

# New Canvas

## Soft Top Replacement

By Aaron Smith

**A**t some point during the ownership of your Miata, the convertible top will need to be replaced. The average life of a Miata top is about five to seven years depending on use, care, and the weather. When the time comes to replace the top on your Miata, consider doing the job yourself. You can save yourself between \$300 and \$500 in labor by spending an afternoon installing the top on your own.

When it comes to buying a new top, there are quite a few options from which to choose. One can simply choose another vinyl top with a plastic rear window similar to the original. Some companies offer tops with three windows and other companies offer tops in custom colors. For those looking to upgrade, cloth tops are available as well as tops

with a glass rear window. Even rear window defrosters are available for certain year Miatas. Prices for a new top range from \$200 to \$800 with the cloth and glass tops coming in with the highest price tags.

Some tops are made of high quality material, but don't include a rain rail. Transferring the rain rail is the most tedious part of the job. An upholstery shop can transfer the rain rail for you; however, the idea here is to make this a do-it-yourself project. Robbins sent us a Sun Fast cloth top with a glass rear window. This top came with a new rain rail already attached and saved us hours of time. If you choose to purchase a top without the rain rail, it is possible to do the installation yourself. However, we recommend that only those who are very experienced attempt to do this.



1) Begin the installation by removing the doorsill scuff plates, the beltline cover trim, and the door seam seal.





2) If you own a 1994 to 1997 Miata, remove the seatbelt lower brace by first prying off the covers on the end, then remove the two bolts that hold the brace to the car. Now, remove the brace.



3) Next, remove the fasteners that secure the rear quarter panels and remove them. The rear shelf carpeting is held in place by several plastic clips. Carefully pry out the clips. It's nearly impossible not to break a few, but they are inexpensive to replace. Once all of the clips have been removed, remove the carpet.



4) Removal of the carpet will reveal the 13 bolts that attach the set plate and rain rail to the car. Remove all 13 bolts and then remove the set plates.



5) Unlatch the top from the windshield header and remove the two screws that attach the window seal to the front of the top on each side.



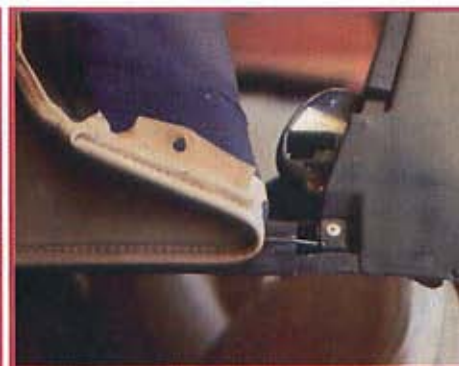
6) Remove the seal from the chrome holder by simply pulling it away from the top. Remove the center section of the seal by pulling it out. The last section of seal should be pulled back from the top, but not completely removed. It will remain attached to the bottom of the top until the top assembly is removed from the car.



7) Remove the three chrome seal retainers on each side by removing the screws that hold them in place.



8) Remove the set plate at the front of the top by removing the seven screws that attach it.



9) You will now be able to begin to peel the top back a bit. Stop when you reach the cables found on each side.



10) Drill out the rivet on each side that holds the cable in place.





11) Peel the top back to the first bow. Pry the bow open with a flat blade screwdriver and the top will be released from the bow. Repeat the same procedure for the next bow. Guide the cable ends through the top, but leave the end with the spring attached to the frame. The third bow has a Velcro strip that runs along it that must be opened. Once open, the third bow can be released in the same manner as the previous two.



12) With the top partially attached to the frame, the next step is to remove the entire assembly from the car. Begin by removing the three bolts on each side that attach the frame to the car. Pull the rain rail away from the car and make sure that it is clear of all mounting studs. Remove the press-in clips that attach the rain rail to the car on each end. Next, with an assistant, lift the top and frame from the car. Find a soft surface and set the top down upside down.



13) Remove the rear weather stripping by prying the plastic retainers out with a screwdriver. Then, remove the screw that holds the metal end piece to the top and remove the piece.



14) Drill out the two rivets on each side along the back of the window frame. Then, drill out the two rivets on the link assembly. The top should now be free from the frame assembly and ready for removal.



15) Place the new top on a soft surface being careful to protect the rear window. Place the top frame upside down over the new top. Begin by reattaching the metal end piece removed in step #13. Then, use the rivets included with the new top and reinstall them along the B pillar.



16) Attach the top to the rear bow again by wrapping it around the bow and then sliding the end into the slot. Press the slot closed with your hand and then give it a firm tap with a leather or wood headed hammer.



17) Place the top back onto the car and reinstall the six bolts that attach the frame to the car. Properly torque the bolts.

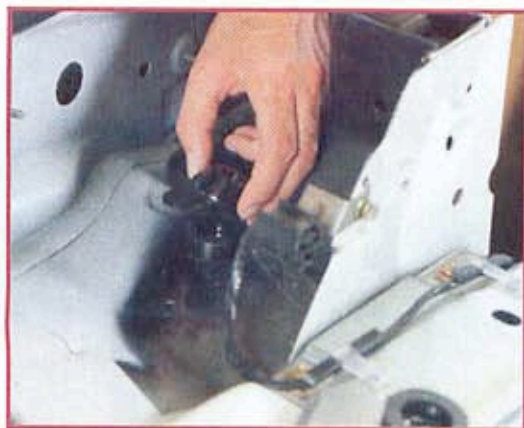


18) Route the cable through the new top using the pull strings provided with the top. Because of the end piece, pulling the cable through the hole is difficult. Be patient and slowly work it through. Then, reattach the rest of the bows as described in step #17.



19) Rivet the cables to the top using the provided rivets. We found that the hole in the top frame was slightly smaller than the rivet and we had to widen the hole with a drill to make it work.





20) To prevent the top from resting on the glass window, spacers are included to keep the frame from lowering as far as it did with the original top.



21) One notable difference between the Robbins top and the OEM top is the fact that the Robbins top includes a much higher quality zipper.

The rest of the installation involves reversing the order of removal. Two people will be required in some areas when stretching the new top into place. When tightening the rain rail, special instructions are included showing the proper tightening order to provide even tension on the top. Getting the weather seals around the windows correct may require a few adjustments.

Once the top is completely attached to the frame, it's time to close it. It will require two people to pull the top closed and latch it. Once latched, it should remain closed for one to two weeks in order to allow it to stretch. Warm weather will accelerate the process of stretching the top, but may drive you crazy wanting to put down the top.

The new material of the top looks great and the improved reward clarity of the glass window is amazing. It almost looks as if there isn't a window there at all. Lowering the top is the same as the original top and the rear window still needs to be unzipped. The top will not fold as flatly as the original because of the spacers. Depending on the tightness of your boot, a new boot might be needed. Robbins sells boots that are designed to work better with the glass window tops.

We also installed a MAX-5 rear window protector provided to us by Performance Buyers Club. This window protector was originally designed to work with vinyl windows, but it also works with the glass window of our new Robbins top. The protector connects to the snaps where the boot connects on the rear shelf and has male snaps to allow for the continued use of the boot. Made from heavy-duty vinyl, this protector not only protects the window, it looks sharp too. 🚗



#### TORQUE SPECIFICATIONS:

<b>Rain Rail</b>	<b>79-104 in • lbf</b>
<b>Seatbelt tower brace</b>	<b>47-68 ft • lbf</b>
<b>Top frame</b>	<b>14-18 ft • lbf</b>

#### Sources:

**MM Marketing**  
222 Franklin St.  
Fayetteville, NC 28301  
800-666-4282  
[www.mmmiata.com](http://www.mmmiata.com)

**Moss Motors Ltd.**  
440 Rutherford St.  
Goleta, CA 93117  
800-642-8295  
[www.miatamania.com](http://www.miatamania.com)

**Performance Buyers Club**  
14620C Flint Lee Road  
Chantilly, VA 20151  
800-359-4093  
[www.performancebuyers.com](http://www.performancebuyers.com)

**R-Speed**  
1011 South Marietta Pkwy #4  
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888-551-0025  
[www.rspeed.net](http://www.rspeed.net)

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