Tech Talk: C2 Luggage Stop Panel Repair

By Ed Szeliga

If you have a C2, there is a good chance that the carpet covered, near vertical "luggage stop panel" directly behind the seats is probably bent to toward the back of the car. The panel is approximately 48 inches across, is made of thin gauge steel and is an inviting feature to place one's hand on (and upper body weight) when attempting to retrieve something from the storage wells or the luggage area. The result of using the panel as a support brace is that it has a tendency to deflect from its original shape up to two inches. The panel is securely fastened to the fiberglass body with no less than 10 rivets making it reasonably sturdy and somewhat difficult to remove and reinstall. Accordingly, the issue is, if your panel is noticeably bent from years of leaning on it, how do you straighten it without removing it?

While the panel is a relatively thin gauge metal, whacking it with a hammer, even if you use a block of wood as a hammering surface won't straighten it. The metal has a tendency to resist straightening from moderate hammer blows and, if you were to whack it with sufficient force to alter its shape you would likely loosen some rivets and possibly even pull a few out through the fiberglass.

While preparing my storage area for new carpet I discovered a way to easily straighten the panel that posed no risk of damage to it or other components. The trick is to apply even and steady pressure to the back side of the panel and uniformly force (or bend) it towards the front of the car until it is straight, as originally designed.

I was able to straighten my bent panel by employing a few items I had laying around my shop – if you don't have the exact same items, I am sure you will be able to improvise with other like items. The items I used include: two short (about 4 inch long) scrap pieces of 2 x 4; two 12 inch long, general purpose "trigger clamps"; a 48 inch long piece of 1 inch diameter "black (iron) pipe"; and a several 4 inch C-clamps.

I positioned the black pipe along the front top edge of the panel and positioned a wood block between the panel and black pipe at the extreme ends of the pipe. I used trigger clamps to hold the wood blocks and pipe in place (Figures 1 & 2).

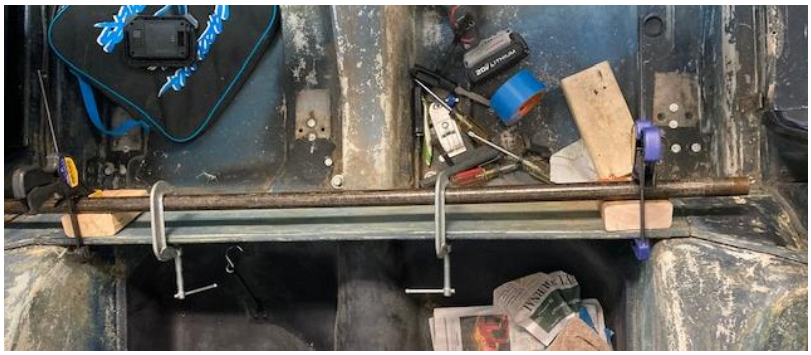

Figure 1: Pipe positioned on panel

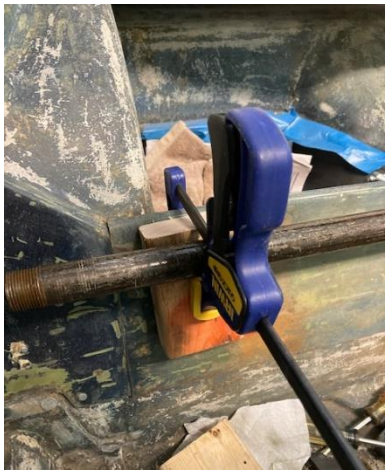

Figure 2: Trigger clamp

Once the black pipe (or some other relatively rigid length of material) is clamped in place you are ready to begin bending the panel back to its original (straight) configuration. I accomplished this last step by positioning three 4 inch C-clamps over the black pipe and behind the panel (See Figure 1 again). Although the picture only shows two C-clamps, I used three, one in the center and one about 18 inches out, on either side of center.

Once the C-clamps are in position just begin to tighten them. As the clamps get tight they will pull the somewhat pliable metal panel toward the rigid, non-bendable, black pipe. You will have to tighten the clamps until the panel is bowed a bit toward the front of the car and beyond the ultimately desired straight position. You need to do this to get the panel straight because when you release the tension on the C-clamps the panel will spring back more than desired. Getting the panel straight to your satisfaction is a simple trial and error operation. I did not check the "straightness" of my panel with a straight edge – I just eyeballed it.

Depending on the items you have around your shop, you might use thicker wood blocks and larger C-clamps. This technique is not a precision operation. The major advantage of this procedure is that it places absolutely no stress what-so-ever on the rivets that secure the panel to the fiberglass or on the fiberglass. And, I suppose you could do it with the carpet in place. So, that is it. If you have questions please feel free to contact me, edszeliga@comcast.net or call 703-862-8101.