

Base Coat and Clear Coat The Rusty Acres Approach

With the very popular and growing hobby of tractor restoration, one of the biggest questions on people's minds is whether or not they'll have the talent to paint, and what equipment and facilities it will take to put on a showroom finish.

Just to warn you ahead, my upcoming comments will be on the path of base coat/clear coat, so get your head scratching out of the way now. Let's start at the beginning...

Not all that many years ago, more than a few people painted their tractor with whatever the local ag supply store had on its shelf. If the can said John Deere Green, that's what it was, even if it wasn't.

Then, as the restoration hobby began to grow, people discovered that automotive paint, reducer, and hardener resulted in a whole new level of shine, even if it did usually take a bit longer to dry.

A few years later, automotive single-stage acrylic enamel made the scene and I think it's the best bet to get that beautiful showroom finish. So, you ask, how is this accomplished? And this is where we head towards the base coat/clear coat technique.

Base coat/clear coat is the same method that better paint jobs are applied to vehicles — cars and trucks — so why should this technology be used on tractors? A better question might be, "Why not?" Let's talk...

An argument against is the obvious statement that it wasn't done that way at the factory. But remember, this is your tractor. You want it to look great. You've already put a pile of money in it coming this far, so why not leave it at that?

I know that you can achieve the perfect paint job by spraying acrylic enamel. I use it all the time in my restorations. The question of whether or not to follow it with clear coat is best answered by considering what you want for the final finish. I clear coat at the customer's request, and have done a couple of my own that way, but the problem with clear coat is that it looks so shiny that the tractor looks like it's plastic! No question about it, the shine is deep.

I've even base coated/clear coated rear wheel

rims. What a look! Clear-coated tractors are capable of stealing the show on parade day, but they're also capable of exposing even the smallest ripples or dimples in the sheet metal work.

I also collect Massey tractors, and some of them have a bronze-painted engine. I base coat/clear coat these engines, and with the bronze and silver metallics they just glow. Regular single-stage paints leave them attractive, but flat by comparison.

I was visiting with my paint rep a couple of years ago, who suggested that I try clear coating a tractor. When comparing the samples, I thought it would really look sharp to have that deep of a finish. On the other hand, I thought it would be a bit pricey to achieve such a paint job. But again, everything is expensive these days, and we've already paid plenty to come this far...

Base coat/clear coat isn't as difficult as it may sound. It's really just like regular painting, but has a couple more steps involved. More than likely, the base coat will have to be color matched in the color you choose, and then produced in the base-coat formula.

I use Martin Senour Paints® base coat/clear coating procedures. I get the Tec/BASE® from my local NAPA® Auto Parts Store, and then mix Acrylic Urethane Basecoat Stabilizer part number 8882 along with it to an even 1:1 ratio. Then apply two or three medium wet coats at intervals of 15 to 20 minutes between coats. Two coats color it real well, but three will *really* do the job. Then, after about 30 minutes of drying time of the base coats, it comes time for the clear coating. There are many clear coatings available, but I use Martin Senour Tec/BASE® High Solids, Air Dry Clearcoat 8889, which reduces with Acrylic Urethane Solvent part number TS-3 Reducer and Acrylic Urethane Hardener part number 8876. Put the first coat on light and dry. Then, put on two more coats that are medium wet and even, allowing 30 minutes between coats. The trick to spraying clear is that you should always watch the spray pattern, and follow your spray shadow. Clear can be tricky to shoot, but once you get the hang of it, you'll be a pro. Try small pieces first, or even the inside stuff, to learn.

Obviously, the cast iron parts won't need polishing, but sometimes there are those little pieces of dirt, or maybe a bit of "orange peel," or perhaps even a run or two. You'll want to correct this. To do so, wait until the clear is dry. Preferably, that's

the next day, but don't let it set for too long, like a week, as it's best to get at it as soon as possible.

The reason for the three coats is for mistakes and flaws, as one coat of clear will be sanded off in the buffing stage. Sand the clear with dry 1500 to 2000 grit paper. I use an orbital air DA Sander for this. Have plenty of paper available, as it plugs up fast. Sand lightly, and stay flat to avoid sanding through. Also, do not sand in areas that you will not be able to polish later.

After sanding, blow off the dust with an air hose (safe procedures and proper masks, of course).

To buff and polish, you can use an orbital electric or air car waxer. I use air. It has a foam pad that kind of looks like the inside of an egg carton. Cloth bonnets will work, as will a wool pad, but the 3M™ Perfect-It™ Plus Foam Compounding Pad, 05737 works best for me.

I use 3M™ Perfect-It™ II Rubbing Compound, 05947 and buy it by the gallon. I transfer it to a squeezable ketchup bottle and put on a little at a time, polishing until all of the swirl marks and dull spots disappear. Don't spend too much time in one spot (you can come back to it) and hand polish the tight corners. Spending too much time in any location can result in "melt-throughs" as the friction heat builds up. Go around evenly, taking just a few square feet at a time on the larger surfaces. Watch those edges and corners!

Achieve this and you'll have a look that will stop people in their tracks, and you'll discover that you have a perfect surface for decal application as well. The classic compliments will come to you in the form of pointed questions...

"Yeah, I bet that's one of them \$5000 paint jobs."

"Nope, only cost a few hundred."

"Well, you gotta have at least 10 coats of paint on there!"

"Nope, only three, and they were shot one behind the other just 20 minutes apart."

"Well then, do you think I'd be able to do that?"

"Sure, have a seat and I'll tell you how."

These days, as you might expect, the shop is very busy. I'm getting tractors ready for Two-Cylinder XVI, which will be here sooner than you think. Remember, it's in June this year, the 16th and 17th, in the hope that the weather will be more comfortable for all of us. I'm looking forward to it, and hope to see you there too! Maybe we'll be able to spend a little time visiting about paint. ☺