

Wheel Spacer Tech + New Jeep JK Project + Going Topless?

TRAILS

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SPARE TIRE DELETE PAGE 65



SPIDERTRAX WHEEL SPACERS INSTALL PAGE 74



WHEEL SPACERS BY SPIDERTRAX

THE WHY, WHEN AND HOW

Words & photos by John Herrick

Wheel spacers of various types have been around for years. There are good ones and there are most definitely bad choices to be made. The reasons for running them in the first place are fairly simple. You need to mount a tire that will no longer fit on your stock setup or you need to change your bolt pattern to accommodate different wheels from a different application. In either situation, buying and installing the right product will accomplish the goal and keep you safe.

For our Project JK 2-door, I wanted to run the stock Jeep wheels for as long as I could. The build goals were to limit weight gain and I was going to avoid running beadlock wheels with their heavier weight. I also wanted to run the rig in a fairly stock form as I hadn't wheeled a stock vehicle in nearly 20 years. To that end, I chose a set of Spidertrax wheel spacers because I've used them in the past and they are American made by an engineering company that is fixated on high quality. I knew these were going to be perfect for this application.

I chose the 5 x 5" bolt pattern to match the JK. What that means is there are five lug studs and they are measured at five inches apart. Previous Jeeps have had 5 x 5.5" (think old CJ) and 5 x 4.5" (think TJ, XJ, YJ, etc.). The "modern" Jeeps, like the JK and JL have the 5 x 5". You can choose a spacer that actually converts your pattern. If you have a favorite set of wheels that have a different pattern, you likely can get a spacer that will convert a 5 x 5" to a 5 x 4.5" so you can use your TJ wheels on your JK build or vice versa.

In my case, the factory wheels came mounted with tires that were sized 255/75R17. This is nominally a 32" tall and 10" wide tire. While the Jeep had low mileage for a 2012 at only 23,000 miles, the prior owner had never replaced the tires and they were the OEM provided units and nine years old. I chose a Milestar Patagonia in a 285/70R17 which measures nominally at 32.7" tall and 11.25" wide. I'll go to something larger yet when the suspension lift is done but for now I needed something to get me down the road without the risk of aging tires that might blowout at the worst possible time.

The OEM wheels have a large amount of backspace which is the distance from the inside rim or lip of the wheel to the wheel mounting

surface. Take a look at the before and after photos and it will make sense. When you add a larger tire to a wheel with a lot of backspace, the tire, if wider than the factory used, can rub when making turns. It may rub on the lower control arms, the front bumper, inner fender or steering components.

The OEM wheels have a backspace of 6.25". By adding spacers that distance became 4.75". This change effectively puts the tire & wheel out further, widening the stance a total of three inches, adding some stability and allowing the clearance needed to avoid rubbing. There are limits to how far you can go with this but the tire size I chose allows it to work really well.

Once the spacers arrived it was a simple job to install them but there are some key aspects that need to be addressed. Follow the instructions. Use a torque wrench. This is not a time to be happy with "good & tight" torque. It needs to be right.

The Spidertrax spacer is a beautiful thing to look at. It's made from US sourced 6061 T6 aluminum billets that are machined and then anodized for corrosion resistance. It's a harsh world down at the wheel. They give your spacers a fighting chance at staying in shape.

The lug studs they use are 4140 chromoly with a corrosion resistant coating so your lug nuts, also provided, stay in place once they're torqued to the right spec. Each package comes with two spacers with lug studs installed, ten lug nuts and enough thread locking compound to secure them all as well as complete and detailed instructions for your application. Every part and process is US made.

Follow along as I install these and reap the benefits of a wider tire and stance. **[T]**

SPIDERTRAX

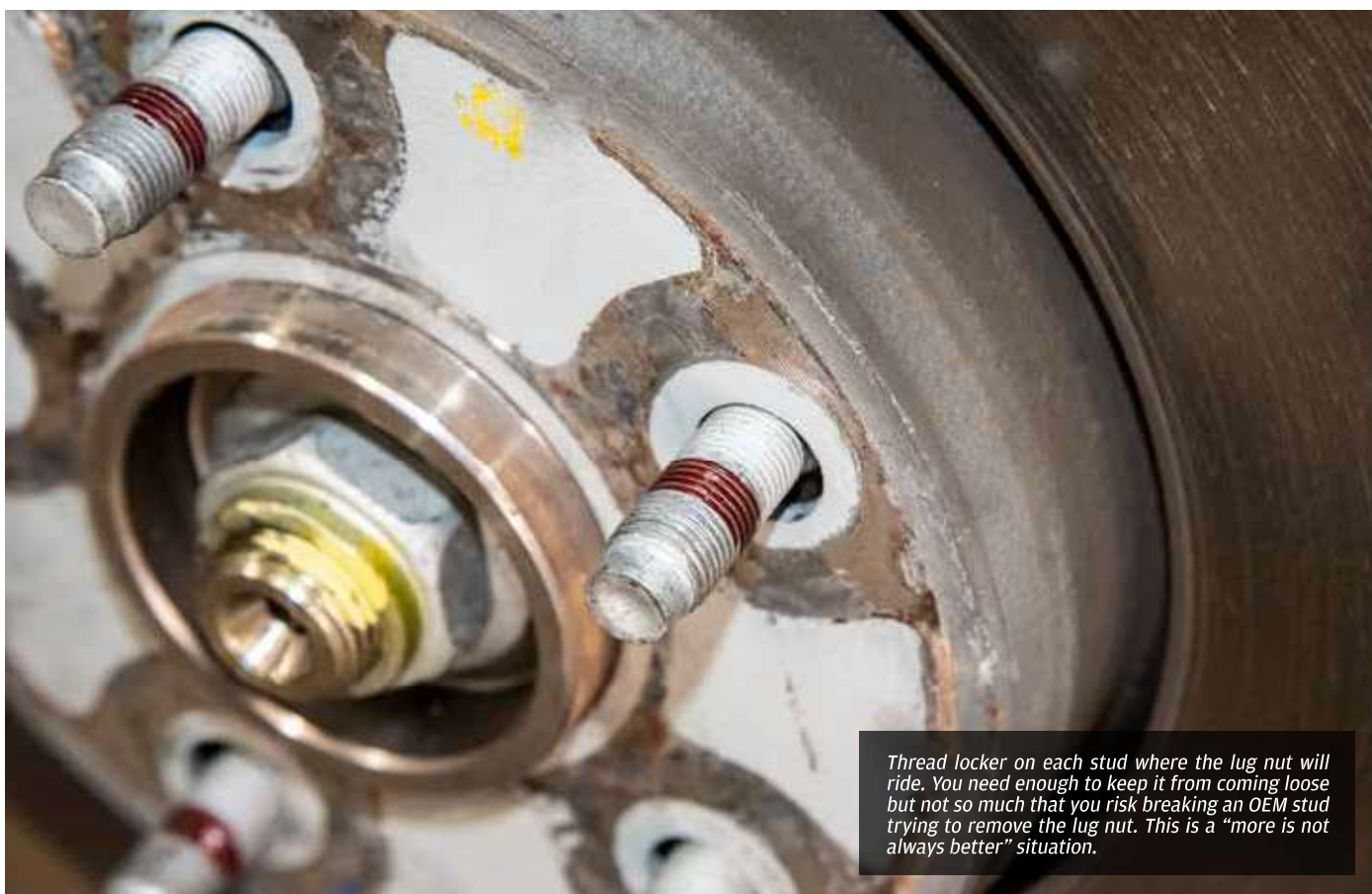
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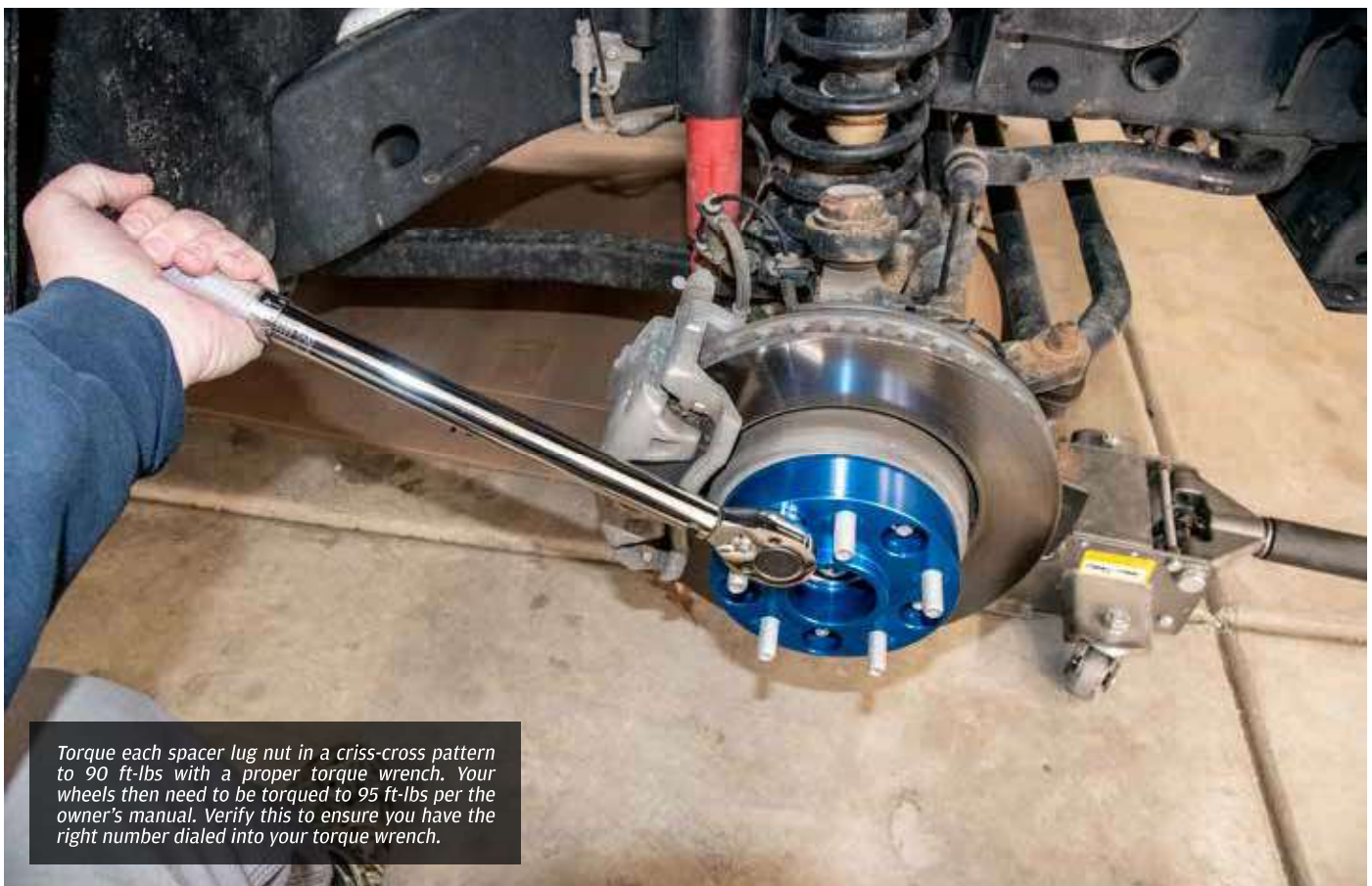




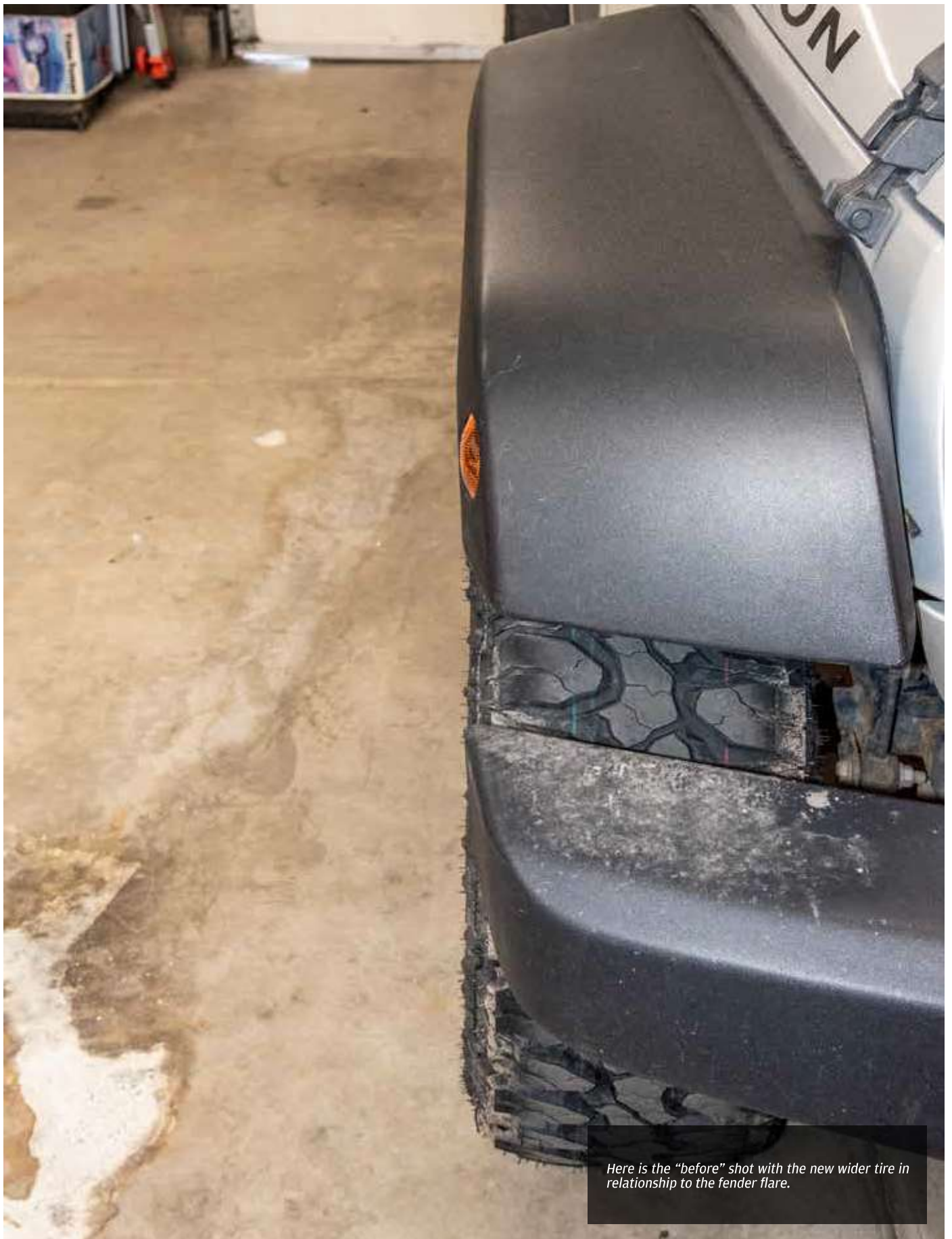


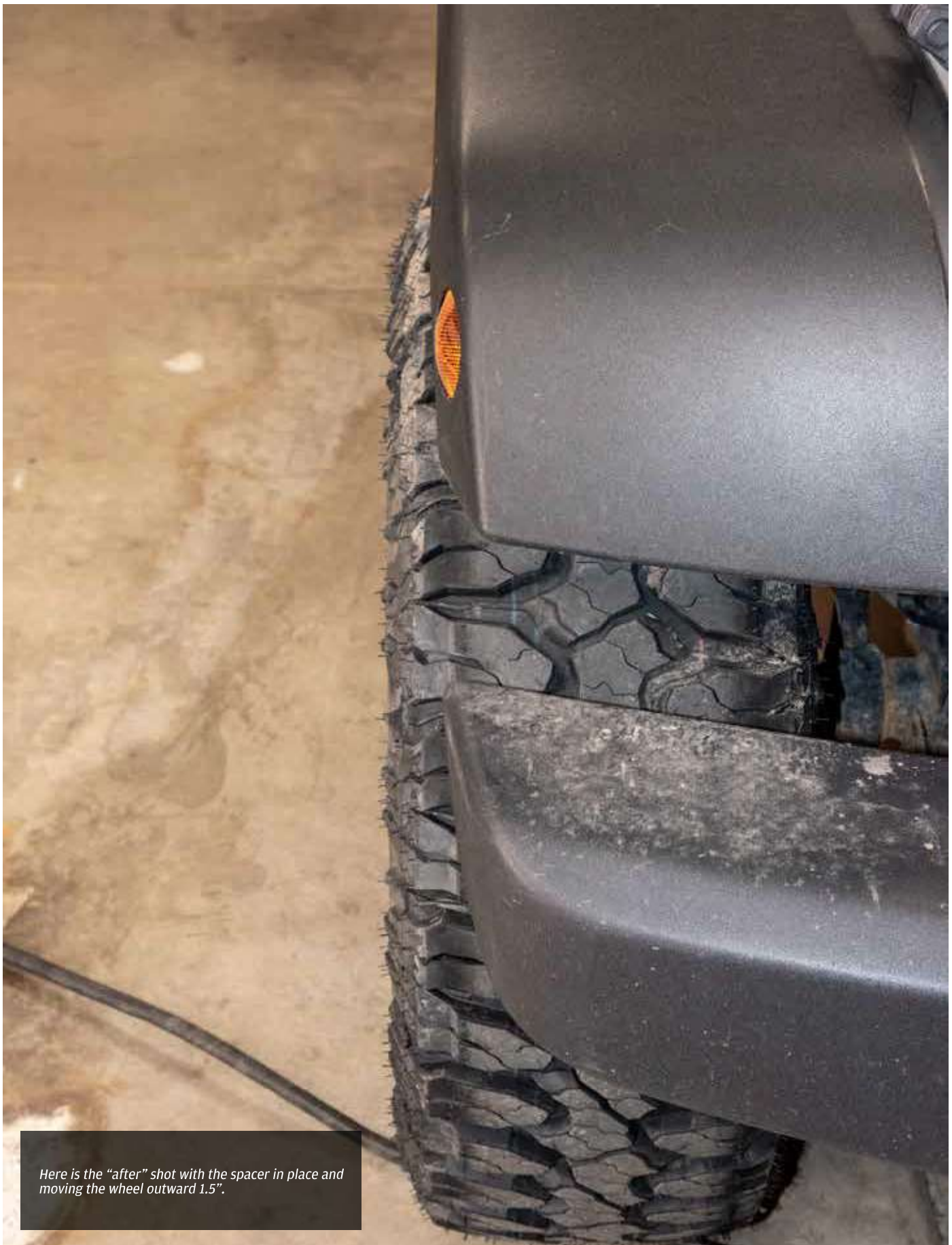


The spacer is in position and I've snugged up the lug nuts but they are not yet tightened to the 90 ft-lbs requirement. Do not use an impact gun for this.



Torque each spacer lug nut in a criss-cross pattern to 90 ft-lbs with a proper torque wrench. Your wheels then need to be torqued to 95 ft-lbs per the owner's manual. Verify this to ensure you have the right number dialed into your torque wrench.





Here is the "after" shot with the spacer in place and moving the wheel outward 1.5".



The "Little Feller" is out running with the big kids in Moab at Easter Jeep Safari.



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