzes the correct scrub radius for most commonly used tire sizes.”

What are some of the potential problems encountered when using wheel spacers?

“Wheel spacers that are of ‘universal’ design and manufactured by hidden third parties pose the most risk. The truth is ‘universal-style’ spacers don’t take into consideration the difference each vehicle’s fit and finish has. Also, you certainly want to know where your wheel spacers are manufactured. Proper QC (quality control) and material selection is critical for any wheel spacer’s performance.”

What are the more common questions customers have about wheel spacers, and what do you tell them?

“Are they safe?” Our vehicle-specific designs and in-house manufacturing ensure our wheel spacer kits to be the safest on the market.

“Is the spacer thickness going to work for me?” Because we make them vehicle-specific, the thickness usually works perfect. In addition, we offer an unmatched ‘competition tested’ 30-day money-back guarantee and a full one-year warranty. Basically, you can install and use the spacers to make sure everything works perfect. If for any reason they are not perfect in every way, you can send them back for a full refund.

“Are they street legal?” This is a tough one because there is no one legitimate answer. The DOT doesn’t regulate this kind of product, so there is nothing that says it isn’t street legal. Your local vehicle inspection has the authority to say it is or isn’t street legal without it being in writing. Best bet is to check with your local vehicle inspection office and get their position before making your decision.”

J

Tom’s Wheel Spacer Tip

“Impact guns are dangerous when installing wheels or wheel spacers,” explains Spidertrax’s Tom Kingston. “Definitely put the impact gun aside and use a good torque wrench. Also, having a friend hold the brakes while the wheel spacer gets the proper torque will keep the drum or rotor from spinning.”

It’s A Snap

For something that cures so many problems, wheel spacers are fall-down simple to employ. Really, sneezing can be more challenging than this...



1. Add a thread-locking compound to your wheel studs.



2. Install the wheel spacer onto the hub.



3. Torque by hand to the recommended specs. Your wheels will now bolt onto the wheel spacer studs.

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