

The Flame Game

BY JULIAN "MR.J" BRAET



Getting all fired up over flames.

IDON'T KNOW about you, but *I love flames*. I've come to realize that everything looks better with flames. (Well almost everything. Sorry, Lansburg.)

I mean how else can you completely change the appearance of any object so dramatically with just some paint?

In my many years in the auto graphics business, I have painted flames on just about anything that you can imagine. I've painted flames on cars, trucks, motorcycles, bicycles, helmets, boats, signs, toys, jet skis, clothing and more (don't ask).

The painting of flames got its start during WW2. Some of our bombers and fighters had them painted on their noses. (Hey, I think I'll try that. Jay, Jay — awe come on, it won't hurt.)

When the war ended, these same pilots and mechanics started to build hot rods and they added these same flames to their cars.

Originally the flames were crude, but eventually the artists took over the tasks

of *flaming* the cars and the smooth flowing licks followed.

Throughout the years there have been some great automotive artists that have applied their own unique styles to the flame. Among the *greats* are, Larry Watson, Rod Powell, Dennis Ricklefs, Andy Southard, Art Himsl, Tom Kelly and the list goes on and on. You would be wise to check out their work in hot rod, truck and motorcycle magazines. As a matter of fact Rod Powell has written a book entirely devoted to flames.

(Note: Mr. J does not imply that he is in the same league as these "real artists"; he just wants you to think that he knows them...)

Mr. J owns Mr. J's Signs and Graphics in Lyndhurst, N.J., and is the creator of Xcaliber, striping brushes and preservative. For more methods to the madness, check out Mr. J's three-volume Video Classroom series, Jersey Style Airbrush & Lettering. Send questions about "Joisey Style" lettering to Mr. J at JXCAL@aol.com.



I've come to realize that everything looks better with flames.



After I make some rough pencil sketches, I tried various patterns out on the hood of the van using a white Stabilo pencil. (These pencils are like a china marker, except that they wash off with water and will not harm your paint.) One way to do this is to make a paper pattern. Another way is to draw the flames by hand and then scan them into your computer to make a paint mask. This time I decided to use application (transfer) tape and lay out the flames directly on the tape. I prepare the hood like any other type of graphic application. I start out with a glass cleaner, followed by Rapid-Prep to remove any wax or grease before any taping is started. Starting in the center of the hood and using 6" tape, I begin masking off for the flames. Next I squeegee the tape edges down. I sketch the flames using a black Stabilo, starting in the center of the hood (working lightly at first). I like to use the Stabilo pencils because you can wipe out a mistake at any time. (Not so easy with a magic marker.) Now it's time to check the flames for any needed corrections before starting to cut them out.



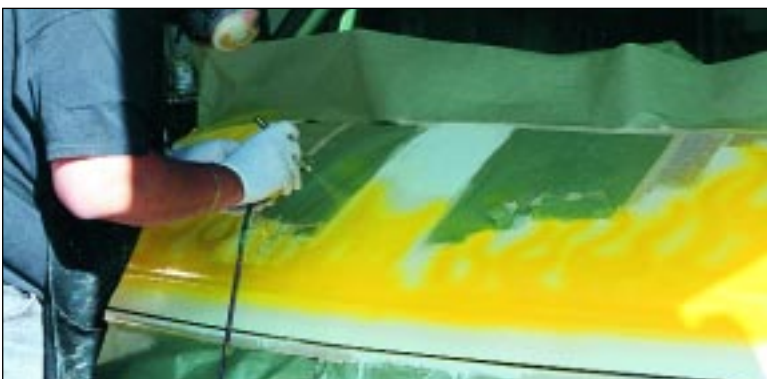
The flames have been hand cut using my trusty Olfa knife (thanks, Kool Tools). I have found that this knife is easier for me to use than other knives. At this time I check all my cuts and make any adjustments in the flames. As you can see, I used the flames to accent the louvres that I painted on the hood (see Sign Business, June 2000, page 48). Since I'll be painting using 1 Shot lettering enamels, there is no need to sand or scuff the surface before I do any painting. However, if you are going to use automotive paints (lacquer or urethane) you must scuff the surface first. Use automotive sandpaper or a scuffy pad.



Using auto body masking paper, I paper and tape off the surrounding areas of the hood to protect against overspray. I clean the area again using Rapid-Prep. I notice a couple of small scratches in the hood, and decide to sand them out using 600 grit wet or dry sandpaper. Oh, what the heck, I might as well scuff the rest of the area that I have to paint. I use a green 3M scuffy pad for this. Now, I re-clean the hood for the last time.



Since I want the flames to start out in the front of the hood as white, I mix 1 Shot white with a couple of drops of hardener and some hi-temp reducer. I apply the white with a gray foam roller. (You can brush or spray the color on also.) Because this is my base color, I need to apply it as smooth as possible. Use only the weight of the roller to eliminate any bubbles in the paint.

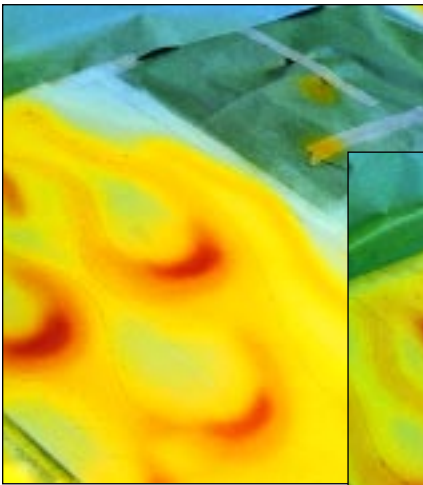


I wait about 10 to 15 minutes to let the paint tack up before any airbrushing is done. While the base is setting up, I mix the lettering enamels that are to be airbrushed all at once. The ratio is 60 percent reducer to 40 percent paint (give or take). The colors are sprayed on at 40 lbs. And I'm using an Iwata Eclipse airbrush. Don't forget to wear disposable gloves and a good respirator. The first color is chrome yellow, sprayed over all the flames, except for an area approximately 2 1/2" on the very front of the hood. (We want this to remain white.)

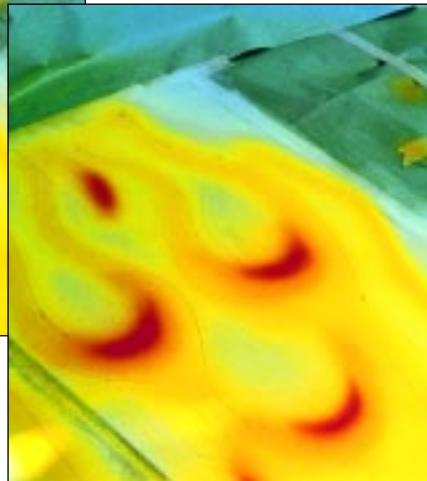


Medium orange is airbrushed on next. Follow the inside parts of the flames and keep it light. Note: there is no reason to clean out all the color in the airbrush between these steps because they are all in the same color family.

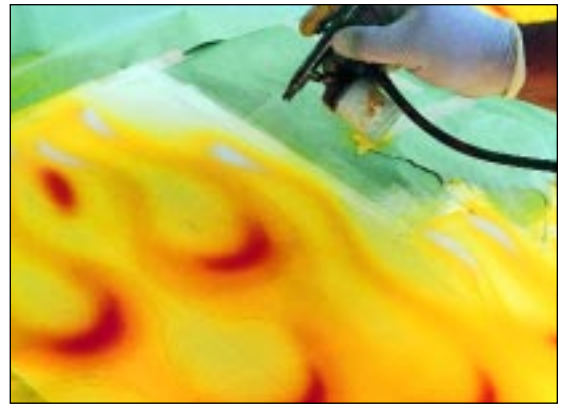
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Vermillion is airbrushed into the orange, with a little heavier accent on the bottoms of the curves.



Here I use some Rubine red to give it a little more punch. After this, you must clean out the airbrush thoroughly. We are going to airbrush with white, and if you do not clean out the red the white will turn pink.



The last color airbrushed is white. This is only sprayed on the tips of the flames for an added highlight. Now that all of the airbrushing is completed, it's time to clean your equipment. The first thing that you'll need to do is to spray as much of the remaining color out of the airbrush as possible. Next, run some reducer through the airbrush to flush out the lettering enamel. Mineral spirits are now sprayed through the airbrush. Carefully remove the needle, clean it, and replace it. The last thing that I do is spray some WD-40 into the part of the airbrush where the paint enters the airbrush. Spray this out. Finally I spray some more into the trigger, the tip and the needle. The WD-40 will keep the airbrush lubricated; simply run some mineral spirits through the airbrush the next time you need to use it.



Looks pretty confusing, huh? No wait that's just me. But seriously folks, let the paint set up only about 15 minutes. If you wait any longer, you could have a problem when you remove the masking. The airbrushing could tear up.



What do you think? Looks more like flames without all that tape-n-paper right? And because we took some time in the beginning masking and taping, we have NO overspray to deal with. You'll notice the front of the hood where we left the white helps to bring your eye into the flames. (Well your eye doesn't really leave your head — or does it?) You could leave the flames alone at this point, but why?



I allow the paint to dry for about 12 hours. I know that everything looks better with pinstripes. So I whip out my trusty Xcaliber striping brush, load it up with some process blue and add the finishing touch. Note the details of the painted-on louvres.



Process blue outlines really make the flames stand out.

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