

Five Ways to Latch Your Tailgate

Many of our customers have told us they want to customize the tailgate of their pickup by eliminating the tailgate chains for a smooth clean look. New tailgates are available with or without a chain latch or you may just want to modify your stock tailgate to eliminate the chains. You still need to provide some type of latch to safely and attractively latch the tailgate closed. Following are some of the methods available that have been used successfully. **MAR-K only sells the Sliding Bolt and the MAR-K method. All others are just ideas from our customers trucks - we do not sell parts for these other methods at this time.**

First you need to consider some of the ways the tailgate will be used and how you want it to look when finished. Here are five important questions to be answered as you decide which system to use. Of course other factors to be considered are the skills and equipment available and how much you can spend for the modification. If you plan to purchase a new tailgate, consider one that is manufactured with some of the custom features you are looking for so there will be fewer modifications to be made.

1. Do you want to be able to easily open the tailgate or is it more or less permanently closed?
2. Do you need to be able to hold the tailgate in the open horizontal position, which is normally a function of the hook and chain assembly?
3. Do you want it to latch when slammed closed or just push it closed then actuate some type of system to hold it closed, such as a sliding dead bolt, cabinet latch, or threaded fastener?
4. Do you want the system to be hidden or visible from the outside rear of the bed?
5. Do you want to ever go back to using the original chain latch on your truck? While it is not very pretty, the original system is very simple, reliable, safe, and easily repaired or maintained.

Bolt On Method

The simplest methods usually consist of just finding a way to bolt the original tailgate closed. On some trucks, this method is clean, attractive and effectively eliminates the chains. '41 to '53 GM trucks are quite easily modified in this way. It will take a few minutes to open the tailgate so it is inconvenient if you frequently open the tailgate. There may not be a simple way to hold the tailgate in the open horizontal position. On the positive, you can probably use the original style tailgate and accomplish the desired result with minimum of expense and body work. Some examples of this system are pictured.



Cabinet Latch Method

Some customers choose to install some kind of cabinet latch to the inside of the tailgate and bedside so they may be latched when the tailgate is held closed. There are many sources of these custom latches such as cabinet hardware suppliers, marine parts suppliers for compartment latches on boats, and numerous industrial suppliers. They are much more convenient than the bolted systems but may not be as strong and may be more likely to be opened accidentally. Usually a little custom fitting and drilling is required but the result could work well. Matching cabinet hardware may be available to hold the tailgate in the open horizontal position, as shown in the picture right. This method can be used with either a modified stock tailgate or a new **MAR-K** custom tailgate purchased without the chain latch.



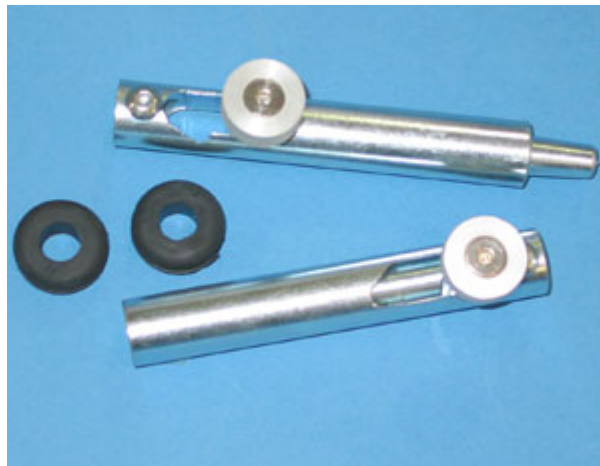
Seat Belt Method

One interesting type of latch that is in this category is the use of a standard seat belt buckle attached to the bed sides and the mating belt end welded to the tailgate. It is generally inexpensive, simple, and quite strong. The finished result is illustrated below on this GM application. You can even carry a short strap with a hook on each end in the glove compartment to hold the tailgate in the open position. Hook one end of the strap in the original eyebolt and the other end in the seat belt latch on the tailgate. Just remove the strap to close the tailgate. This method is very convenient and may be latched simply by slamming the tailgate closed. Depressing both latch buttons at the same time is a two hand operation but not usually an inconvenience.



Sliding Bolt Method

The next step up in appearance is use of a custom or hidden sliding latch that is attached to the top rolled edge of the tailgate. This spring loaded latch slides into a hole drilled in the bedside to hold the tailgate closed. The sliding latch assembly is totally enclosed within the top rolled edge on most GM tailgates except for a small handle that is exposed on the inside of the tailgate. By moving this handle or knob away from the end of the tailgate, the sliding latch is moved so the tailgate may be latched or unlatched. The **MAR-K** latch features a spring-loaded mechanism and a unique cam on the handle to hold the latch in the unlatched position. These systems are designed to retrofit a stock tailgate and may also be used with a custom **MAR-K** "No-Latch" tailgate. The installer may wish to use a strap or folding linkage to hold the tailgate in the open horizontal position. **MAR-K** sells these link assemblies as well. Installation of this type latch requires drilling in the bed sides and tailgate, and touch-up painting may be desired for protection. **See the complete instructions for GM [Stepsides](#) or [Fleetsides](#).**



MAR-K Method (Latch and Handle)

The best system for both appearance and function is the **MAR-K** system with the central handle inside the tailgate and the rotary "bear claw" type latches in the tailgate ends. This tailgate may be slammed closed to latch, opened with one hand, and is very secure and safe. It is virtually invisible from outside the truck with the tailgate closed, and has integral steel check straps to hold the tailgate in the open horizontal position. The tailgate and latching system has been designed for long term reliability. The tailgate sheet metal is 16 gage electro-galvanized steel. The handle is formed from 14 gage steel and pivots on nylon bearings. Rotary latches at each end of the tailgate are rated for 750 lbs. each. Even though you may not be hauling loads in your custom pickup, it is reassuring to know your tailgate will stay closed, with the two rotary latches solidly holding the tailgate to the bedsides.

Installation of the tailgate is straightforward but does require modification and welding on your original bedsides. The customizing kit included with the tailgate comes with complete instructions and all the parts and fasteners needed. You can also order **MAR-K** bedsides with the latch upgrade already installed, if you need new bed sides anyway. The installation instructions, which are also available on-line, provide step by step photos and descriptions of the procedure. Say goodbye to the chains and hooks forever along with the problems of rattling and scratched paint in the tailgate area.

This tailgate has a smooth flush look much like that of a Fleetside tailgate with a smooth tailgate cover. For Chevrolet owners, it is also available with a large Chevrolet 'Bowtie' emblem embossed in the outer skin of the tailgate. Either way, smooth or Bowtie, you will be amazed at the results. These are available for 41-53 or 54-87 GM Stepside trucks.

See **41-53 GM instructions** or **54-87 GM instructions** in our **Tips & Tricks** section.

