

Bob Schlosberg — AirBrush Equipment & Technique W/O the Mumbo Jumbo Part Two

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I would like to thank all who responded to my first article on air brushing. For me it was an indication that many modelers wanted to use an airbrush but had some problems in the past and then were discouraged from continuing to use it. A few were sorry they had invested in the style that I had not recommended, the internal mix models with the long paint needle down the barrel of the airbrush; Having not used this style in about 25 years and at the bottom of my learning curve at the time there may be more value to these airbrushes than I realize, so don't discard them until you have experimented more. My suggestion to those who have one is to make sure the type of paint you are using is well thinned to facilitate it passing through the airbrush. This is paramount, no matter what type of airbrush you are using.

Also surprising was that a few modelers were using the Badger airbrush that I started out with so many years ago. Obviously they still work, but an updated airbrush like the Paashe Model H can work wonders in technique with more nozzle tip adjustment control. As I remember, the Badger has no paint flow control. Being able to control the paint flow will increase your enjoyment of using an airbrush, especially when making repairs.

The following tips and airbrushing techniques are all based on my using dope as my paint of choice. These are random thoughts and not written in stone or in any particular order. In time you may develop your own methods with continued use that you like better. There is no exact rule to this process, but there is lots of trial and error to learn and some of these tips I suggest are a good starting point for your own personal learning experience.

First and foremost, as I have already mentioned in this article, the most important issue is to make sure the paint is well thinned. I can not emphasize this enough! I only use dope, and some acrylics, but I feel sure that any paint will spray well if it is properly thinned. If when you start to paint and the paint has difficulty traveling up the siphon tube, and then clogs up the tip before you can really get started, then the paint has not been thinned enough. **THIN IT SOME MORE**, and until it sprays out so easily you have to close down the tip because you are now getting more paint than you want or need. (You are trying this process on a spare cardboard or piece of paper, aren't you? NEVER start spraying your model until you KNOW what is coming out of the airbrush.) My rule of thumb is the paint has to run off the mixing stick like water would. If you have made it too thin you can always add more paint in very small quantities to the desired consistency. This is not hard to do and does not need to be precise. Start with an eyeballed mix of approx. 60-40 %, (60 % being the thinner) and add thinner as needed to achieve the water consistency I mentioned. Don't be concerned if the final mix is close to 70-30 %, some paints, and pigments need to be thinned more than others.

Do not be tempted to use a cheap acrylic lacquer thinner, acetone or MEK for thinning dope. Cheap lacquer thinner is OK for cleaning only. Inexpensive lacquer thinners can evaporate much too quickly causing drying problems such as blushing and drying too fast on the airbrush tip. Good lacquer thinner will dry fast enough for our purpose, several minutes for air dry, almost immediately if you use a hair dryer. One caution with using a hair dryer is not using the hot button selection on sheeted areas for more than a few seconds or the paint will bubble. Stop immediately if this happens. If you are using dope let it cool just a little, but not completely, wet your finger and press down gently, this will most always remove the bubble(s), then let it air dry. Further heating will only produce the bubble(s) again in that area. I have never seen bubbles form over open tissue covered areas. When using a hair dryer always keep it moving so the heat is not concentrated on one area of the model.

I was taught to spray with an airbrush using the intermittent spray technique. In other words, you apply the paint in strokes in a left to right pattern (or vice versa if you are so inclined). After each stroke you stop, make another stroke just below the previous stroke which is repeated again and again until you have laid on the base coat fairly evenly. Let it dry naturally, or use the hair dryer, and then start the second coat filling in the areas that need it being careful to spread the paint as evenly as possible. With practice you should get sufficient coverage with three light coats. Really big areas may need a touch up fourth coat. That's not unusual. Never try to cover in one coat, that is the way to apply too much paint. Applying paint in short bursts takes a little practice, but in the long run is the better way rather than just pressing the airbrush button down and holding it. You have better control of the paint pattern, and you will avoid applying too much paint in one area avoiding the need for more paint on the rest of the part to get what looks like an even coat. With continued use you will find on the Paashe airbrush I recommend that you will be able to control how much paint you are applying by how hard you press on the button. A light touch will produce a reduced flow which is very helpful in some instances.

Try to avoid a very involved paint scheme for your model when first starting to use an airbrush. Keep it simple until you get the feel of what you can do. Don't be tempted to be like the first time modeler who wants to build and fly an Albatross D-Va WW I biplane and has never even tried a simple Bostonian model.

A two color model such as a conventional dark fuselage and a lighter color wing and stabilizer is a good

starting point. Remember. you are painting the model so it will look good years from now without fading, so to keep it light and competitive. If you so desire. paint red tissue red. green tissue green etc. Do not cover a model in one color and paint it another color as this will require too much paint and will only add more weight than is necessary. There are some exceptions, partial colors that are trim colors can be done easily as they are covering only a small part of the base color and will add negligible weight to your model. Many times you can mask off the trim area before you apply the base coat and avoid a double painted area.

As you start to get more involved in paint schemes you will need to mask off areas to be painted and to protect other areas already painted. This is an art all by itself. It can be a tedious job and probably the least liked part of painting a model, I can readily attest to that but when your model comes out as you visualized it with crisp lines defining color separations you will see it was well worth the effort.

Until someone shows me a product that is better than 3M # 811 scotch Removable Magic Tape in the BLUE box for masking lines, this is the product to use. If it is well adhered to your surface it will provide the sharpest line between colors you could possibly want and it will not lift off paint already applied, a huge plus to anyone who has had paint peel off when lifting tape that has too much tack. Recently, Gene Smith, an accomplished well known modeler and Cactus Squadron member from OK asked me what I use to mask off paint color separations. I told him, use the 3M # 811 almost exclusively. After he tried it he later told me that he couldn't get along with out it now! This tape comes in three sizes, 1/2, 3/4, and 1". The 3/4" size is the easiest to find in large office supply stores, the other sizes I've found in artist supply stores and in longer footage rolls,. Don't be tempted to use low tack drafting masking tape, it will do a terrible job of color separation as the product is too thick. When spraying a color separation line try to avoid spraying directly at the tape line. It is much better to spray from above or behind the line as this will keep paint from creeping under the line if the tape lifts even the slightest bit. This is not always practical, but always be careful spraying at the line by checking frequently that it has not lifted. It probably won't on a completely flat surface, but span wise on top of a wing where there is some sag to the tissue between rib bays it can lift. Pressing it down lightly before spraying each coat will correct the problem. This tape will not work on curves or compound surfaces so you have to transition the straight line to a striping tape that will make gradual 0-180 degree bends and adhere to compound surfaces. For this I use a product called EZ-Mask flexible masking tape. It is marketed by Great Planes and can be purchased at many hobby shops or mail order hobby catalogs. It comes in two sizes, 1/8 and 1/4 inch, the color is red so it is easy to see and to work with. I use the 1/8 " size the most but the 1/4" size comes in very handy also. This tape works very well when you want to wrap a trim color around a leading edge or wing tip to carry the color to the underside. When you heat it with the hair dryer it becomes quite flexible to work with and is really required for nice smooth curvatures on flat or compound surfaces. It also is a low tack tape. When removing these tapes from your model after the paint has dried it is a good idea to pull it back over itself and away from the paint line at a tangent as opposed to lifting it off straight up. This is just an extra precaution, not always needed, but if too much paint has been applied at the line it can sometimes peel some of the paint on the trim side of the line with it. NEVER use 3M #810 that comes in the Green box! You will regret it as it has far too much adhesion for tissue paper. Speaking of tissue paper, I am assuming that you are using a good grade of Japanese Esaki type of tissue on your model. Tsk,tsk, if you are using Hallmark domestic.

Now you have to mask the rest of the model from the over spray, or at the very least the immediate areas adjacent to it. Don't be lazy about this. If you have never used an airbrush you will be very surprised how the over spray can redeposit a very fine amount of paint somewhere else on the model. You will not be happy about this! I have found that after using many different types of paper materials for this rough masking that a paper kitchen towel similar to a Bounty towel is by far the BEST thing to use. It is soft, conforms to the model very well and is easily taped to itself by plain old masking tape, being careful of course not to have the masking tape touch any thing but the paper towel. I purchase these towels at a Costco or Sam's Club type of warehouse discount store and use these towels extensively. They are excellent for paint and airbrush clean up also and are less expensive and usually come in larger rolls than what you purchase at the grocery store. My last thought for now is that you should not go from one color to the next using the same airbrush without at least a good flushing of the air brush with thinner. Much preferred would be a complete breakdown and cleaning of the tip and siphon tube. You will be one unhappy camper if the previous color spits out some small pin size or larger dots on your nice white finish because it was not cleaned properly. When that happens you have probably spoiled your carefully thought out paint job. This is another reason to consider having at least one more airbrush. It is important to keep the airbrush clean. When you are through using it clean it thoroughly, otherwise a color could show up the next time you use it because the thinner will eventually soften the paint inside the tip you didn't get completely clean, and there it is on your next model. If you need help or advice I'm available, my phone # is on the front of this newsletter (480-941-8778). I would much prefer verbal communication than writing letters, they take too much time from building models and I have a few hundred more I would like to build before these old eyes and body fail me. Gene Smith told me recently of a saying that fits many of us, " God put me on earth to accomplish so many things, right now I am so far behind I may

never die". Until the next time ----