

The Fear of All Things Shiny...!

The fear I speak of, has taunted many of us warbird and armor kit builders for eons. Apart from the obligatory gloss clear cote before decal application, we seldom cross over to the “other” side of the paint finishing world where a high gloss, perfectly smooth finish is demanded.

I recently crossed over to this realm, where I have been going on and off for over two decades, and decided to go for broke as it were, and pull out all the stops on a Japanese GT racing auto. The idea was to get as near a perfect finish as possible with the tools at my disposal. Having done many gloss finishes before, I was aware of the trials and tribulations of orange peel, fish eyes, sink holes, edge blobs and cat hairs...! All of these annoying, frustrating, hair pulling irritants can and WILL assault your efforts on more than one occasion. The keys to remaining calm and collected, and not chucking the damn kit against the wall, are 3 things...preparation, preparation, preparation...!

Sounds basic doesn't it..? Not so fast olive drabson...! When working with gloss paints, especially on cars and bikes, you want the final “look” to be shiny, clean and above all... smooth. To get there requires planning, the right tools, and elbow grease. To start with the surface MUST be completely free and clear of any and ALL mold release. Next, a good quality primer that will bite the surface well, and provide a very smooth, slightly rough finish Steve Curll put me on to the primer in the big cans from Canuck Tire that I tested, and can recommend. The trick here for me is the shake well, and warm the can in a pot of extra hot tap water for at least 10 minutes prior to spraying. Some of these primers come with a movable spray tip that changes the fan spray from horizontal to vertical. Any good quality model primer will work, so long as it is thoroughly mixed and heated. The heating helps the paint flow better, and settle smoother on the plastic surface.

Once the primer has dried completely, a first cote of your preferred gloss clear can be applied. Here is where the arguments start as to who has the best clear out there. The only effective way of settling this argument, at least for your own uses, is to TEST...and TEST some more...! I know this sounds laborious and tedious, but if you are chasing points and awards, either for club contests or Nats, it's the only way you can come up with a formula that works.

For the Nizmo GT that I won the Model of the Year award, I started out with one of my favorite paints that unfortunately are not available anymore...AeroMaster. Yup, the same guys that brought you all those great WW2 flats that were IMHO the best out there. I shot 2 light passes of this, and let dry for 3 hrs. Then the fun part. Wet sanding with 4 thou paper from the MicroMesh line. Another 2 passes of the same clear, this time a little heavier to build up a better “drop” from the decal edge, of which there were many on this car...!! More dry time, and wet sanding, this time moving on to 8 thou paper. The trick here is to go slowly and lightly, keeping lots of water on the surface. Clean thoroughly between sandings of course. I wash the model under the tap, and gently draw a tack cloth across to get any “bits” off the surface.

The whole idea behind wet sanding is the “key” the surface for the next top coat of clear. Also, you lesson the risk of “orange peel” and “under drying” by applying too many heavy coats, and not sanding in between the light coats. Now comes the scary part...!

I have tried many final coats in the past, and this was my first major attempt at using Future. I sprayed 4 heavy coats cut with Tamiya Thinner, and 1 hr between each. Oh ya, I wet sanded each when dry, with 12 thou paper. I then sprayed one FINAL coat of Future, and let dry with the aid of a plastic box placed over the model to keep the dust and cat hair off...! Sometimes a hair dryer set on low can be used to help the Future to “lay down” better. This all depends on how heavy the final pass is sprayed on.

The finishing touch to any gloss scheme, is to polish out the finish to really bring out the shine, and knock down any tiny blemishes that may have snuck in. I have used the MicroMesh polish as well as the stuff from Tamiya. Both work well. Use a lint free cloth, and do small areas at a time, kinda like polishing your “real” car...! If you take your time and work carefully, you CAN produce a super smooth, glossy finish.

Articles involving somewhat involved processes like this one can go on for too long and get lost in the explanation. If any prospective “glossers” wish to dig a little deeper, or have any questions, pleas DO NOT hesitate to get in touch, and I will help you any way I can.

Cheers, Laurie
Resident AirHead