THE BEST OF TIPS & TECH

VOLUME 2

50+ ways you can build better car and truck models!
In a recent issue, we highlighted a Tip about using Simple Green as a paint stripper. One of the appealing features was its biodegradable nature.

In response to that tip, astute reader Leslie Whitfield sent this enlightening note:

Response: Using Simple Green for removing old paint is fine, but after it is used, it is no longer biodegradable or environmentally safe.

After you dissolve paint in it, the paint (or any other material) is in suspension within the Simple Green. It is the same thing as adding salt to water; it never goes away.

Also, do not smell the fumes. They are as active now as they were when you started painting the item. And if you use the same Simple Green more than once, there will be multiple contaminants in the solution to be concerned about.

– Leslie Whitfield
Chicago, Illinois

Ken: Those are important points, Leslie. After it’s been used to strip paint, Simple Green should be disposed of with the same caution when we dispose of other potentially harmful liquids. Thanks for taking the time to share that information.

Tip: I’ve been working on a 1966 Ford Galaxie junker, complete with a well-worn, dirty interior.

To duplicate the dust that has settled all over the interior, I used ... dust. Vacuum-cleaner dust, that is.

Just open a vacuum-cleaner bag, grab a pinch of dust from the bag, and sprinkle it over the car’s interior while the paint is still tacky. Shake off the excess when the paint dries. Vacuum-cleaner dust goes on like flocking, only dirtier! Give it a try.

– Jeff Johnston
via E-mail

Ken: That’s a simple, inexpensive way to obtain weathering powder, Jeff. The only problem is, now we’ll have to start vacuuming the T&T Workshop. Thanks for the tip.

Q: I’ve recently had a problem with several cans of paint that have been getting clogged in the stem – not the nozzle. Also, I’ve had a couple of cans actually spray out from under the nozzle, with paint going everywhere except where it should. What’s up?

– Andrew Benidetto
via E-mail

Ken: Aerosol paint cans require some attention in order to get good results. Andrew. Maybe not as much as your favorite airbrush, but there are a few precautions that will make your spray-can experiences more pleasant.

It’s imperative to clear the nozzle of the can after each use. This can be done by simply turning the can upside-down and pressing the nozzle. Paint will flow for a second or two, followed by pure propellant. The blast of propellant is what clears the nozzle. Make sure you expel propellant for a few seconds to make sure all of the paint is blown from the nozzle and the stem.

Here’s another thing to remember: When paint cans are stored, the pigment drops to the bottom of the can – right where the opening in the pickup tube is located. The unmixed paint down there can get pretty heavy, and if you start to spray before you really shake the can and mix the paint, some globs of thick paint could get sucked up into the tube and cause problems later on.

When I complete a painting session, you all know that the staff at the T&T Workshop is always looking for quick, simple answers to perplexing modeling questions – and every so often we find one that’s just so simple and easy to do that it makes all of us smile like little kids.

Our friend Chris Roldan provided lots of smiles with this tip. It’s the kind of tip that, after it has been pointed out, makes perfect sense, and we wonder why we hadn’t thought of it ourselves.

It’s a neat little quickie, as Chris describes:

“If you’ve started to accumulate a few chrome headlights after you have replaced them with clear ones, don’t worry – I’ve found a good use for them: speaker grilles!

“Just file them as flat as possible, without losing the outer rim of the headlight. Paint them your favorite brand of semi-flat black, or you can lay on a heavy wash of thinned-out flat black for that ‘chrome grille look.’

“Don’t forget those snappy little photoetched screws, to really make them look convincing. Works for me!”

Now is that a cool tip, or what? Those superunrealistic, chrome-covered headlights that have merely been taking up space in countless scrap boxes can now be put to use. Thanks for the great tip, Chris. Stop by the Workshop whenever you’re in town, and we’ll cruise.
involving an aerosol can, I always clear the passageway (as mentioned) and then take off the nozzle, swish it around in some thinner, and blow it out with air to make sure it’s thoroughly clean.

If the tube is clogged (not the nozzle) and you’re not getting any paint out of the can, it probably can’t be salvaged, and you just have to throw away the can.

One more tip: Before you throw away a can of paint, save the nozzle. Clean it out and store it to replace a similar nozzle that may become hopelessly clogged in the future.

Tip: I was building a resin truck kit that required the fabrication of several windows. At first, I thought about buying clear acrylic to do the job. Then I found something that worked quite well as an alternative: the clear plastic jewel cases in which I store my computer music albums were the perfect thing.

They may be a little thicker than what most modelers might use, but with a little sanding (on the cut edges) and polishing on the surface, they worked perfectly for the straight sections of glass that I needed to fabricate for my modeling project.

So maybe all those old CD jewel cases are really worth something after all!

– David Haneke
via E-mail

Ken: Installing windshields and other glass in a model is usually one of the last construction steps, and there’s nothing worse than botching the job – and potentially ruining the model – so late in the game.

Remember one important tip: this is one instance where less is more. You generally don’t need a lot of glue to hold model car glass in place.

Unlike other structural components, where a strong, continuous glue joint is essential, tacking auto glass in just a few spots will usually be sufficient. (Notice that I’ve said “generally” and “usually,” because there are exceptions.)

What’s the best glue? Everyone has a favorite, but the best ones certainly are not solvent-based (which melt the glass, and offer a greater potential for disaster) or in the super glue family, which can fog clear plastic. It’s probably a good idea to seek out clear adhesives that won’t show if they happen to find there way onto visible portions of the glass.

Clear epoxy is a good, strong choice, but be careful when applying it or you could end up with those pesky little “pizza cheese” strings that always end up somewhere they shouldn’t.

Clear enamel paint works well, too. Other choices include products such as Elmer’s white glue, Future floor finish, clear RTV silicone, and the canopy glue that’s used by RC airplane guys.

Two of my favorites are Microscale (the decal people) Kristal Klear and watch-crystal cement, available through Micro-Mark.

The key, though, is to use any type of windshield or other “glass” adhesive sparingly, and carefully, to ensure good results. Good luck, Roger, and let us know how it works out.

Q: Is there any other way to do convincing chrome trim, aside from using Bare-Metal foil? My attempts at using BMF have been B-A-D. Any help you could offer would be greatly appreciated.

– Hank Liepe
via E-mail

Ken: As in Roger’s case, good results can be achieved with a little planning and extra care. Applying Bare-Metal foil is no exception.

The process begins when you make your initial purchase of a new sheet of BMF. It does have a shelf life (which can vary, depending on weather conditions in your area), so the first thing to do is mark the front with the date of purchase just so you can keep track of it.

I like to store BMF in a resealable bag, to keep out dirt and moisture. I don’t know if it really helps, but it can’t hurt!

Store the BMF by hanging it or laying it flat. Don’t fold or bend the sheet. It’s really thin, and creases in the material will end up as tears when you try to pull it from the backing. Frustrating!

When it comes time to use the BMF, be sure to reach for nothing other than a brand-new Number 11 hobby blade to trim the foil from the backing.

One common mistake is to cut the piece too small; make sure you leave plenty of extra material. My rule of thumb is to cut the piece of foil at least twice as big as the piece to be covered.

Use a cotton swab to carefully burnish the foil onto the trim. The foil will stretch to a certain extent, and it won’t tear if you work it slowly, and carefully work it into the crevices. Finish off the small areas with a toothpick.

Trimming the foil is the last – and most crucial – step. Use another new blade for this step, and don’t put the blade in a handle; hold it between your fingers for more control, and let the weight of the blade cut the foil. Don’t use pressure, or you’ll cut the paint.

This step will take some practice, but it’ll be worth the effort. Pick off the excess you just cut, and you’re done.

Tip: Thinking that thin vinyl would work for whitewalls, I measured the inside and outside diameter of the white circles I needed and took the information to my local sign shop. They laid out the design on their vinyl plotter, and cut the patterns I needed.

The “whitewalls” have adhesive backing that’s peeled off to expose the sticky side. Be sure the tires are super-clean so the new whitewalls will stick.

You can make any diameter whitewall, or thin-wall redlines, or masks.

– Kenny Shores
Kernersville, North Carolina

Ken: That’s a great tip, Kenny. Thanks for sharing!
Welcome back to the Tips & Tech workshop. As regular readers know, we actively encourage modelers to look outside the model-car hobby for useful tips, tricks and techniques that will enhance our enjoyment of building scale vehicles.

Well, this time the mailbag just happened to overflow with innovative ideas from a number of unusual sources. Let’s get right to it:

Tip: I was having trouble finding the right piece of strip styrene in my stockpile, and I decided to do something about it. I had a leftover length of 2”-diameter PVC pipe, so I cut it into 6- and 8-inch lengths, stacked the cut pieces (like firewood), and glued them together.

I originally stood this assembly up on end, and glued it to a sheet of plastic; however, I later added PVC “slip caps” that fit into the pipe to close off the ends.

It works well, and helps me find just the right piece when I need one.

I also have a length of 3” pipe for storing styrene strips that are still in the package.

One other thing I do to organize my workspace is use a piece of cork board hung on the wall over my workbench. That board comes in handy for hanging my bags of photoetched pieces and other small parts.

– Ken Kitchen via E-mail

Ken: Thanks for the great tips on organizing the workspace, Ken. Not having to hunt for tools and supplies means we can spend more time building models – and that’s what we like to achieve!

Tip: I’m not sure if this truly counts as a tip, but I think it could be a helpful suggestion.

I recently saw several of the 1/6 scale Revell-Monogram engine kits for $20 each at a local retail chain. I’ve since purchased four of them, and find them to be quick and fun builds; but more than that, they’ve turned out to be a great educational tool for learning about wiring and plumbing engines.

The kits are pretty detailed, with spark plug wiring, hoses, springs, vacuum hoses, etc. For anyone who isn’t 100 per cent comfortable with the

Tip of the Month: Casting parts

In keeping with this issue’s “theme” of looking outside the box for ideas, our Tip of the Month is one we uncovered while looking through some old model-railroad magazines. It involves casting simple parts with automotive body putty.

With this technique, you can make a simple impression and cast the parts in a material that can be sanded, primed, painted, or plated, along with your other model car parts.

You’ll need to take a trip to the craft store for some Fimo or Sculpey modeling clay. It remains flexible until it’s baked, and it doesn’t shrink.

The simplest way to make a mold is to knead a substantial wad of clay in your hand to soften it, then press it onto a flat surface into an oval shape that’s thicker than the “master,” which is the piece you need to reproduce.

Press the master into the clay. (This technique works best when the master has one flat side, and no undercuts – like a valve cover or oil pan – that would inhibit the master from being removed from the clay. After you’ve made the impression, carefully remove the master, so as not to disturb or distort the clay. Following the instructions on the box, put the mold in the oven until it hardens.

When the mold is cool, coat the inside with a mold release such as vegetable oil, mix a small batch of automotive body putty (a two-part polyester putty, such as Evercoat, would be perfect) and squish it into the mold cavity.

When the putty has hardened, the new part can be carefully removed from the mold. This is the tricky part; the hard, baked mold may not want to give up the master without a struggle.

As a worst case, if you have to break the mold, at least you’ve duplicated a part, which may be all you need if you can only find one of that perfect valve cover for your next contest model!
intricacies of wiring a 1/25 scale engine, these could be a great way to get more familiar with it. They’re a perfect “exploded diagram” in three dimensions!  – Daniel Ricchezza via E-mail

Ken: Quite honestly, Daniel, at first we didn’t think your E-mail counted as a tip either, but after giving it some serious thought, we realized you had discovered one of the most handy tips we’ve ever seen here in the T&T Workshop.

These engine kits can be wonderful educational tools, if we just take a minute to see them in that light. After all, what better way to learn about the operation of an internal-combustion engine than to build one?

Your tip emphasizes how important it is to keep an open mind, and look for useful information in places you normally wouldn’t expect to find it. Thanks for opening our eyes, Daniel.

Q: I have an airbrush and compressor with a regulator and a moisture trap, but I am not sure what the pressure should be. Is there an average pressure to use, or would it depend on the paint?

A: Generally speaking, air-pressure settings can range anywhere from 12-15 psi to upward of 40-45 psi, depending on what you’re comfortable with and the paint you’re using. Paint thickness enters into this equation, too.

Tip: I was recently building a car model, and I needed to apply some mesh to the front bumper. I got some loose-leaf notebook paper and placed it over the front opening of the bumper. I then used a pencil to gently made short, quick strokes over the paper.

In seconds, I had a perfect template. The open area was light, and the outline of the hole was dark on the paper.

All I had to do was cut the template along the dark line, and place it on some mesh with double-stick tape. Then I just cut around the template.

– Rafał Piersiak via E-mail

Ken: Jeff, I take it from your question that this is your first attempt at using an airbrush. You’ll no doubt find that using an airbrush opens a new world of paint possibilities, but in order to get the best result you’ll have to spend some time practicing.

The paint you use needs to be thinned to the proper consistency. Read the label and follow the manufacturer’s thinning recommendations carefully. When properly thinned, the paint should have the consistency of milk.

To definitively answer your main question, there is no definitive answer to your main question.

Generally speaking, air-pressure settings can range anywhere from 12-15 psi to upward of 40-45 psi, depending on what you’re comfortable with and the paint you’re using. Paint thickness enters into this equation, too.

The object is to get the paint to atomize, shoot through the nozzle of the airbrush, travel through the air to the object being painted, and land on that object while it’s still wet enough to flow.

If the paint dries too much on the way to the model, it will create a powdery texture on the surface. If the paint is too wet when it hits the surface, it will run.

The only real answer we can give you, Jeff, is to experiment with different settings, read up on airbrush techniques, and see which is best for you.

Thanks for the question, and good luck with your new airbrush.

Tip: Instead of oven cleaners or other harsh chemicals you can use good old Coca-Cola.

I have a small container that I call my “dip tank,” and I simply fill it with Coke and drop in the parts to be stripped. Sometimes it takes a few days to get the job done, but it does work.

I’ve had success in every instance except one: the stock hubcaps in the old AMT/Ertl Buick Riviera (kit No. 38158) have been in the dip tank for about three weeks now, and they’re still as shiny as ever. All things considered, though, Coke has worked well on almost everything.

My next tip involves making fuel lines with hair ties – the elastic ones with the cloth woven around the black, rubbery core.

To use the ties as fuel lines, you need to remove the core, while leaving the woven covering intact. There are two ways to do this.

You can try wigging the inner part out until you have enough to grab, so you can pull it out the rest of the way.

If the inside doesn’t want to budge, place a drop of Testor’s Liquid Model Cement on the end of the rubber insert. Within a day or two, the chemical cement will take its work through the length of the hair tie, and turned the rubber into soft mush – which can be washed away with a good-quality grease-cutting dish detergent.

What you’ll end up with is a perfectly good, woven fuel line.

Thanks for the great magazine. I hope you can use these tips.

– J.J. Lukas
Stanley, Wisconsin

Ken: Thanks, J.J. Not only can we use your tips, we love that kind of ingenuity. Your techniques are definitely geared toward builders who aren’t in any hurry; however, to quote an old cliché, getting there is half the fun!
As regular readers of this column know, the guys in the Workshop are constantly looking for inexpensive tricks and solutions to modeling problems. More than ever, that frugal philosophy comes in handy to increase enjoyment of our favorite pastime, when hobby dollars are at a premium.

So it’s no coincidence that most of our tips feature low-dollar/high-impact information that inspires us to open our eyes just a little wider as we look for ways to have fun with car models.

We’d like to hear about your cheap tricks, so send them in and share them with the rest of us!

Our good friend and regular T&T contributor Arnie Chamberlain sent in these timely tips:

Arnie-tip I: A recent trip to a sporting-goods store triggered a memory of something I used to do as a kid building models during the 1970s: make full Moon hubcaps from table-tennis balls. Determine the size Moon you need by laying a circle template over the wheel of choice, then lay that template over a table-tennis ball, and trace a pencil line around the section of ball that sticks up through the template.

Cut along that line with a hobby knife or scissors, and you have a perfect domed Moon hubcap.

Back then I used Testor’s silver paint, but better results can now be achieved with Bare-Metal foil or Alclad II. Table-tennis balls are cheap, and you can get four discs per ball – or more if you want Baby Moons. Just avoid the seam around the middle.

And the balls are plastic, so it goes along with the integrity of keeping as much of the car as “plastic” as possible!

Arnie-tip II: I recently bought an all-in-one “starter” casting kit at the local hobby/craft store, and soon realized I needed to make a mold dam.

I didn’t have any Legos, and didn’t want to waste my stock of sheet styrene, so I went through my collection of blister-pack scraps – the clear plastic packaging that everything come in these days. I save it all for dashboard and headlight lenses, windows, etc.

So far I’ve only cast a few pieces, but each time I’ve managed to come up with just the right size and shape of blister pack to do the job. They’re also clear, so you can see any air pockets or bubbles in the casting material.

Ken: Arnie, anybody with a blister-pack collection is always welcome at the T&T Workshop. Thanks for the tips.

And speaking of Alclad II:

Tip: Alclad Chrome finish has become a great asset to our hobby, but because it’s only available in ready-to-airbrush form, its use is obviously limited to those with an airbrush. But that has changed.

Testor’s offers a painting set that includes six bottles of paint and a can of propellant. The set includes a spray head that attaches to the propellant can, so you can spray the paint directly from the bottles.

TIP OF THE MONTH: Fineline for better foiling

Applying Bare-Metal foil (BMF) can be frustrating, even under ideal circumstances, which include being able to follow existing panel lines in order to get a crisp, sharp edge. But what about trim pieces that have no such edges to guide the trimming blade? Fortunately for us, award winning modeler Steve Hinson is not above using low-tech methods to get good results:

“Here’s a way to get a clean edge on Bare-Metal foil in those instances where you don’t have a template or panel line to trim against. Without an edge to guide the blade, chances are you’ll get a wavy cut, no matter how steady your hand may be.

“To create an edge, I lay down a tape border to cut against. 3M Fineline tape is thick enough to create an edge to cut against, and tough enough to not be cut by the knife. Determine where the edge of the chrome ‘molding’ will be, and lay out the tape against that line. Fineline is narrow enough to follow most contours – even those with compound curves. Burnish the edge of the tape to make sure all of it is in contact with the surface.

“Apply BMF over the whole section, including the tape. Burnish the foil as you normally would. Trim along the tape edge with a new, sharp cutting blade; and when you’re done, carefully lift the BMF and the Fineline tape, to reveal a perfect edge.”

Ken: That really is a neat trick, Steve. It may not be news to you, but it is to us. Here’s another tidbit to help those of us with unsteady or uncoordinated hands: After laying your Fineline tape, fill in a wider section BEHIND the tape, almost like you’re masking out a custom paint job. If the knife gets away from you as you trimming the BMF, it will end up on the tape, and not through your finished paint.

Thanks for sending the Tip, Steve. You’ve made life a little easier for a lot of us.
To spray Alclad Chrome, I simply poured it into the empty bottle included in the set, attached the propellant can to the jar, and it was ready to spray—without an airbrush, and for less than $10, which is the cost of the Testor’s paint set.

Now I’ll be using Alclad Chrome all the time!

**Ken:** A helpful tip indeed, Craig. May your bumpers and trim be shiny!

**Q:** Is there a way to clean caked-on plastic from Micro Burrs? I was thinking “thinner,” but there must be a better way. Thank you.

— Keith Baty via E-mail

**Ken:** The Micro Burrs Keith is referring to are those steel rotary-tool cutters with aggressive spiral blades that make quick work of plastic, wood and metal.

They’re great for cutting and shaping, but at a price: they do clog easily, and they’re tricky to clean—especially if material such as styrene has melted between the teeth during a high-speed cutting project.

There are several ways to clean them:

If the buildup isn’t too intense, you might be able to pick the chunks out with a needle, or coax them out with a rotary-tool wire-brush wheel.

You can also try heating the burr to soften the plastic just enough to make it easier to pick out, but be careful: too much heat might affect the temper of the bit.

We’re not too sure about the “thinner” solution, Keith. We tried that once a long time ago, and it liquefied the plastic just enough to make more of a mess than we had before we started.

I’ve had the best success with the rotary wire-brush method, but try several methods and determine which one works best for you.

**Tip:** When I replaced one of our storm doors, the insulation that goes between the door and the frame was a little too long, and needed to be trimmed.

I noticed it had bristles that resembled a 1/25 scale push broom. The scrap piece was an inch long, or just about two feet in 1/25 scale; the correct length for a broom.

I superglued the bristle piece to a strip of plastic, drilled a hole in the plastic, and made a handle from a two-inch piece of 1/16” aluminum.

Now I have a push broom for the back of a pickup, tow truck, or diorama—and it looks much better than the blobs of plastic that come in some kits.

— Bob Nelson Ishpeming, Michigan

**Ken:** Great tip, Bob. You’re not only recycling, you’re also upgrading your doors, keeping your house warmer, and stocking your hobby room with great-looking scale brooms.

That sounds like a winner to us. Thanks for sending it in.

**Q:** I’ve always admired models that are detailed with photoreduced boxes and posters and such. Is there any way I can do that without a good camera?

To further complicate matters, I don’t have any graphics programs on my computer. Is there any hope for me?

— Steve Hendriksen via E-mail

**Ken:** Don’t despair, Steve. You can do everything you want to do with what you already have: a basic computer and Internet access.

I’ll go out on a limb here and assume you have Microsoft Word. If so, here are the steps to follow to create scale, printed details:

1. Surf the Internet for images that can be used for the details. Google any and every site you can think of for suitable boxes, magazine covers, newspapers, etc. You won’t begin to list any here, because there are literally millions of sites with material that’s just waiting to be (legally) copied.

2. After you’ve selected an image, right-click your computer’s mouse and hit “Save Image As.” That will open your computer, and you can save the image in the folder of your choice.

3. Here’s where MS Word comes in:

   a. Open up a blank page, making sure the Pictures toolbar is showing, and click on the Insert Picture box. Go to the saved image of your choice, highlight it, and hit Enter. That will import the image onto the blank Word document.

   b. Now comes the cool part: Click on the image, and you can reduce, enlarge, and/or move it anywhere you’d like on the page. When it looks right, click Print and you’re on your way.

   c. We can’t take any credit for this technique, but we’re sure grateful to the first modeler who discovered how it’s done. Hope this helps, Steve.

— Tom McDaniel Estero, Florida

**Q:** I have a technical question that may have been presented to you in the past regarding disconnecting chrome parts from the sprue:

No matter how careful I am in removing the parts from the sprues, I always lose the chrome on the spot where it was removed.

The particular kit I’m working on now has a lot of attachment points that are in noticeable areas.

Other than having the parts rechromed, is there a simple or logical fix for this issue?

I have sprayed some parts with Alclad Chrome, but to make everything match or look uniform, you would need to spray every chrome piece that was being used. That would seem to be very time-consuming.

Thanks for any tips or suggestions.

— Tom McDaniel Estero, Florida

**Ken:** If it’s any consolation, Tom, this has been a problem for modelers since plastic kits were invented.

Ideally, every kit manufacturer would connect all chromed pieces to the sprue in areas that would never be seen, but that’s not always possible.

You’re right: Alclad and rechroming require that you refinish everything, so all the pieces look uniform.

Probably the best way to attack the problem is to cover the blemish with a small piece of Bare-Metal foil.

You might just burnish a very small piece over the bare spot where the tree connection was, but that sometimes is visible if you look close.

You might be better off hiding the spot by evaluating the piece and applying the foil so that the visible edge lines up with a seam or “shadow line” on the chrome part.

For example, if a part has a ridge or a natural crease in it, align the foil seam with that crease, to hide the edge.

The only other way to achieve flawless chrome is to strip it, fix the compromised area, and either Alclad the whole thing or send it to a chrome shop.

Good luck, Tom. Thanks for the question.
WE RECENTLY HAD quite a revelation here at the T&T Workshop, when we came face to face with a facet of the model building world which, quite honestly, we’ve never taken too seriously: paper models.

There’s a large modeling subculture out there dedicated to this type of building, and after looking at some of these creations up close, we were astounded by the realism of the surfaces these guys are working with.

With the quality of printing available today, any observer would be hard-pressed to tell from even a short distance that these flat, paper surfaces are not actually textured and downright three-dimensional!

Granted, not many printed models are currently available in 1/25 scale, but many bits and pieces of these wonderful kits could find their way into our models.

Need a wood-textured dash insert? How about stonework for a diorama or textural detail for a scenic base? Maybe some upholstery inserts?

Think paper and you might find just what you’re looking for.

There are so many paper-model Web sites out there that we can’t even begin to list them here, but a Google search will point you in the right direction.

While you’re at it, perform an Internet search for “textures” and you’ll find hundreds of free images that can be downloaded and printed to create your own unique patterns, for almost any application you can think of.

By pushing your imagination to the limit, you can achieve some fantastic results with, of all things, paper. Give it a try. You may even be as surprised as we were.

Now, on to the mailbag:

Q: I’d like to make a set of exhaust pipes using aluminum tubing, which can be highly polished, but I’d like to also flare the ends to make them look more like early “megaphone” ends.

I’ve tried using a hardware-store flaring tool, but it’s too cumbersome to do a good job. Any suggestions?

Thanks for the great magazine. “Tips & Tech” is my favorite column.

– Fred Berrins
via E-mail

Ken: Thanks for the nice words, Fred.

You’re correct about the flaring tool: it is too cumbersome for this application and you can achieve better results with a more-subtle approach.

You need to thin the end of the tubing (which a flaring tool won’t do). This makes the tubing easier to flare, and gives the aluminum a more-accurate scale thickness.

Do this by carefully scraping the inside of the tube with a #11 hobby blade. Put the blade (which is slightly tapered) into the end of the tubing, then slowly turn it to remove excess material. Thin the inside of the tubing as far down as you can.

Use a tapered steel center-punch to make the flare. Stick the end of the punch into the end of the tubing, and turn it while applying as much pressure as possible.

Klaus Raddatz’s handy little tip deals with ready-to-spray Metalizers, but could just as easily be adapted to other paints:

“I use a Paasche Type H airbrush, with a paint cup. I never liked pouring ready-to-spray materials like Testor’s Metalizer into the cup, then pouring the leftover material back into the jar; there’s always a lot of waste. Simple solution: adapt the Metalizer bottle to the airbrush.

“I bought a small Paasche paint jar, and removed the fitting from the cap. Then I drilled a 1/8-inch hole in the center of an old Metalizer bottle cap, for the Paasche fitting. I assembled the fitting and washer to the cap, and drilled a 3/64” vent hole using the hole in the washer as a guide. Make sure you drill through the gasket too.

Measure and cut the Teflon tube that came with the Paasche jar to the correct length for the Metalizer jar. The tube should extend within 1/32 to 1/16 inch of the bottom.

“When I spray Metalizer, I simply screw the jar onto my airbrush, and spray whatever I need. When I’m done, I open the fluid tip all the way, unscrew the jar, and tap the Teflon pickup tube against the inside of the jar to drain the paint from the airbrush. Flush with a Metalizer jar full of thinner, and I’m ready for the next color.

“Cleanup are faster, with less waste, because there’s only a small amount of residue inside the airbrush.

“An alternative to using old Metalizer jars is to purchase Model Master 1/2-ounce mixing bottles. It’s the same jar and cap used for Metalizer.”

Thanks, Klaus. Your visits to the Workshop are always informative.
Good luck, Jim, and thanks for the question.

Quick Tip: Tinted window material

Several alert readers informed us that HobbyTown stores carry translucent plastics sheets that are tinted red, blue, green, and smoke that are perfect for tinted windows. The sheets are available in thicknesses of .005", .010", .015" and .020". Similar sheets are also available at various craft stores, in the scrapbooking section.

Thanks to all you Tipsters out there who are keeping an eye open for new building materials.

Ken: Have you seen something out there that can be used by your fellow modelers? Let us know, and we’ll pass it along here in the column.

Q: To get a smooth and glossy finish, I use a polishing kit, followed by waxing with The Treatment. This produces satisfactory results, but the problem comes when I apply decals: the carrier film turns frosty white, and the decals don’t stick well.

Would using a setting solution help?

– Dan Johnson

Jasper, Indiana

Ken: This is a quick fix, Dan: Don’t wax the car until after the decals are applied.

We could stop right here with those two sentences, but we want to tell you why the problem was occurring, as well as how to fix it.

Have you ever seen water bead on a freshly waxed car? That’s what’s happening with your decals.

Water used to loosen the decals and wax aren’t the best of friends. You’re not getting an even layer of water on the body, and the decals aren’t snuggling down as they should. Hence the “silvering,” as air between the water beads gets caught under the film.

Setting solution won’t help, because you still have wax on the body that would be fighting with the solution.

So lose the wax, and you’ll fix the problem faster than it took to read this extended answer.

Tip: Lacking a dust-free environment to protect freshly-painted models, I’ve used a variety of sealable boxes to serve as “curing” containers.

I recently found an easier and more spacious solution: a small, portable greenhouse. Mine is made by a company called Dream Products in Chatsworth, California (www.dreamproductscatalog.com), item 97070.

It’s made from clear, heavy-duty nylon, and is about the size of a large book when collapsed for storage. It unfolds to measure 24 inches wide, 24 inches long, and 28 inches high, with a zipper door. Four “ground” stakes and a shade cover are also included.

It’s an ideal solution to keep wet paint dirt-, dust-, and bug-free. It costs around $40, but the peace of mind is well worth the price.

– Ed Henson

Sitka, Alaska

Ken: That’s a neat tip, Ed. Dust and dirt specks are the bane of painters everywhere; any new idea about keeping dust to a minimum is appreciated.

Tip: I’ve noticed that in many of the painting articles, there’s a reference to “a new piece of white flannel” that is used as a polishing cloth. Some readers may be wondering where to get flannel.

Go to a fabric store and ask for flannel diaper material. Two yards is usually enough to last me for at least two years. I cut the bulk piece into 12-inch squares and store them.

– Herb Pfeiffer

Bellevue, Washington

Q: I’m working with some dry-transfer graphics that I’ve had for a while, and they’re not sticking properly to the surface. When I burnish the graphics, they peel away from paper carrier, but don’t stick to the paint. What can I do?

– Walt Priser

via E-mail

Ken: Problem 1 might be the age of the dry transfers. The older they get, the more they lose whatever it is that makes them stick. Try to locate new sheets. If you can’t, we’ve heard that slightly moistening the backing might help with the adhesion.

Make sure the surface is clean, but not glossy. Dry transfers “like” flat surfaces. If it’s feasible, spray the model with Testor’s Dullcote before you apply the transfers, then spray a gloss coat over that to bring back the shine. ■
Welcome back to the Workshop. Before we get down to business, I'd like to veer off on a personal tangent by saying what a thrill it is to be one of the two 2007 inductees into the Model Car Museum’s Hall of Fame. Former inductees include modelers, writers, and industry insiders that I’ve admired for years, and to be listed in their company is indeed an honor.

It’s rewarding to be recognized for something you love to do, but it’s also important to realize that the Hall of Fame list is far from complete. There are countless modelers who could and should be recognized for their achievements, and many of them contribute to this column! So thanks to all of you who voted, and let’s get to the mailbag.

**Tip:** I recently read the question from Jim Dale about removing old paint from his plastic models. I’ve tried all of your suggestions, and found them all very good, but I have another method; one that is totally safe to the model, the modeler, and the environment.

Try immersing your model in Simple Green. Simple Green is a concentrated all-purpose cleaner. It’s biodegradable, environmentally safe, and it will leave your hands as clean as or cleaner than the model!

I’ve used Simple Green full-strength and diluted up to 50 percent, and have had great results every time, removing new paint, old paint, lacquer, enamels, and acrylics, as well as paint on plastic, metal, or resin.

Depending on the paint, plan on leaving the parts to be stripped in the Simple Green bath for 24 to 48 hours. Remaining paint in the nooks and crannies can be scrubbed out with an old toothbrush. There have been times when I have forgotten a model in the Simple Green for 4 or 5 days and I have

A few issues ago we managed to get “Tip of the Month” contributor Dennis Scheidemantle’s last name just about as wrong as we could. Well, not only has Dennis forgiven us for our faux pas, he sent in another great tip.

Making a scale antenna with small, stiff wire is a pretty good way to jazz up a model, but how about making a working telescoping antenna that’s in scale? That’s pretty cool if you ask us, so we asked Dennis to describe his technique:

“I just came up with a way to make realistic-looking telescoping antennas for 1/24 and 1/25 scale vehicles – and all parts are easily available. The idea is to simply combine two different sizes of tubing and one piece of wire.

“I started with a piece of 29-gauge hypodermic stainless tubing from McMaster-Carr (www.mcmaster.com, hypodermic stainless tubing, part 8988K429) Into that I slid a section of .018” tubing from Ngineering (www.ngineering.com, .018” tubing: part N2018-2) followed by a section of their .004” ultrafine wire (part N2104). They all fit together perfectly, and if stops are put on the bottoms, they can be raised and lowered like the real thing. You can use Ngineering parts only for a two-stage antenna or their .012” dia. wire (part N211) for a more-modern nonadjustable one.

“I also used the brass nozzle from a disposable lighter as the base. I chucked it in my motor tool and turned it down to size using sandpaper and files. You can Alclad or chrome it. Fill it with putty or gloss black paint and drill it with a #20 bit to fit the three-stage antenna, or use some black silicone and center it (if you’re that good) and let it dry.

“You can then put a drop of adhesive on the bottom of the disposable lighter base on the tip-top as a button, and leave it round or flatten it as desired.

“For a fully hidden antenna, drill a hole smaller than the base (but larger than the tubing) in the fender, and the wire will disappear into the car when the antenna is not in use.

“I suggest that you assemble the tubing and wire ‘telescope,’ then cut it as one unit so as not to crush the tubing.”

Thanks for another great Tip, Dennis. We especially appreciate all the part numbers and contact information you provided, so we can easily track down all the required materials.

One last note: Extreme caution should be exercised when you’re taking apart an empty lighter to use as a base. For those who feel uncomfortable with that procedure, a suitable piece of tubing, carefully cut and shaped, could be used for the base as well.

See you next time. Thanks for stopping by to visit the Tips & Tech Workshop!
as yet to notice any attacking of the plastic – not even the smallest detail.

I hope you try this, and I feel that it’s a worthy tip to pass along to others!

– James Palicka
Aurora, Illinois

Ken: Indeed we do, James. There are many paint strippers out there, and many modelers have their personal favorites, but I like this one for its environmentally friendly attitude.

Q: I’ve been having trouble polishing models with decals. It seems that every time I polish, the sanding goes through the finish and chips the decal.

I realize that a few things could be at fault: wrinkled/loose decals, using too much pressure while sanding, or not enough clear coat. I usually put on four coats of clear over decals.

Is there a better way, or something I should do to prep the decals before clear coating and polishing?

– Mike Hoekstra
via E-mail

Ken: A decal can add to the thickness of the model, and leave an edge. Imagine, in microscopic terms, the edge of the decal as a curb, where the sidewalk meets the street. Covered with a clear coat, that edge can be sanded into – even if you’re being supercareful.

This is not an uncommon problem, which is why many modelers don’t like to apply clearcoat over decals. They’ll polish out the car first, then apply decals that are carefully trimmed so there’s no decal film showing.

Decals “like” to be applied to polished surfaces; they stick much better, and you don’t get the “silvering” that you get when a decal is applied to a dull surface. (Silvering is caused by light diffusing through the air spaces between a decal and a rough surface).

If you prefer to clearcoat, just make sure you have enough clear over the edges of the decal so you don’t rub through. That’s a double-edged sword, though.

If you apply too much clear, it starts to fill in door lines and crevices that shouldn’t be filled – and the car starts to look hand-dipped (an exaggeration, but you know what I mean).

I recommend polishing the paint first, then adding the decals. Try it; you may like the results.

More: Another method deserves mention here, too:

After the decals have been applied, brush or spray on a top coat of Future floor finish, which is thin and self-leveling, and creates a good, glossy finish. Try it on a test model to see if you like the results.

One more thing: Don’t leave the decals in water any longer than you have to; just leave them in long enough so they slide off the paper. Any longer and the glue starts to dissolve, and the decal won’t stick as well, which could result in the “silvering” I mentioned earlier.

Tip: I’ve seen question after question in Scale Auto about repairing window scratches, and I have the simple answer: the Lens Dr. Scratch Repair Kit!

I had seen their commercials, and because I wear glasses with plastic lenses, I picked up some Lens Dr. at my local megamart. It worked great, which got me thinking about the next logical step: trying it on other clear plastics.

I recently bought an old MFC kit on eBay, and the windows were atrocious; the scratches were terrible. I applied Lens Dr. following the instructions, and it fixed the windows right up. This stuff is fantastic! Give it a try.

– Kevin White
Canton, Ohio

Ken: We sure will, Kevin. We can clearly see that a simple, effective, and inexpensive tip like yours can take the work out of removing pesky scratches that usually require hours of polishing to eliminate. Thanks for the great information!

Q: Is it safe to soak resin bodies in CSC [Castrol Super Clean] to clean them before painting? Thanks.

– Rusty (no last name given)
via E-mail

Ken: Resin kits typically exhibit various degrees of residual mold-release, which will have to be removed before the parts are painted.

Castrol Super Clean is an automotive degreaser that is typically used as a paint remover in our circles.

In most cases, CSC and resin don’t get along too well when exposed to each other, so the answer to Rusty’s question is “No.” However, you can use CSC as an effective cleaner, if you spray or wipe it on, keep a close eye on it, and wash it off right away.

As for removing mold-release from resin parts, a less-harmful and very effective alternative that’s also found in the automotive section is Westley’s Bleche Wite whitewall tire cleaner.

Thanks for your no-nonsense, concise question, Rusty. I hope this information helps you.

Tip: After writing in school notebooks all year, I found a use for the old ones: Spiral notebooks have a wound metal wire that holds all the pages together. You can use it for brake lines, fuel lines, and anything else you can think of. Even better, there are several gauges of this metal wire.

– Rafal Piersiak
Staten Island, New York

Ken: You really did your homework on that one, Rafal. Thanks for the tip.

Tip: If you have trouble slipping the tires onto the wheels of new Revell-Monogram kits such as the 2006 Mustang, 2006 Magnum, etc., try placing the tires on a sunny windowsill for a little while. The direct sunlight will warm the tires just enough to make them easier to slip over the wheels.

You can also turn the tires inside-out and literally “roll” the tires onto the wheels, too.

Finally, you can combine the two methods (heating and rolling) to get the tires on the wheels.

I’ve used all three methods, and have had good results.

– Chuck Most
Ithaca, Michigan

Ken: That’s a neat little tip – particularly for those of us who are hesitant to heat tires in the oven (even when our significant others aren’t at home) or place them too close to an open flame.

To generate even more heat if required, I wonder if putting the tires on a reflective surface, such as aluminum foil, or placing a transparent drinking glass upside-down over the tires (to create something of a “greenhouse”) would work as a tire-warmer.

The possibility for experimentation with solar energy makes this a thought-provoking tidbit! Thanks, Chuck.
The mailbags are overflowing, and we’ve got plenty of ground to cover this time, so let’s dive right in with a paint question:

Q: I recently tried my hand at masking a two-tone paint job on a Fat Fendered Street Rod. It went pretty well, except for some underspray on the fenders; the masking material (adhesive frisket paper) didn’t flatten well over the curves. I slit the frisket where it “bunched up” and tried to flatten it that way, but the line was still messed up. What can I do?  
– Dennis Hunter via E-mail

Ken: Frisket is a good masking material, Dennis, but it has its limitations – one of which is its inability to adhere tightly around a curved surface. That holds true for most other types of “sheet” masking material, with the exception of Bare-Metal foil, which is thin enough to burnish around most irregular and/or curved surfaces.

In your case, for a relatively uncomplicated two-tone paint job, you probably would be better off laying out the color separation with the narrowest painter’s-quality masking tape you can get your hands on.

If you have an auto parts or good paint store nearby, pick up some low-tack painter’s tape that’s specifically made for this purpose.

(Don’t try to use narrow pinstriping tape. It would bend around curved surfaces, but the adhesive used on that kind of tape might be too strong to pull off easily.)

After you establish the sharp edge of the color separation, you can mask the rest with just about anything. Keep one more thing in mind: Pick up the thinnest tape you can find. Remember these two things about selecting tape to mask a model paint job: The narrower the tape, the sharper the curve; and the thinner the tape, the less paint buildup along the edge.

Ken: Speaking of Bare-Metal foil, Sam Tate dropped by with this quick hint:

Tip: Just one addition to the excellent tips on working with Bare-Metal foil: Cut a sheet of card stock the same size as the BMF, and slip it into the envelope behind the foil. This will provide support to help prevent cracking and wrinkling.

You can also cut against it without pulling the foil completely out of the package.

– Sam Tate  
San Diego, California

Q: What would you recommend as a guide coat when sanding and smoothing bodywork on a car model?

I’ve heard that some builders use...
marking pens for this, but something tells me that’s not a good idea.

– Richard McCallahan
Newark, Delaware

**Ken:** Something tells you right, Richard. The guide coat is dusted on a model during the “Body Sanding and Smoothing” stage, to reveal high or low spots that need attention.

You’d be amazed at the surface irregularities that are all but invisible when the model is in primer, but jump out after the shiny coat is applied – and then it’s too late to correct the problem.

The guide coat typically contrasts with the undercoat you happen to be dealing with at the time, which is usually primer. Black is most often the color of choice, because it’s so visible. The guide coat doesn’t have to be heavy; just dust on a thin coat.

The idea is that when you’re sanding, the guide coat disappears first from the high spots and stays in the low spots, pointing out areas that need to be brought up with putty. When the guide coat vanishes evenly from the model being sanded, it’s generally good to go.

Marking pens are way too heavy and much too potent for this process, which requires a more-subtle touch and a type of paint that won’t bleed through.

**Tip:** After trying a number of overpriced knife-sharpening devices, I accidentally found a much better way to sharpen any knife used for modeling.

It’s called the Ultrasharp Pro Sharpener, by Farberware. This is the easiest and most-effective sharpener I’ve ever used. It creates a supersharp edge.

It utilizes ceramic rods to restore a sharp, fine edge to any hobby knife, while providing and maintaining the optimum knife edge for error-free performance. I picked mine up for $3.99 plus shipping.

If you can’t find this product locally, the Web site is www.pfalzgraff.com.

– Jerry J. Broz
Pueblo, Colorado

**Ken:** Thanks for the tip, Jerry. We don’t officially endorse commercial products here in the T&T Workshop, but your enthusiastic review has piqued our curiosity about the Pro Sharpener. We’ll try it ourselves and report our findings.

**Tip:** After you’ve had bridgework done, you can’t use normal dental floss. Instead, you need to use a product called Superfloss, made by Oral-B.

Each piece of Superfloss is divided into three parts: A stiffened end to insert under the bridgework; a “spongy” floss section; and a “normal” floss section.

It’s ideal for cleaning an airbrush. The stiff end can be threaded through small apertures, and the floss can then be pulled through to clean the inside.

I find that it works better than using pieces of tissue, and Superfloss can get into tighter spots than pipe cleaners.

– Robert Cornege
Port Macquarie, Australia

**Ken:** Thanks for the unique and effective tip, Robert. This is a tip you can really sink your teeth into.

**Q:** I want to paint a primed custom in flat black and apply some flame decals to the finished car, but the decals I’ve added so far look terrible. They don’t stick right, they turn cloudy, and the edges of the film are really visible.

– Jared Tate
via E-mail

**Ken:** This question pops up more and more as flat-finish rods and customs continue to climb the popularity chart.

Just keep one thing in mind, Jared: Decals don’t “like” flat-finish surfaces. The surface of a flat paint job is microscopically rough, which diffuses light, which creates a flat appearance.

Multiplied a gazillion times, that “flat” surface would look like a mountain range, with endless peaks and valleys. Most deal film can’t snug down into the low spots, which traps air and gives the decal a cloudy appearance.

Use a glossy black paint, apply the decals, then add a “flat” top coat.

This serves two purposes: the decals will stick better to a smooth, shiny surface; and the clear, flat topcoat will hide the edges of the decal.

One thing to watch out for, though: Flattening a glossy paint will change the color somewhat. Experiment with this gloss coat/flat coat on a separate sheet of plastic to see what the final color will be before you start painting your model.

**Q:** I recently returned to the hobby by building some of my old kits.

When I soaked the decals, they just about disintegrated off the paper. Is there any way to salvage old decals?

– Ben Rugga
via E-mail

**Ken:** That’s not an uncommon problem with some old decal sheets, Ben.

Over time, the carrier film can break down to the point where soaking causes them to break up right before your eyes.

Providing they’re not too far gone, a few brush-coats of Microscale Liquid Decal Film should add enough of a top coat to hold that old decal together.

Commercial aerosol clears such as Krylon may work, but be careful: Krylon can do damage to some old decals.

As always, do a test shot on a small area first.

Good luck, welcome back to the hobby, and thanks for the question!

**Q:** I just sprayed painted a car body with enamel (spray can; color coat), and a big part of it is cloudy now that it’s dry.

Will I have to strip it, or is there a quick fix to this problem?

– Art Petrosh
via E-mail

**Ken:** It sounds like humidity is the culprit, Art.

When you spray a model, the paint atomizes as it leaves the nozzle, and the mist of paint picks up moisture particles as it travels through the air toward your intended target – in this case, your meticulously prepared car body. The clouds appear as the moisture-laden paint dries.

There are several ways to fix this.

Don’t touch or try to spray over it right away. Let the body dry, and wait a few days until the humidity goes down.

If the cloudy finish hasn’t corrected itself by then – which it probably won’t – you can either wet-sand the color coat and spray it again (if it’s an opaque color) or you can just spray on a coat of clear, which usually causes the clouds to simply disappear.

I’ve heard that Krylon Crystal Clear is a great paint for this, but do a test-shot first on another body (painted with the same can of color that clouded up) to make sure it’s compatible with that particular brand of paint.

Of course, all situations are different, but unless there’s a real problem, this should do the trick.
BUILDING SOMETHING different once in a while can do wonders to boost the fun-factor of our hobby, and with our own level of creativity.

With that in mind, I’d like to give a quick mention to two Web sites that were brought to our attention by our friend Mike Henley.

As you may recall, we touched on paper models a couple of issues ago. Mike sent along these links, where printable paper models can be downloaded.


The second site, https://www.fiddlersgreen.net/ offers less-detailed paper models for the novice builder (folder?). Give it a try.

Now on to the mailbag, and our first official plastic-related tip:

Tip: While recently working on a large truck, I found the need to cut a long strip of styrene from a large sheet. Holding a metal straightedge with one hand, while running a knife along the edge with the other, was an “iffy” prospect at best.

Then the idea hit me: Clamp a metal straightedge directly onto the large styrene sheet, and use it as a fence, like on a table saw.

You don’t even have to clamp the plastic to a tabletop – just clamp the plastic directly to the straightedge. It keeps the straightedge from wandering, and keeps your fingers intact and away from a possibly-slipping knife blade.

It worked great.

– Mike Johansen
via E-mail

Ken: That’s a handy Tip, Mike. The boys in the shop tried the technique, and it prevented the straightedge from shifting, which resulted in a nice, clean cut. Thanks for passing it along.

Q: I need to remove the old paint from a plastic interior, and I have tried several products with poor results. I recently heard about 91-percent rubbing alcohol, and/or Easy-Off oven cleaner. Do you have any thoughts about which product might be better to use for this job? Also, can the plastic be soaked in either of these products without damaging it? Thank you for any help you can provide.

– Frank Reynolds
via E-mail

Ken: This is a question that keeps popping up, and we keep answering it because it’s such an important topic.

There are many paint removers on the market that are suitable for use on plastic models, and everyone has their favorite. Mine happens to be Easy-Off oven cleaner.

I simply put the model in a deep plastic container, cover it with Easy-Off spray, and leave it for several hours. Most – if not all – of the paint will lift off. Any stubborn nooks and crannies can be cleaned out with an old toothbrush.

I’ve never had any plastic model react adversely to Easy-Off. As with any stripper, care must be taken to avoid

Whenever expert modeler and all-around-good-guy Chris Roldan stops by the workshop for a visit, he always brings along a great idea. He came up with this one while working on his current project: a 1932 Ford street rod. We’ll let Chris take it from here:

“As I sat at the bench finishing up the front end, I wanted to add a ‘final touch’ detail to make it really pop.

I already knew I was going to drill some vent holes in the backing plates, but then I thought about adding scoops on the backing plates to help force out heat and dust that are typical with drum brakes.

“Looking no further than inside the box, I zeroed in on the box-stock street-rod valve covers. I cut them to size, filed them to shape for a classic ‘scoop’ appearance, brushed on some red paint and Testor’s Dullcote, and attached them to the backing plate.

“The old-style tooling of this kit gave the ends of the valve covers a nice vintage shape that enhances the model’s “period” look. That was a piece of good luck; there’s no way that modern square-corner valve covers would have looked as good in this application.”

You’re right, Chris. Those scoops add a lot of period-correctness to the front end, and you did it all with what came in the box. Good one! Thanks for stopping by, and providing us with a great Tip of the Month.
Ken: Good idea, John. If a smoother surface is desired, the undercoating can also be sanded when it’s completely dry and touched up, lightened, or darkened to suit your scene.

Speaking of undercoating:

Tip: A popular option on the cars that were driven during the 1950s-1970s was undercoating. I always do my street machines with a chassis-and-fenderwell undercoat. It’s simple, really:

After putting the chassis together, including the front and rear suspensions, I paint the entire chassis with Scale Motorsports Faux Fabrix spray. This gives it a typical undercoat wrinkle appearance.

Then I paint the chassis in various shades of black and dark gray, depending on how the car is used (brand-new, daily driver, etc.) I do not add mufflers and tailpipes until after the chassis is ‘undercoated’.

This will give a nice appearance to the chassis of a daily driver. I recently found that Model Master (Testor) also has a spray that will probably work: 28153 Black Vinyl Top Texture Coat. Haven’t tried it yet, but I will.

— Larry Davis
Granite Shoals, Texas

Ken: On a positive note, Chris, you still have your sense of humor, so all is not lost. (For those of you who don’t have one in the neighborhood, Piggly Wiggly is a grocery store chain with a really cool name.)

This hobby is all about learning new techniques and expanding our modeling horizons, so our advice is for you to take a deep breath, dive in, and start sanding.

There are many tricks and approaches when it comes to polishing out a paint job – too many to list here – so we’ll try to give you an overview of the process:

Simply (but unscientifically), sanding is the process whereby big scratches are replaced with smaller scratches, until it reaches a point where the scratches are so imperceptible that light doesn’t diffuse as much and we see reflections in the surface.

The trick is to approach the process with a certain amount of finesse, so you don’t sand through the paint, while being aggressive enough to eliminate the orange peel.

Start by using appropriate automotive sandpaper – which is made for this purpose – and not “lumber” grade paper. An aftermarket polishing kit, which contains several grades of fine polishing cloth, will do the trick, too.

Think of orange peel as waves on a lake, with high spots and low spots. Your first sanding pass, with whatever grade of paper you decide to use, will cut down the high ridges and flatten the surface.

At this point the surface will look smooth, but dull.

From there it’s a matter of further reducing the depth of the scratches until the surface shines.

There’s much more to the process than we could ever cover in this column. Look through some back issues for more information, or check the Kalmbach Library for books on painting techniques.

We know you’ll feel better about painting once you get one or two shiny ones under your belt, Chris.

Tip: This goes into the “something for nothing” category.

Everyone knows that the straight pins from new articles of clothing have lots of model uses, but those little reclosable bags that hold the spare buttons are also handy!

Throw the button in your button dish (the bags take up too much room anyway) and use the bags to keep all those tiny scratchbuilt parts, loose photoetched items, etc.

If you’re ultraorganized, you can record the contents with a permanent marker, or even staple them to an 8½ x 11 piece of card stock.

— Jason MacLennan
via E-mail

Tip: It seems that no matter how careful I am when I tackle a masking project, I end up with some underspray that bleeds under the tape.

My remedy for this is to use wax or rubbing compound (I use Meguiar’s products) on the affected areas. I apply the wax to a toothpick or cotton swab to rub away the underspray to achieve a sharp paint line.

I’ve found it must be done within 15 minutes or so after painting – before the paint has time to set up.

— Mia Bevacqua
via E-mail

Tip: Here’s a source for cheap plug wire – and lots of it: I cut the wiring off a set of earbud-style speakers (the small, lightweight, min headphone kind). The set I had contained three thin wires: green, red, and bare copper. I rolled each color and stored them in separate bags (you couldn’t even use Jason’s button bags for that – Ken).

— Bryan McCallum
via E-mail