Can you 3D print old car parts?

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Abstract. Mercedes-Benz Classic 3D prints PA12 sunroof rollers for the W 123. What carmakers print for classic cars, and which old trim parts a home printer can copy.

Keywords: replacement-parts, reverse-engineering, asa, home-repair

Table 1. 3D printed classic car parts from the carmakers

Program	Example part	Process and material	Year
Mercedes-Benz Classic	Inside mirror base, 300 SL Coupé (W 198), part A40 198 811 00 25	3D printed aluminum alloy, then chrome plated	2018
Mercedes-Benz Classic	Spark plug holder, 300 SL tool kit, part A198 580 00 65	3D printed polyamide 12 (PA12)	2018
Mercedes-Benz Classic	Sliding sunroof rollers, W 110, W 111, W 112 and W 123, part A110 782 00 30	3D printed PA12	2018
Nissan NISMO Heritage Parts	Wiring-harness protector, R32 Skyline GT-R	HP Multi Jet Fusion in HP PA 11 nylon, produced by SOLIZE	2021
Porsche Classic	Clutch release lever, 959 (originally grey cast iron)	Selective laser melting of tool-steel powder; Porsche's plastic parts are made by selective laser sintering	2018
BMW Group Classic	No part named; components of very old collector cars are 3D scanned to make spare parts that were unavailable	Reverse engineering from a scan	2015

1 Can you 3D print old car parts?

Yes, for the plastic interior and trim parts that are no longer made: knobs, bezels, clips, vent louvers, switch caps and small brackets. Carmakers do it themselves: Mercedes-Benz Classic added 3D printed polyamide sunroof rollers for the W 123 in 2018. Chrome-plated die-cast trim, rubber seals and anything safety-related (brakes, steering, restraints, fuel, wheels) are not home-printer jobs.

1.1 3D printed classic car parts from the carmakers

Figures from the Mercedes-Benz Classic, Nissan, Porsche and BMW Group releases, plus TCT Magazine's report on the HP and SOLIZE process for the Nissan part.

1.2 Why discontinued parts suit printing

A molded part needs a mold. Mercedes-Benz says printing suits small quantities and cases where the genuine tools no longer exist. Porsche Classic stocks some 52,000 parts and reruns the original tools when stock runs low. It prints the parts needed in tiny numbers, such as a lever for a car built 292 times.

Every printed part in the table is an industrial print: powder-bed nylon or laser-melted metal, then tested. Porsche load-tested its lever at almost three metric tons, scanned it by tomography for internal faults and drove it on a test car. Its plastic parts must resist oils, fuels, acids and light. Nissan redesigned and performance-tested its parts for printing, and its heritage range has grown from 80 to 300 parts. A home print copies the geometry. It does not copy that testing.

1.3 What you can and cannot 3D print for a vintage car

- **Plastic cabin trim: yes, in the right plastic.** A dashboard averaged 157 °F (69 °C) after an hour in the sun in an Arizona State University study. Prusa says PLA (polylactic acid) deforms above 60 °C (140 °F). It rates ASA (acrylonitrile styrene acrylate) for use up to 93 °C (199 °F) with high UV resistance. The filament table for replacement parts covers the other materials.
- **Chrome-plated die-cast trim: no.** Bright trim on many classics is a zinc or pot-metal casting under copper, nickel and chromium plate, and Products Finishing calls restoring it specialized work. A print can serve as the casting pattern instead. Polymaker makes PolyCast, a PVB (polyvinyl butyral) filament for investment-casting patterns, and says it leaves 0.003 percent ash after burnout. A foundry casts the metal part from it, and a plater chromes it.
- **Rubber seals: no.** Dow markets its EPDM (ethylene propylene diene monomer) rubber for car weatherseals on its resistance to heat, UV, ozone and aging. TPU (thermoplastic polyurethane) filament is a different polymer: NinjaTek gives NinjaFlex a heat deflection temperature of 60 °C at 0.07 MPa. Parker rates polyurethane rubber in

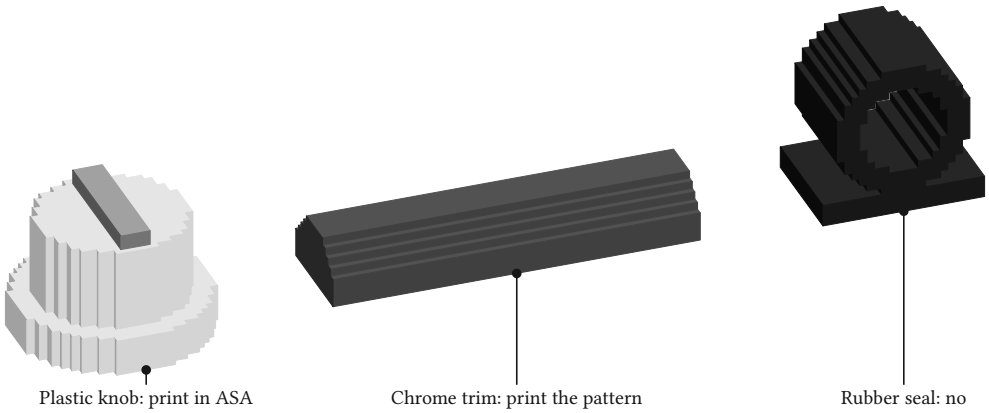


Figure 1. The plastic knob prints in ASA, the chrome trim needs a printed casting pattern, a foundry and a plater, and the rubber seal is not a filament job.

water only to 50 °C and EPDM to 150 °C. Printed gaskets covers where TPU does seal.

- **Safety parts: never.** Brakes, steering, suspension, seat belts and restraints, airbags, the fuel system and wheels stay with original, new-old-stock or reproduction parts made for the car.
- **Badges and logos:** reproducing a maker's mark is a trademark question, covered on is it legal to 3D print replacement parts.

1.4 How to 3D print a discontinued car part yourself

1. **Check supply first.** Look for the part from the maker's classic division, reproduction catalogs and owners' clubs before modeling it.
2. **Measure the original or a donor part.** Glue a broken part together for measuring, or borrow an intact one from another car. Calipers and a profile gauge do most of it; the method is on measuring a broken part without a scanner.
3. **Pick the plastic for where the part lives.** Sun and dashboard heat point to ASA. A shaded clip has more options, listed in the filament table.
4. **Fit-test in cheap filament, then print the final part.** Orient it so the load runs along the layers, as the replacement parts guide explains.
5. **If it fails:** a part that sags in summer was printed in a plastic whose heat limit sits below the cabin's, so reprint it in ASA. A clip that snaps at its base needs a tapered snap-fit arm printed flat.

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