

Don't take fright. I am not going into a long treatise on a subject perhaps better covered by painting specialists. I do however get questions about painting methods, and in the ensuing discussion I am surprised to find that I break some of the basic rules!

Preparation.

Really this starts at the building stage. It makes painting the main assemblies, such as frames, footplate, boiler, smokebox and the like, much easier if you arrange as many items as possible to be capable of attachment by glue or screws after painting.

Make sure that all the nooks and crannies on the model are clean, crisp, and square, by careful work with the scraper on any surplus solder.

Wash and gently scrub the items in warm water in a semi-abrasive solution, that is, one is not good for your hands (washing-up contains hand oils which do not mix with paint).

Dry the items and warm them up a bit. I have made a small aluminium box with a flat top, containing a 100-watt light bulb, and this does the job very well.

Arrange some "gadgets", clips, pin-vices, clamps or similar to enable you to hold the items without finger contact – even a light touch with the finger will leave a print to which the paint will not stick.

Paint.

Now we drift into areas which come under "personal choice". The following system has evolved over the years, and it works for me. Having spent a lot of time on fine detail metal work, rivets, fine valances, beading and so on, I don't want to lose it under too much paint. To this end, I have never used primer or undercoat on any model which has a gloss or satin finish. Matt black is the problem, and here I spray a very light coat of black gloss, and then the matt over that.

And now to the paint. I use Humbrol or Precision/Phoenix standard enamels, because they are easy to get, can be mixed for variations in colour, and they airbrush well. I do wish that we still had the old-style Humbrols from before the quick-drying era of "build a model in 10 minutes"! It is very difficult to get coverage with a brush in one coat that does not look like cold porridge.

To work.

So, with the preparation done, and the model clean, dry and warm, it is clamped in the holding device. Stir the paint very well, for 10–15 minutes, and pour a small amount into the airbrush glass container, through a filter made from a piece of old tights (ask permission first). Then pour the same amount of turps/thinners into the pot, so that you have a 50-50 mix. Cover the top and give the container a good shake.

On my air pressure set-up in the workshop I have a valve for reducing pressure and a large reservoir, which enable me to get a very low but constant pressure. I usually set pressure at between 20-30 psi. Paint viscosity seems to vary with colour!

Take the now-warm part from the heater cabinet and just “waft” the airbrush over it with a couple of passes and return the part to the cabinet. Treat in the same way all parts needing the same colour.

Repeat this performance about 6 – 8 times at intervals of about one minute.

Bearing in mind that the paint is very thin, what happens, I think, is this: -

The first coat, through which you can still quite clearly see the metal, has nevertheless left a light cover everywhere. In the 60 seconds or so it has gone “off” enough so as not to run. The next coat, again of a couple of passes, eats into the first coat just enough to blend in, but not enough to run. This too is left for 60 seconds, and so on. Keep it to a couple of passes per cycle and don’t get impatient. Do not be tempted to put extra paint on towards the end of the process, or it will run.

Patience.

When all the metal edges and corners have disappeared under paint, then that is thick enough. Place all the parts under a dust cover and leave them alone for at least three days. Then, with careful handling, you can scrape the paint off splasher beading and so on, and then add items like the springs, injectors, and whistles. Solder the pick-ups in place, and fine-tune them running.

Finally, give a very light coat of varnish by means of a couple of passes with the airbrush over both sides and ends. And leave it under cover for 2 – 3 more days before playing with it!