

The Cosmetic Surgery

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I thought I'd write up a few tips I've picked up or developed over the years, regarding those finishing touches which, after having made a restoration project work well, make it look good, too.

Paints

As a rule, never apply cellulose paints over oil-based paints. If you think you must, try a little first in an inconspicuous area. Chances are, it'll "pickle up" (a quaint paint-shop phrase for when two paints interact badly, resulting in ugly wrinkles).

On the theme of adverse reactions, never apply solvents or cleaning foam to any painted or plastics surfaces, without trying it on a test area first.

If painting on bare metal, always use a primer. Ordinary primers don't adhere well to aluminium or galvanised surfaces. For these, I recommend Finigan's Special Metals Primer.

If a panel, which cannot readily be removed from a project, has become corroded in places, rub down the corroded spots with emery paper. Alternatively, I sometimes use a miniature rotary wire brush in a low voltage "hobbies" drill. Sometimes, the rust can discolour the surrounding, otherwise sound, paint. Rust stains can often be removed by polishing them out with Brasso metal polish, or an automotive cutting agent, such as T-cut. Treat the corrosion itself with a proprietary (automotive) rust remover/inhibitor. Prime the spots you have treated. To restore the panel, you need to obtain a paint whose colour precisely matches the un-corroded parts. This is easier said than done, but what I do is obtain an oil-based paint (usually enamel paint) whose colour is close to what's needed. I then experiment, mixing on an old saucer a small amount of the "base" paint with various colours of Humbrol enamel paints (in particular, black, white and the three primary colours). With patience, a very good match can be obtained. Apply a spot of the paint to the panel, and allow it to dry to make sure the colour match is still OK. If so, use a small brush to paint over the former corrosion spots, and try to "feather" the edges of the paint into the unaffected areas.

On the subject of corrosion, did you know that Cola soft drinks (Coke, Pepsi, etc.) are rust removers? I have freed many a rusted-up mechanism by several days' immersion in the popular drink. Rinse off, dry, apply some WD40, and with luck, you'll free it. Apparently, the fizzy stuff's anti-rust properties are due to a rather high content of phosphoric acid. That's why I don't drink it. Real ale's much healthier! *[Amen to that – Ed!]*

Where to obtain olive-green paints, and other military colours?

Tins of NATO Green are obtainable for military vehicle specialists, such as Leavesley International, XWD, Anchor Supplies. They are available in two sizes; large and huge! These tinned paints are for brushing, or spraying with a compressor and gun. Of course, it's nice to have access to military colours paints in aerosol spray can. These are much harder to find. It's always worth looking in car accessory shops to see what colours they have, especially if they're selling off old colours cheaply. Of these, Austin-Rover "Tundra" is the jewel in the crown to look out for. I reckon it's spot-on for most British Army sets, Larkspur onwards. Sadly, it's long discontinued, and I haven't found any for some years. If anyone sees a case of it, please buy the lot and sell it on to our members! Fortunately, I've found that model shops are selling large aerosol cans of various military colours. Recently, I bought a 400ml can of "Matt Olive Drab" (Flair Products; 01793 721303) for about £7 (not cheap!). Colour is good, though the texture is perhaps rather too matt. Not forgetting the "senior service", I find Ford's "Polar Blue" good on the more modern Royal Navy sets, such as the B40. Interestingly, I noticed at Blandford this year that modern Army signals kit now has the "Wedgewood blue" livery, if permanently installed inside a hardtop vehicle.

Restoring Decals Using Letraset

I have found that Letraset can be used to restore or replace panel markings, provided one is lucky enough to find a font

which is a reasonable match in style and size. If this is not the case, it is probably best to leave it alone.

I find it is fairly easy to apply Letraset to painted panels. Rule a fine pencil line on the panel, along which to align the legend. Then, use a soft pencil to rub and press down through the top film on which the letters are presented underneath. The alignment of the rows of letters on the film, and their spacing from each other, will guide you as to their precise required position.

Once the letters have been applied, ensure the panel is on a level plane, and gently go over them ONCE with a little polyurethane varnish on a small paintbrush. Never be tempted to go over them again, or you'll dislodge the letters. Allow this varnish to dry. If using white lettering, and the new legend is a much brighter white than the originals, I apply one coat, or more, of coloured varnish (the sort used on furniture, where the varnish imparts a wood stain effect) to tone down the stark, white letters, so they blend in. Allow this to dry. I then usually apply a coat of clear satin-finish varnish over the whole panel. This is to avoid the effect where only the lettering areas have been varnished, which would look odd.

I end this section on a strange note. Does anyone know where to obtain Letraset, or the like? Supplies seem to have dried up, and Maplin no longer supply their version of it. I believe some model makers devise decals by means of computer graphics, and then print the images onto a special transfer medium (similar technology to iron-on T-shirt logos). Can anyone enlighten us on this?

Odds and Ends

Any machine screws on the face of a panel, which look tired and rusty can be revitalised as follows. Remove the screw. If it has a single slot in its head, clean it out gently with a hacksaw blade. Then clean the top of the head by gentle rubbing against an oiled carborundum block. Needless to say, replace the screw.

Ebonite parts and other black materials, such as Bakelite or rubber, which have become faded or discoloured, can be cheered up by a light application of black shoe polish.

Everyone knows that brass nameplates, Morse keys, etc. can be polished with Brasso metal polish. But for severe tarnishing, I recommend first treating with a tissue *just* moistened with lavatory lime-scale remover (e.g. Harpic). Its acidity soon clears away the tarnish. A quick buff up with Brasso completes the job. (This is actually a great tip for next time the xyl asks you to polish up those horse brasses on the mantle piece!).

Digressing slightly, here's a familiar scenario. You've bought a really nice bit of kit from the local rally. You get it home and start admiring it. It'd look better without that fluorescent orange £24.99 price tag stuck across the meter! Can't get the wretched thing off? Relax! Spray the sticker with WD40. Go and have a cup of tea. By the time you get back, the WD40 will have soaked through the sticker, dissolved the adhesive, and that annoying label floats off with ease.

In your shack, or museum, keep a new, good quality, one-inch paintbrush and a clean duster handy. During those long overs, where the other guy's waffling on about his tomato plants, you can keep yourself busy. Use the brush and duster to keep your collection looking ship-shape by removing dust.

Finally

I hope, dear reader, that you have enjoyed reading this article. Inevitably, there will be those who throw their hands up in horror about some of my ideas. Cosmetic restoration is largely a matter of taste. Even the degree of restoration to be undertaken is debatable, and I for one am a great believer in not *over-restoring* an item. Sometimes, a few battle scars or the ravages of time can add to the sense of history.