

The Preventive Maintenance Series

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Early Model & FC Running and Parking Light Sockets: Problems and Solutions

Keep in mind that in this article “socket” means the part that the bulb fits into with a twisting motion. “Housing” means the part that the socket fits in to and is attached to the body.

It is assumed that the bulbs are good when you troubleshoot. Check the bulbs with an ohm meter connected from the bulb base to the contact(s). Use the beep function or lowest scale; you are only looking for continuity.

Be sure you never use an ohm meter on a circuit with power applied. Your meter could be ruined since it has to operate on its own low power source.

Since only a small amount of voltage and current are used in an ohm meter, it is extremely important to make sure you have good contact. Paint, rust or caked on oil or grease can give you a zero reading. The same can apply to a volt meter so scratch around with the leads while watching the meter to make sure you have good contact.

Rear:

Loss of a good ground is the most common issue, and can occur between the socket and the housing and between the housing and the body. Two ways to check: **1**, with the car and lights off, use a test light with a probe, hooking the probe clamp to the positive battery or any positive source that is handy. Probe the housing first checking for body ground. Next probe the socket watching for dimming or absence of light in your tool. The steel sockets are clenched onto the aluminum housing and after 50+ years no longer have a good electrical connection. **2**, Another method for checking grounds is to turn the parking lights on and use a jumper that is grounded on one end and attached to a small pick. Simply probe the housing to see if the bulb lights with the additional ground, and then do the same on the socket.

For cars, the ground between the housing and the body is provided by a backing plate and clamping action. Four flattened tips press against the body and are exposed to the rear tires. Remove the housing and backing plate, bend the tips slightly, and sharpen them to dig into the housing. Use a slight twisting action when tightening the housing screws. (FC vehicles have screws attaching the housing the body.

If all grounds prove good, turn the parking lights on and use your voltmeter to probe the socket contact(s) for power. Since you push down on the bulb to remove it, the contacts can stick in the socket in the down position and may not return to make bulb contact. Try WD40 inside past the springs and use needle nose pliers to work the spring action. Another possibility is to add a drop of solder to each bulb contact and dress them up. The extension may solve the problem. New housings are available or you could cut off the old socket and get a pop in socket with a separate ground (or solder one) to fit. You have

to peen the socket to the housing. Protect from weather since the rear housing are exposed to the rear tires. You could also solder a ground wire on the existing rear socket and then to any point on the body. Some new parts store sockets have ground spade connectors.



Repair Socket for the Rear from a Local Parts Store

Front:

The fronts are a pop in socket which is plastic with a push in bulb support which has two grounding tabs. The grounding tabs can get bent and rusty and the steel insert can pull out of the socket. Perform the same grounding tests as with the rear except you need to pull the socket out slightly to use a thin probe on the ground tabs. The front sockets are inexpensive and available at any auto parts store as they are the same as many other GM products. One note on new sockets: the Chinese copies are not exact where the plastic fits against the housing. The originals had a taper at that point while the copies are flat and will not snap in. I have had these slowly come back out of late models but not early models (yet). Use a hacksaw blade to slot the plastic slightly and as close to the ridge as you can.

Check the two power contacts in the socket with it out of the housing. They get bent and the bulb cannot reach them. If you have difficulty “re-springing” them, just get a new socket as noted above.



Original and Replacement All Metal Shell For the Front
Both Available at Local Parts Stores

