



Zann Jones
www.ZannJones.com

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When I first started out, I found painting to be very frustrating. The paints at the home improvement centers like Krylon, Valspar and Rust-Oleum were too plain. I wanted to duplicate the colors that I saw on the web, but I couldn't find anything that I could use. Eventually from reading various magazines like Air Brush-Action, I finally found two paint systems that I like, and I want to share the information. I do not consider myself an expert on paint so feel free to disagree with my comments.

Priming

Ideally being able to sand blast the metal will provide the optimum surface for applying the primer. A sand blasted surface provides an ideal surface for the paint to adhere to. But working out of my garage, I am limited on the size of the artwork. If it does not fit into my sand blasting cabinet, I have to resort to a different method:

First, I start by removing the welding slag and splatter. In inaccessible locations, I spot sandblast to remove the welding slag.

Second, I use a nylon bristle brush and soapy water to remove oil and other contaminants. An old tooth brush also comes in handy for those tight spaces. Afterward, I wipe the entire surface using rubbing alcohol and clean paper towels.

Finally, I spray the metal using a two part self-etching primer. The primer provides excellent paint adhesion to bare metal. Using an Elcometer Paint Adhesion Tester, I was consistently having paint adhesion pulls over 900 psi which is excellent. The primer was applied over the normal mill scale found on a steel plate. The only surface preparation was the cleaning using rubbing alcohol. I bought the paint at an automotive paint store.



Elcometer Paint Adhesion Tester



Two Part Self-Etching Primer

Using the various other primers like Rust-Olium and Krylon, the paint adhesion was less than 150 psi when applied over mill scale. A paint adhesion of 150 psi would be adequate for artwork that is not subject to wear and tear, but a adhesion of 900 psi is definitely better. Of course if you can sand blast everything, paint adhesion is not an issue.

Airbrush Paint.

When I want to blend colors or to use bizarre bright colors, I end up using airbrush paint. The paint comes in a multitude of colors and is relatively inexpensive. With it being water based, it is easy to work with and clean up. The paint does have the consistency of water, so you will need an airbrush to apply it.

The airbrush paint itself is not waterproof so you will need to seal it using an automotive clear coat. I personally like DuPont ChromaClear HC-7776S. Since I am always spraying small areas, I like the 3 to 5 minute flash between coats. With it being a automotive paint, it provides the same protection as your car finish. I have used it over Createx, AutoAir, and Medea airbrush paint without any problems. I have also used the ChromaClear over copper, aluminum, brass, and steel. I have also used other automotive clear coats with good success.



Airbrush Paint



DuPont ChromaClear HC-7600

I have also tried the Ultra Clear Acrylic Finish that comes in a spray can. It comes in various brand names and it is available at Craft Stores and Home Centers. It does work, but it dulls the colors compare to DuPont ChromaClear clear coat. It also lacks the high gloss new car shine. Plus I do not know how durable it is.



Clear Acrylic Finish

1 Shot Lettering Enamel Paint

For painting using a brush, I prefer 1 Shot Lettering Enamels. It is an oil base paint that comes in 40 different colors. I like the colors and durability of the paint over Krylon, Valspar and Rust-Oleum. It is a graphic artist paint so its availability is limited to art stores and the internet.

With the long drying time for 1 Shot Lettering Enamels, I generally avoid using DuPont ChromaClear clear coat over it. If the paint is not completely dry, you will end up with a mess. The manufacture does make a Hardener that will shorten the drying time, but I have not used it yet.

Hopefully you will find the above information useful.



1 Shot Lettering Enamel Paint