

How I painted my Ultra Van for \$100
(and you can, too!)



It was my first Rally, and Norm Helmkey introduced me at a Tech session by saying, with tongue in cheek "And now Bill Welle will tell you how to paint an Ultra Van--on the cheap!". He was exactly right, because all materials, including chemicals, scrubbers & sandpaper, rollers, and paint came to less than \$100 when I was finished. But--while the cost was low, it took quite a bit of time. Let me say at the outset that thorough and careful preparation of the surface is of the utmost importance--and that's true of any paint job.

Now, just to get your attention, I'll tell you that I did the job with house paint and a roller. But read on--specialized house paint, special rollers, and specific chemicals.

This is what you will need:

- A. For bare aluminum--A chemical etch such as Aluma Prep or Alodine.
- B. For bare fiberglass--A de-glosser like liquid sandpaper.
- C. A primer paint compatible with aluminum, and a primer for the fiberglass. (Note: they will differ from each other, but they both should be able to accept the same finish or top coat).
- D. Finish or top coat--Acrylic House Paint.

Now for some general information:-

I used Porter paint products--it is a paint of choice down here for professionals who paint mobile homes. Other companies such as Sears, Sherwin Williams all offer this acrylic paint in literally hundreds of colors in flat, semi-gloss and gloss textures--so take your choice, but try to stay with one product line to avoid confusion or mistakes. Porters cost a little more, and their metal primer paint is almost impossible to use (it dries too fast). Their own salesmen will recommend another primer such as Kilz I or Kilz II.

Use only smooth foam rollers, and cut them down to a manageable size, such as 3 or 4 inches. You will find many "nooks and crannies" on the Ultra (as compared to a house) that even the cut down roller will not reach--do not resort to a paint brush! You will have to make some very small rollers because you won't be able to buy them (I don't know why they are not made). These don't need to be very exotic--make a handle from coat hanger wire, use a piece of dowel for the roller (or cardboard), and cover with foam attached with rubber cement. Just look at a full sized roller and make a much smaller replica.

In any case, you will have to develop a smooth even technique, because these foam rollers are not very "forgiving". If you bear down too hard, you will squeeze paint out of the roller ends, and not enough pressure will cause the roller to skid, and smear the paint. Either way you'll have to go over it again and remember--this paint sets up fast. So--practice first, and then start with the roof. That way if you make a few mistakes--just keep the critics off a ladder! In my case, I went thru the entire process on just the door before deciding to tackle the whole job.

Now let's take it from the top:

1. Surface preparation-

The paint on #211 was so deteriorated that I had to strip it of the entire vehicle. A lot of work and paint remover, but probably best in the long run. You may not need to do this with yours, but remember--thorough preparation.

2. Next the entire vehicle should be scrubbed with Nylon scrubbers and detergent to thoroughly clean the aluminum and fiberglass.

3. Then apply the metal etching solution to the aluminum, wait the prescribed time, then flush off with water.

4. Apply de-glosser (Liquid Sandpaper) to the fiberglass to remove the gloss and promote paint adhesion.

5. Roll prime paints on aluminum and fiberglass surfaces. (Note: the aluminum should be primed as soon as possible after the metal has been etched).

6. Now the whole vehicle should be sanded to smooth down any rough spots.

7. Then carefully roll on the finish coat or coats. (The fiberglass gelcoat on my Ultra was a bright red, so I used two coats on it). The aluminum got only one coat--this paint is very thick, and it covers well.

Finally, step back and admire your work--you're done, and the job will look professional. To sum up: Aside from price--there are other advantages.

A You can choose from hundreds of colors and shades.

B these paints are very "user friendly" when compared to automotive finishes.

C Roller application is relatively easy.

D Acrylic paints dry very quickly, become dust free (and bug free) in minutes--they don't run or spatter.

E You can work outside in many cases, doing a section at a time.

So have at it--and use the money you save to finance your trip to the next Florida Rally. See you there! Bill Welle

P. S. One more thing--read and follow all directions carefully, but don't hesitate to call me if you think I can help. B. W.



Above picture shows Bill's final job.

Our apologies to Bill. Picture at right was to go with his article "How much does it weigh", which was printed in the last Newsletter.

