

Curing LIFTGATE woes

So your Nomad's liftgate leaks. Don't feel like the Lone Ranger. That problem has plagued Nomad owners from the time the cars were new.

Part of the problem was the structure of the liftgates. They are die-cast pot metal, a comparatively soft alloy also used for '55 Nomad eyebrow, fender and door moldings and other parts. Chevrolet installed torsion bars to make the heavy (25-30 lbs.) unit easier for owners to open.

According to liftgate straightening expert Jerry Cabunoc, two common practices caused the liftgates to warp. First of all, owners would usually lift the 'gate in the middle. Then they drove with the 'gate open, whether for ventilation or carrying cargo. Not knowing any better,



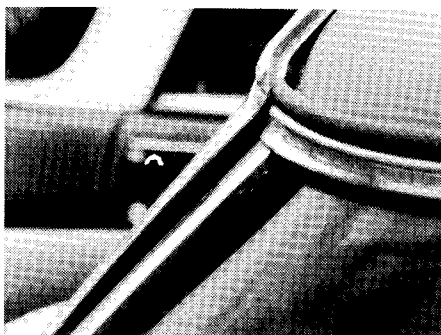
they ended up with warped liftgates before they understood what caused the problem. While helping the owner raise the liftgate, over years of use the torsion bars also contribute to twisting the top of the frame upward in the middle and flattening the arc, Jerry says.

If your liftgate fits well, follow the advice Jerry gives owners after he's finished returning their 'gates to original straightness:

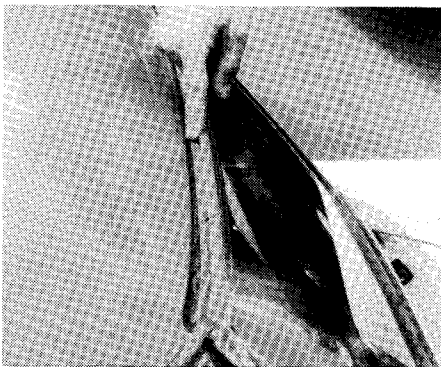
1. Remove the torsion bars and leave them out.

(Continued on page 12)

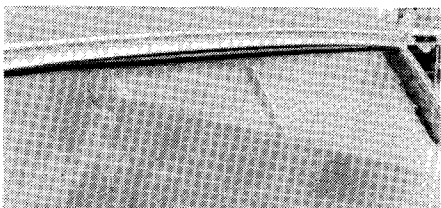
BEFORE



Gapsosis! Years of use and abuse leave Nomad liftgates warped and twisted. There's no way weather seal, new or not, can keep the rain out of the cargo area. Lifting the 'gate in the middle, driving with it up and twisting of the torsion bars all contribute to the condition. Jerry Cabunoc called Jim Jack's '56 at left one of the worst he's seen. After Jerry got done (right), it fit a whole lot better.

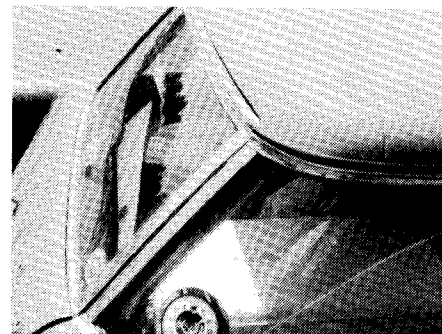


On Frank Carlson's '56 Jerry points out how the torsion bars have contributed to taking the arc out of the top rail to leave a water-catching gap. At right, it's bowed back into shape and, with new weatherstripping, should be water-tight.



Top bar of the liftgate is usually spread upward in the center, pulling away from the glass seal rubber. After the Cabunoc treatment, it's back to square, matching the glass.

AFTER



2. Hold the corners, rather than the middle, when raising or lowering the liftgate. Open the tailgate far enough so the liftgate will clear. Then you can reach the corners and raise the liftgate with your body erect.

3. Never drive with the liftgate open or leave it open for a long time in heat or sun.

If a warped liftgate is one of your problems, Jerry recommends straight-

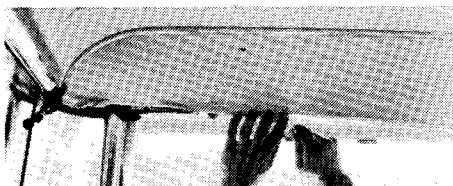
ening it before having it rechromed and installing new weatherstripping.

Deformed liftgates seem to be a universal problem. When Jerry brought his specially built jig to the Nomad Convention in Minnetonka last summer, Nomad owners kept him and Wayne Rife busy straightening liftgates all week long! That gave us a chance to watch and photograph the process. Follow along as we show

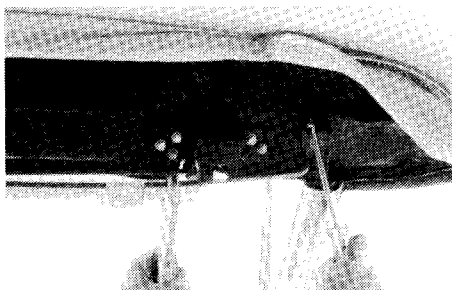
how he does it. Even if you have Jerry or someone else straighten your liftgate, you'll need to remove the glass and weatherstripping and ship just the bare frame with the frame ends attached.



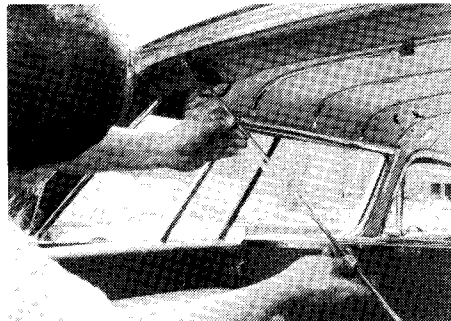
Measure the glass opening in the middle. It should be 15-3/4", the same as at the outer edges.



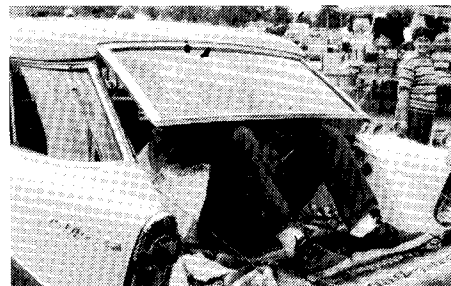
Remove the stainless inside trim from around the back of the roof. Pull the headliner loose and remove the metal panels behind the headliner for access to the torsion bars.



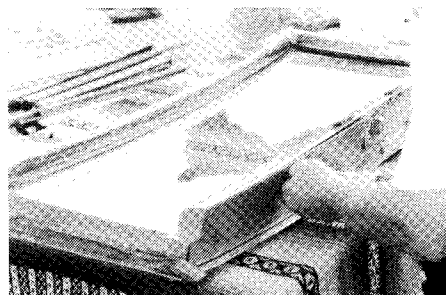
With Vise-Grips break the torsion bars loose from the bracket that holds them in the middle. Then clamp the Vise-Grip tight on the torsion bar to hold it and release some tension as you pry the end of the torsion bar loose from the end bracket. You must hold it so it won't spring loose and hit you.



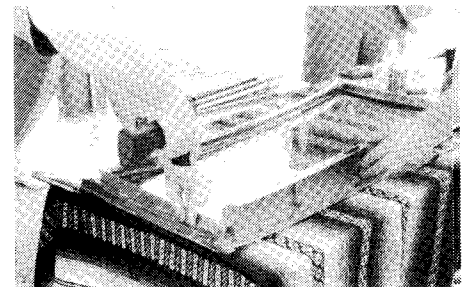
Remove the torsion bars and leave them out. They contribute to twisting the liftgate frame out of shape.



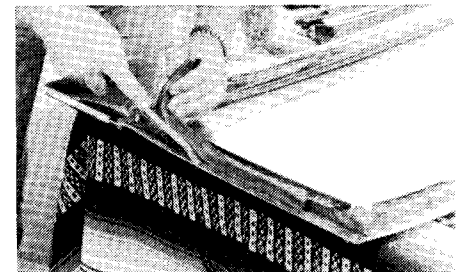
Unbolt the liftgate from the hinges and support arms and remove it. If you are working alone, you can support the 'gate on your knees while removing the bolts.



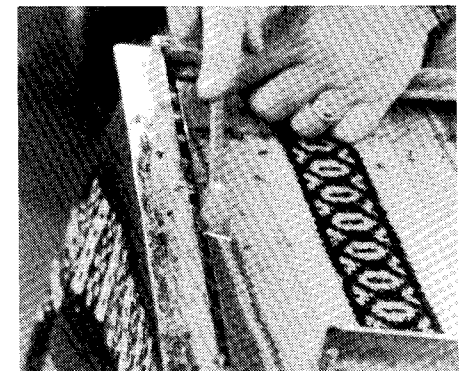
Remove the cover panels (metal) on the bottom of the liftgate and the sill (painted die-cast).



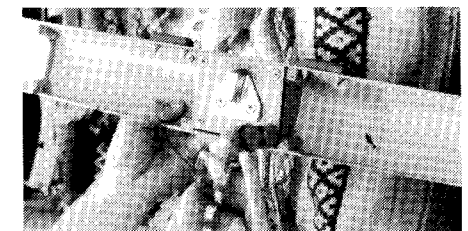
Also remove the chrome frame ends.



With a scraper, remove the weatherstripping from the liftgate frame.



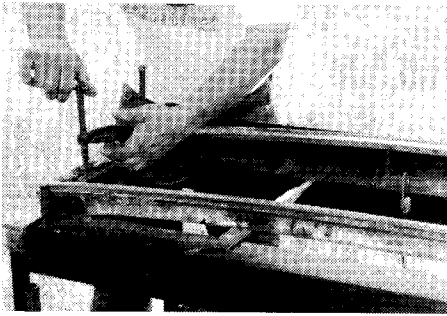
Clean rubber and adhesive from the frame. Carefully loosen the glass at the bottom; when it will clear the lip of the frame, pull it down out of the channel. When you put the glass back in with new rubber, use a dull, rounded-end screwdriver to work the rubber out around the glass without damaging the rubber.



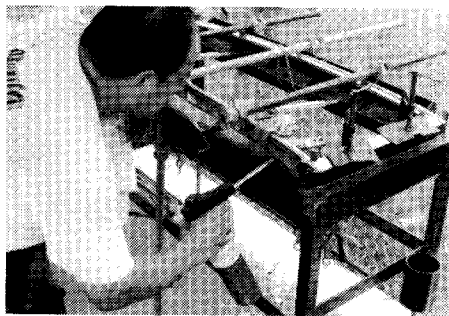
To eliminate a common rattle source, rap the rivets holding the male portion of the latch to tighten the plate.

SOURCE

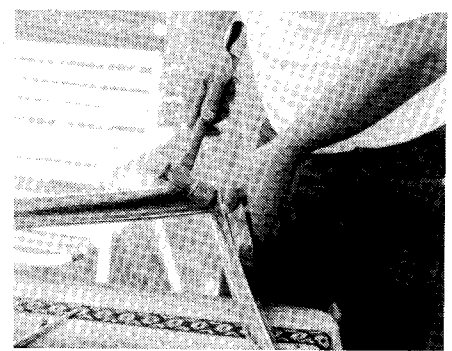
Jerry Cabunoc
1011-1/2 N. Van Ness
Santa Ana, CA 92701
Phone 714-558-8890 eves



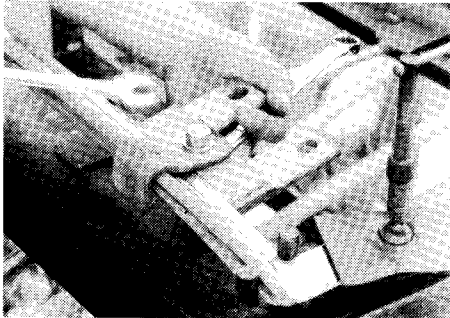
Jerry fastens the liftgate to the jig with C-clamps. He and Troy Kramer built the jig just for straightening Nomad liftgates.



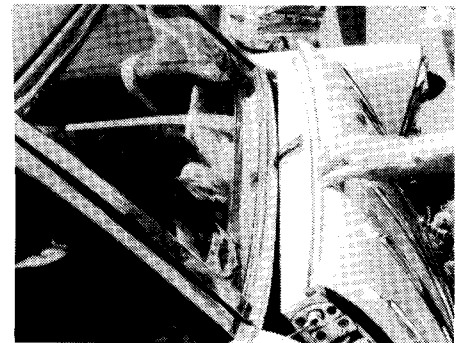
With everything clamped down and all the measurements checked, Jerry applies low heat with a propane torch, which will relieve tension so it will hold its shape. Then the frame is allowed to cool.



If necessary, Jerry makes final minor adjustments with heat and careful nudging with a hammer and block.



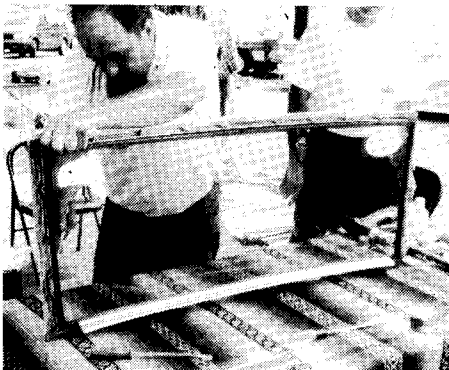
Install new rubber on the glass.



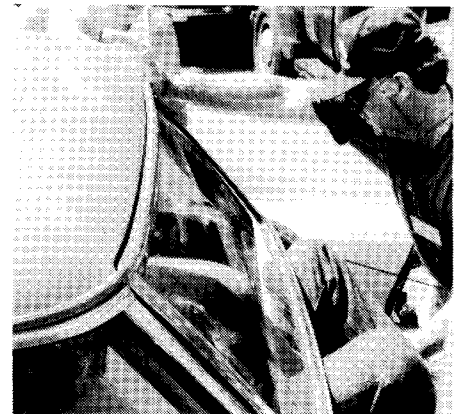
Straightening the liftgate will make the latch work without hitting the plate on the tailgate.



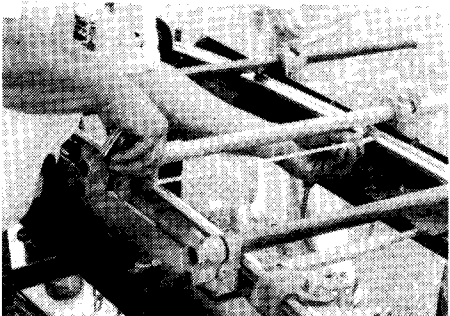
Steel plates attach to the top bar of the frame. Then Jerry attaches turnbuckles and tightens them to remove the twist in the top bar. He uses a gauge to determine when it's back to original straightness.



Reinstall the glass into the frame. Jerry recommends lubricating the rubber with WD-40 to allow it to slip into the frame more easily.



Reinstalling the liftgate is easier with a helper (Wayne Rife, in this case) to hold the top corners in to compress the weatherstrip while Jerry tightens the mounting bolts. Shims may be needed to adjust the liftgate to fit tight to the body. Jerry recommends spraying WD-40 on the screws and installing them with a #2 posi drive Phillips screwdriver.



Bar clamps are installed and adjusted to pull the top and bottom bars of the frame to the correct 15-3/4" measurement.



Screw the frame ends back into place.

If the steel channel that holds the weatherstrip in the top of the opening is rusted, Jerry makes a stainless steel replacement. He also recommends installing auxilliary weatherstripping GM offered to cure leaks. Lubricate the rubber with transmission fluid or Vaseline and re-treat it periodically.

Liftgate fit was always a problem

If you've ever cursed your Nomad's leaking liftgate, don't think you were the first. The guys who installed them at the factory did, too!

"A total nightmare" is the way A.B. Moore described trying to fit liftgates to Nomad bodies in late 1954. "You can't believe the frustration. We wanted to shoot the engineers!"

Hanging liftgates -- or maybe trying to hang liftgates -- on Nomads was Moore's last job before he was promoted to supervisor at the Fisher Body Plant in Euclid, Ohio. He worked for General Motors for 34 years, from 1950 to 1984. Now retired, he lives in a Cleveland suburb.

Moore recalled that the liftgates were supposed to be pot metal, but with what he and his colleagues had to try to make them fit, the pot metal was breaking, so solid brass liftgates were sent to Euclid.

"They'd send up about 10 (from the Detroit casting plant where they were made), and we'd grind and pound them, trying to make them fit," he said. "Oh, it would scare a person what we did! Then (the casting plant) would make adjustments and send 10 more on a chartered airplane."

Moore said the first 200 Nomad liftgates were brass. They continued to use it until they achieved the best

shape and fit possible. Then molds were made and the rest of the liftgates were cast from pot metal. So that's the story behind the brass liftgates found today on early-production Nomads.

Asked if he thought Chevrolet rushed the Nomad into production before all the bugs were worked out, he replied, "Absolutely!" He said the problem of leaking liftgates and quarter windows "never really was completely corrected." And, he noted, engineers didn't rush in to correct problems like they would today.

Only Nomads and the companion Pontiac Safari had pot metal liftgates, Moore noted. The Euclid plant built all the bodies for both those models, as well as the regular station wagons and sedan deliveries. "Those were much easier," he said. From Euclid the bodies were put into boxcars and shipped to the Motor Division.

Moore said he never owned a Nomad, although not because of the frustration he encountered in building them. "We liked the finished product," he said. "They were beautiful to look at, but they were really a bugger to build!"

Thanks to Richard Golanec, who met Mr. Moore last summer and provided information on how to contact him.

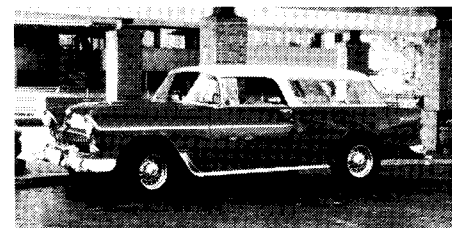
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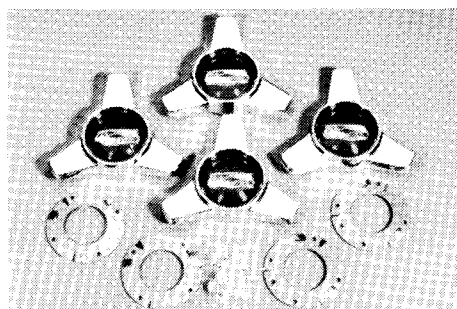
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