

How to remove Flex teak panels from Hunter sailboats

On my 49, the commissioning dealer did a great job of detailing the boat prior to delivery.

They beautifully washed and cleaned the cockpit and deck. And then somebody did something dumb. They oiled the Flex teak. This turned it a dark brown, and no amount of scrubbing, sanding, solvents, bleach could lighten it. It looked really ugly. As you can see, it is a really ugly shade of brown.



Hunter was very responsive, and although it wasn't their fault, supplied a full replacement set of Flex Teak die cut panels. (hooray for Hunter!!)

This job has been on the back burner, but I finally decided to tackle it, having gotten my other 596 jobs out of the way.

I noted on the replacement panels that they had a peel-away paper on the back, covering self-adhesive. I thought that the original panels were also affixed in the same manner, and didn't really expect it would be a big job to remove the old ones.

I called Hunter, asking them if there was a trick to removing a flex teak panel. They asked for my hull number. They told me that my flex teak panels were put on with 5200, unlike the new peel & stick. They advised me that the best, (and only way), they knew of was to cut the panel into strips, and then chisel & cut it off. They said it wasn't going to be quick, and that the panel might take about 2 hours. I then told the gentleman I needed to replace not one, but all my flex teak panels. Bit of a long silence on the phone. He was very sympathetic, but didn't have an answer.

I subsequently discovered that the panels were literally covered , (I mean every single square inch), with 5200. The installer must have been very proud, knowing this would never, in a million years, peel off.

I then asked some boat refit guys, and they told me the same thing, i.e

Somehow get a knife or scraper between the Flex teak and Fiberglass

Keep upward pressure on the Flex teak , (which is not at all flexible), while trying to work underneath it.

Do not damage the gel coat surface underneath.

They also confirmed I needed to cut the flexi teak into strips from the top with a sharp knife, and work one section at a time. I envisioned this part alone to take at least ½ hour per panel, as the material is very hard to cut. It would also dig into the fiberglass below, damaging it in the process. There is no way to easily gauge the depth of cut.

All together, I estimated 2-3 hours per panel of solid effort. As I need to change approximately 20 panels, this is a massive job. Some panels are larger than others, but it still was a pretty awful undertaking.

The one tool I hoped to use on this was a Fein Multimaster, (actually a cheap knock-off), which has an oscillating cutter. This is great for lifting things like linoleum tile etc, but in that case you are working with a much thinner, more flexible material, with considerably smaller area. The flex teak is very high durometer, and is extremely rigid. I knew that the tool would work if I cut the flex teak into narrow strips, but this was a huge effort.

Then I had a brain wave.

Step 1.

Carefully at one corner, put down some protective duct tape, take a sharp chisel, and gently lift up about 2 square inches of flex teak.



The corner is actually the easiest spot to do this, as the adhered surface is fairly small.

Carefully chisel in a bit more



Step 2.

Get a pair of vice grips, and a piece of 3/8" starboard approx 3" x 3"

As tightly as you can clamp the vice grips onto the flex teak, using the backing block on the front side to spread out the load. On the back side, don't use a block. This will allow the vice grip jaw to dig into the flex teak, making sure it doesn't slip.



Now pry it back a little bit



Step 3

Now tie a 3/8" line onto the vice grips. using a combination of half hitches and a reef knot Here's the trick to this: As you are using several hitches, you put them on the narrow part of the handle. The more tension you put on the rope, the vice grips exert even more gripping pressure.



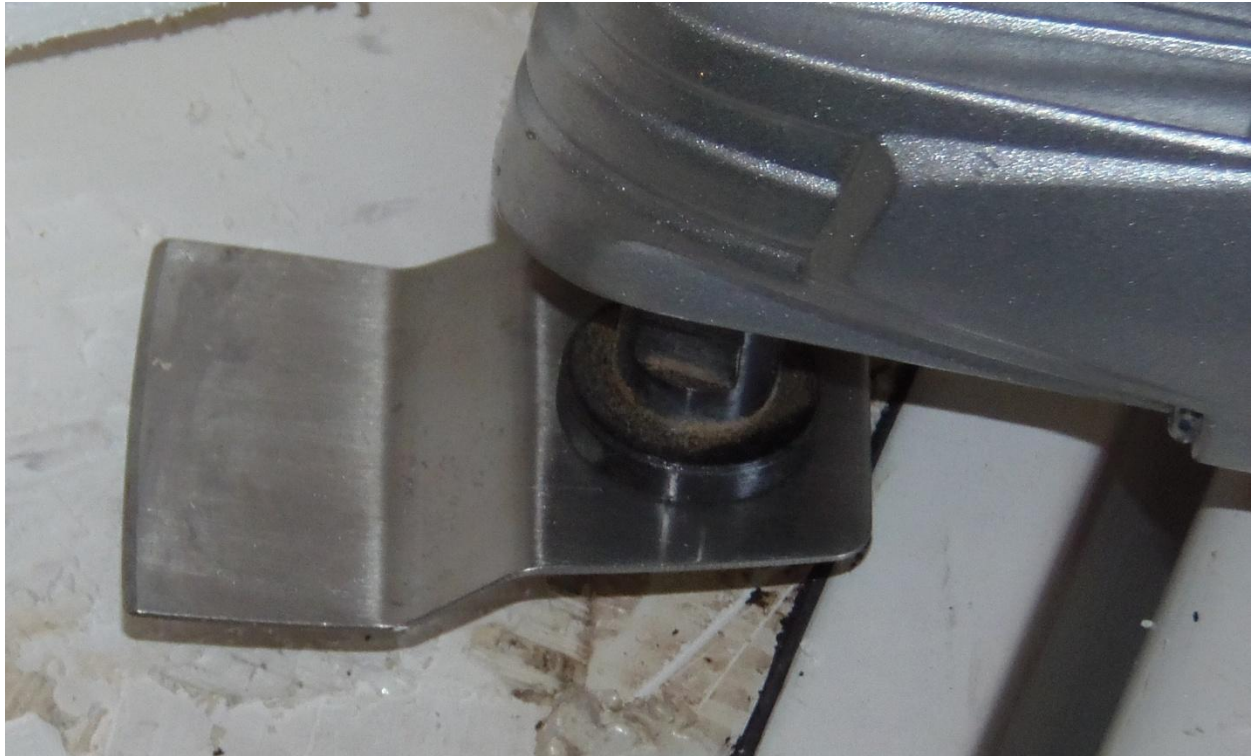
Step 4

Now, take the line and run it to a winch. You may need to use a block or 2 to get the leads correct, but this only takes a few minutes to figure out.



Once the line is on the winch, put on a moderate bit of pressure. No need to over-tighten.

Set up your Fein tool with the knife blade. (not the cutting teeth blade)



Now simply take the Fein Multimaster, and run it down the exposed glue line.



As you do this, the tension in the line will act as a spring, and start to peel back the flex teak as you relieve the exposed glue. You can cut about 1 ½ " of 5200 in one pass.

Now go crank the winch, and load up the line tension again.



Each pass you make relieves about 1 ½ inches of glue. It takes about 1 minute to make the cut. The reason this works so well is because you are bending the flex teak back almost 180 degrees, which fully exposes the glue line. It literally slices through the 5200 like butter.

The first panel I removed took about 45 minutes to figure out the technique.

The next one took less than 15 minutes.

Each panel requires a few moments of thought on how to get the line to run fairly to a winch. You can use any length on line, and as many blocks as you need. More line equals more spring, so this is a good thing. Worst case scenario is to use a halyard. (make sure you attach a safety to the halyard shackle so you don't "masthead" it if something lets go.

Here is an example of removing the rear seat panel by connecting a line cross cockpit.



Doing this solo took almost half the time to:

Switch off tool.

Put down the tool at the end of each cut.

Re-tension line by cranking the winch a few clicks.

If I had an assistant to ratchet the winch, each panel would take less than 10 minutes.

Once the panel is off, use the Fein tool to completely clean the 5200 from the Fiberglass. This takes less than 5 minutes per panel area, leaving it perfectly flat for the self adhesive to adhere to.

Here you can see a stack of removed panels. Note there is no damage whatsoever. Also, you see the horrible discoloration on the original panels versus a new one.

