

Covering and Paint Vol. V, Part III

Paint: As with the covering, I'll touch on a few tips and materials that are common among SA builders that can give you a first-rate finish for painted parts. The first step is to wash all of the fiberglass parts with soap and water to remove any leftover mold-release agent.

The fiberglass parts from Aeroglass are smooth and have few pinholes. Be careful not to oversand the parts. If you remove too much of the thin top gel coat, you could expose trapped air pinholes under the topcoat. So only a cursory dulling of the surface with fine paper is needed. We used 400-grit paper sanded wet. I like to use automotive-grade primer, but you must be careful that you don't get too much buildup. A thin coat is usually all that's needed. Final-sand with 400 wet just to the point of an even, dull surface.

Because gasoline is less harsh than glow fuels that contain nitromethane, you can use many types of aerosol spray-can paints with a gasoline airplane that won't stand up to glow fuels. I know people who have used Krylon or Rust-Oleum paints with good results, but finding matching colors may be a stretch. I've done a few nice finishes using TopFlite LustreKote topped with catalyzed automotive clear enamel. The two or three colors I've sprayed matched well and, with ample time to dry, allowed a wet application of acrylic enamel clear with no adverse reactions.

When using paints from an aerosol can, be aware that they must air-dry, and with that there is a fair amount of shrinkage. When the paint shrinks, it seems to magnify any imperfections in the prepared surface, so small sanding scratches or pinholes really show.

Erik and I prefer to paint our models with automotive paints. They are expensive and require a little experience and special equipment. If you've never painted with professional equipment and paints, you might want to check with others in your club who have painting experience to see if they can help.



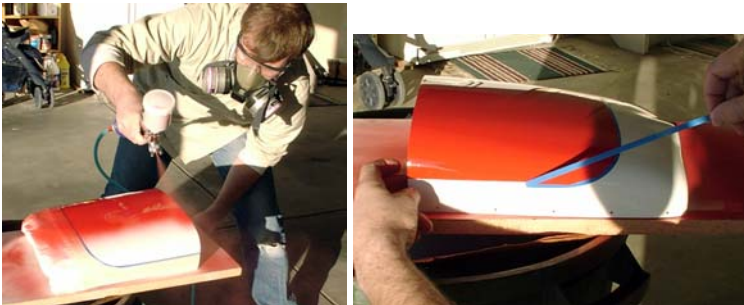
Automotive paints are usually activated with a hardening agent and are often topped with a catalyzed clear. Radio South sells PPG polyurethane paint systems in the small quantities we need. The company has done all of the work of matching the covering colors and can advise you on everything you need to get the job done. Visit the Web site at www.radiosouthrc.com/r_c_flying_colors.htm.

Most local paint suppliers can computer-match your covering for you. To get a match, iron a large swath of covering—roughly 6 x 6 inches—to a piece of balsa, and bring that in to the shop. That way you're sure to get the truest reading possible from the computer.

Another good choice in auto paints is DuPont's ChromaBase two-stage system. ChromaBase is slightly harder to shoot but has a distinct advantage over other painting systems. The base colors are not catalyzed; they go on flat (no gloss) and dry quickly. You're ready to remask and shoot the next color within 30 minutes each in succession. Because you need not be worried about the gloss, the colors can go on thin—just enough for even coverage, meaning you also keep the weight down. The last layer is an activated clear that gives a smooth, high-gloss finish. Expect to spend \$200-\$300 for all of the supplies you'll need from your local automotive paint store.

Be sure to paint in a well-ventilated area. I recommend using a good-quality charcoal-type respirator. If you're painting yellows or any colors that have some transparency, it's best to shoot over a white base. A white primer would be ideal, but that may be hard to find. You can do a light but even coat of white base paint before you add the colors.

For perfect lines on all of your stripes, use 3M Scotch Fine Line masking and striping tape. It is specially treated to make the paint adhere to it, so a sharp, defined line results when it's pulled away. This tape also stretches easily so it can go around corners and curves and create odd shapes with relative ease.



Good luck and have fun putting a quality finish on your latest project. I think most of you will find that covering large models is almost easier than covering the small ones. The big pieces are easy to hold, stretch, and work with. Again, my aim was not to teach you the basics of covering or painting, but hopefully you were able to pick up a few tips that will help you along the way.

Next month will be the final installment of "Project Extra." We'll set up the airplane for the first flights, set the control throws, do a little computer mixing, and touch on the basics for trimming in all attitudes. *MA*

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