

Installing a Pertronix Ignition into your pride-and-joy classic Cadillac

Here's a few tips from the author's experience with the Turk, his 1958 Cadillac Extended Deck Sedan.

If you know me, you know that I like my old Cadillacs as close as possible to the way they were in the Olden Days. It's easier to go boulevard cruising, traveling back to the days of Ozzie and Harriet, when you're surrounded by two-and-a-half tons of original Detroit steel... That is, until you realize you're driving 5,000 miles a year, and you need that old Caddie to keep up with

(and stay clear of) modern traffic. That's why I'm running wide white Michelin *radials* and I shelved my rebuilt generator in favor of a modern *alternator*. And I'm still contemplating a dual master brake setup. However, one of the best things I ever did was to convert my 1958 Cadillac's stock 365 cid engine from the old points and condenser to a modern, electronic ignition and coil. It fires hotter, stays stable for years on end, and I may never have to dig into the distributor cap to change points again. I've had my setup in the Turk (short for TURK-oise) for over twelve years. But for some reason – perhaps this is such a standard modification people assume we already know – no one ever seems to provide details on what all we need for the conversion. Maybe this simple article will help you think your setup through...



First off, realize that you need the correct ignition module.

Obviously, this is for a 12-volt car, so it's not going to work if your Cadillac is 1952 or older (a 6-volt system). Also, note that I have no knowledge of other manufacturers' electronic ignition products, mainly because Pertronix has become the mainstay of such minor modifications. Your 12-volt Cadillac will need the "Pertronix Ignitor" kit, Model 1181, a breakerless ignition made for GM's Delco eight-cylinder overhead valve engines (\$80.99). There are different models with separate numbers for Fords and Chryslers. Don't buy the wrong kit! The wiring approach is detailed in the kit, and it's a fairly simple procedure. The module goes under the distributor cap, replacing the original rotor and points. One screw to fasten inside the distributor, two electrical wires to clamp terminal ends on and connect, and it's done.

If your coil required a ballast resistor when it was used with points, then you must still use the resistor. If it didn't, then no resistor is necessary. In either case, the Pertronix unit's RED wire is supposed to get a full 12 volts, so connect it ahead of the ballast resistor if one is present. To skip the resistor wire issue I just used the matching Pertronix coil, because the resistor is built in. Finally, in case you were wondering, a new generator or conversion to an alternator is not required – although in full disclosure, the Turk has been converted to run an alternator.





You should probably use a hotter coil, and Pertronix bundles the right one with its Ignitor. You'll want the 1.5 ohm, 40,000 volt "Flamethrower" hot coil, Model 40011, in black. (Don't draw attention to it with the chrome version!) It will run you \$38.99 at Summit Racing. These oil-filled coils are higher voltage to allow slightly larger plug gaps for added power, smoother response, and better gas mileage. They have internal resistors, so the wiring is simplified. No need for a resistor wire if you use this coil.

Finally, you will need a proper set of RFI Suppression, high energy, carbon-core spark plug wires. Never use solid core plug wires, they

will eventually burn out your Ignitor module. I've been running an aging and mismatched set of older suppression wires and I've been fighting suspicious issues like hesitation on acceleration for a while now. Time for new wires! Relax, "RFI suppression" merely means they won't interfere with your radio, a problem I've never had because I don't use the AM radio in my car. But the stainless steel-sleeved carbon cores of these wires provide lower resistance than copper plug wires to get the benefit of the hotter coil. You're going to want the 7.0 mm "Stock-Look" plug wires. I bought a set of wires *finished on both ends* with a straight boot.



("Cut and crimp" sets are unfinished, with one end uncrimped so you can fabricate custom lengths for various size blocks. You have to have a good crimping tool and be good at fabricating the plug ends of these wires, so I bought the finished wires at the same price.) The wires I needed for the Cadillac are Part # 708102, made by Pertronix and labeled "Flamethrower" high performance spark plug wires. When I spoke with the customer service rep at Pertronix he said they don't have enough demand for Cadillac kits; they sell mostly to Chevy buffs. He didn't have a recommendation for the Cadillac, nor did he know what to tell me, other than "No, don't take the Pertronix ignitor out of your distributor!" So, I asked for the wires they recommended for a big block Chevy, say a 409. "Oh, yeah, we can do that!" I ordered mine online from Summit Racing because Pertronix didn't have them in stock. Summit shipped mine the same day and I had them before 3:00 PM the next day for \$52.00 plus shipping and tax. The stock look skips those outrageous blue cables and leaves out the white lettering to resemble original wires. The wires for a 409 had two wires that are longer than I needed, but that wasn't a huge deal to me. I just let them flow back between the distributor and the firewall.

When all was said and done here's what I had invested in the electronic system:

- Ignitor 1181: \$ 80.99
- Flamethrower coil: \$ 38.99
- High energy plug wires: \$ 51.99
- Total: \$171.97

For comparison, replacing your old points, condenser, coil and rotor at USA Parts Supply would cost you:

- Rotor \$ 8.62

- Condenser: \$ 5.95
- Points: \$17.95
- Coil: \$34.95
- Total: \$67.47

I had been adjusting points more than once a year before I converted, and other than these new plug wires I haven't spent on the ignition in years. So you can see that the money and time savings can really add up over time!

Let me know what you think of this article, and come on out to race me sometime...

Doug Bailey,

The Turk: 1958 Cadillac Extended Deck Sedan