

Wheelin' Along!

Painting a metal flake ribbon wheelchair cover

• BY ANDY ANDERSON

This was a fun project for me. During the 1970's about 75% of all paint jobs I did were metal-flaked with candy-color graphics. It seems there's a little resurgence in the flake jobs from those days. Maybe they really never went away but given the opportunity to do anything for my friend I chose an old flake paint job. Hope you enjoy the article as much as I did doing this job.

The material list is comprised mainly of high quality urethane paint.



I began this sequence with silver flake and clear already applied on the wheelchair cover. This was for a long-time customer who was slowly becoming disabled. He always had the nicest vans and motorcycles, so he asked if I'd paint his wheelchair cover. No problem!

I laid out my design with 1/8-inch and 1/4-inch tapes. This is all free-form; no pre-sketch or layout. I just start taping and allow my stream of consciousness to take over.

STEP 1 and 2

I used a combination of panels and interweaving ribbons. Once satisfied with the layout, I masked off the separate components of the design.

STEP 3

The panels were masked leaving the outside borders ready to spray.



STEP 4

Starting with magenta candy concentrate mixed with intercoat clear, I carefully faded the magenta, front to rear, using a SATA Mini-jet gun. At the rear I mixed purple candy concentrate and started building color

strength to fade toward the front into the magenta. (See Photo 8 for a close-up of the blended fade).



STEP 5

I reversed my fade on the top border area using purple at the front and magenta at the rear.

STEP 6

After the fades dried (I also applied two coats of intercoat clear over the fade) I unmasked the inner border that will have a candy yellow-to-orange fade.



STEP 7

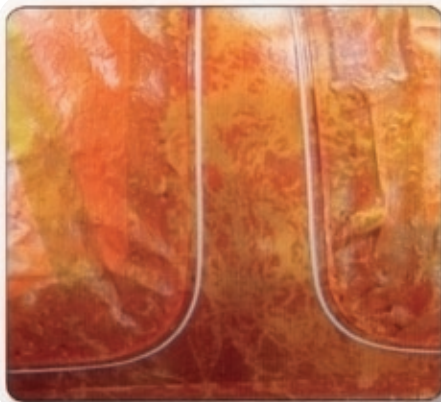
This shows the next area for spraying. There was a little more design work to do on the side panels before I began spraying. I used FBS orange

tape here which I discovered in the middle of this project. Great Product! Wish I had found out about it before I had the whole piece laid out.



STEP 8

Here you can see the magenta and purple fades. The side panel has the additional taping finished and the top is getting an inner 1/8-inch tape line.



STEP 9

For this border I used Spanish gold candy concentrate faded to tangerine and magenta. I added a little texture first before the tangerine was sprayed, and then sprayed gold candy and faded that back to the tangerine candy. Next, I lightly sprayed magenta candy cut with intercoat clear over the rear of the area to strengthen the tangerine. On some applications I may over-reduce the candy with clear to weaken the color. This helps to build the color a little slower when spraying. It may require a few more coats, but it allows for greater control. Note: Always refer to your particular paint system's tech manual for details on mixing instructions.



STEP 10

I peeled off the masks from the panels to prepare them for the next stage. Before spraying the inner panels, I taped off the areas that have already been painted. Always be sure that a painted area is completely dry before taping over it or the tape will leave marks in the soft paint!

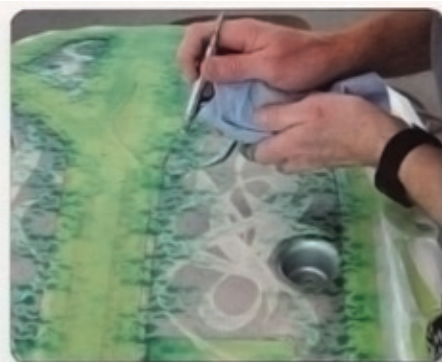


STEP 11

The inner panel was ready for color. I applied a coat of intercoat clear over the ribbons to help seal the tape's edge. Because I used the old crepe tape on these, I know there will be some creeping. Don't ask why I used that product! The FBS tape would have yielded a clean tape line had I been aware of their product at the start of this project. The other choices of tape have limitations on a project such as this. Sometimes, I had to leave this project for many weeks, so any tape that would crawl or shrink was out of the question. In the end the Crepe worked OK.

STEP 12

The inner top panel was slated for a lace texture, and because I really couldn't find a pattern I liked, I made do with a compromise pattern. I taped it down and sprayed candy organic green around the edges. A little trick here: If you have access to a mist textile adhesive, spray it on the side of the lace that will be against the paint. It holds perfectly and any residue can be wiped off with a light wax-and-grease remover. Sometimes you can find it at fabric stores or hobby/art supply stores. You don't want a strong adhesive. No industrial strength. If you find some make sure you experiment before you try it on your job. All manufactures adhesives are not the same. Test, test, test!



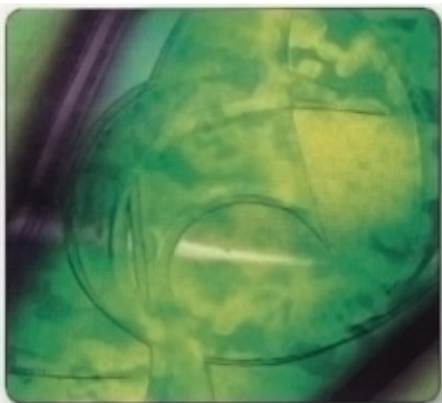
STEP 13

I airbrushed the organic green candy solidly around the edge after I removed the lace.



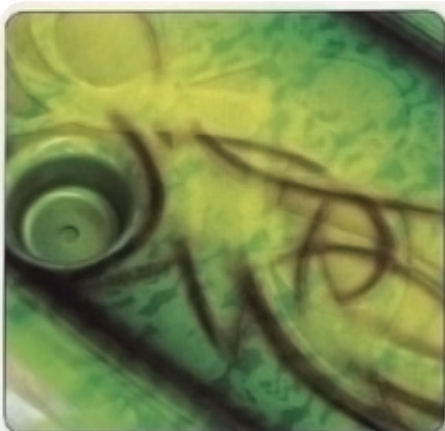
STEP 14

Here you can see the organic green border and the sprayed lime gold in the inner areas of the panel.



STEP 15

A closer photo of the inner panel shows the completed fades in the lace. Here, I airbrushed black around the edge to help define the panel by adding more contrast.



STEP 16

These photos show the shadows being airbrushed off of the ribbons. For the shadow color I mixed organic green candy with some black and a touch of candy purple. This will help to grey the color. The shadow color is cut with intercoat clear. Cutting the color strength with clear helps to gradually build the strength of the color when airbrushing.



STEP 17

I unmasked all the painted areas, and was ready for the taping of the ribbons for individual color spraying.



STEP 18

I masked the ribbons with Automask masking material (it's easy to cut and doesn't leave any residue), and very carefully cut out the ribbons with an #11 X-Acto blade.



STEP 19

The first set of ribbons to be airbrushed were the yellow-to-tangerine. Spanish gold candy was used to fade to tangerine at the ends. I added a touch of magenta to the tips to build color strength.



STEP 20

I completed one set of ribbons. On to the next.



STEP 21

This set of ribbons is a magenta-to-purple candy color fade. The last set is oriental blue candy-to-purple.



STEP 22

I added a little more detail to some of the ribbons. This photo actually shows me airbrushing the tips with magenta candy.



STEP 23

In this step I cleaned up some of my shadowing under the ribbons.



STEP 24

I finished the main color work. I moved onto the detail shadows on the over and under ribbons.



STEP 25

The shadow over the lime gold border was a mix of candy purple, black, and a little organic green. I used an Iwata Eclipse airbrush on all this work.



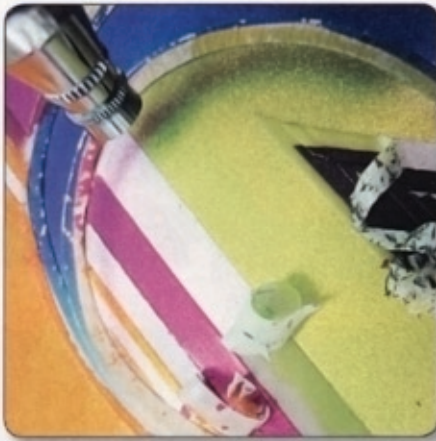
STEP 26

When I shadowed the ribbons, I usually removed tape from the bottom ribbon. The tape was pulled up all the way to the outline tape on the top ribbon so that it could be airbrushed.



STEP 27

This photo shows the right side of the panel with all of the shadowing and tape removed. The left side still required airbrush shadow work.



STEP 28

Here's a good shot showing the pulled up tape for airbrush shadowing. I used different colors over different areas to achieve a little better color balance in the shadows. Note the light purple candy used over the silver tape line. This helps build depth in the design.



STEP 29

All shadowing was finished and all the tape was removed. This is how it looked before I sprayed three coats of clear. Also, now's the time to make corrections or repairs if needed.



STEP 30

I use full safety spray gear when spraying clear. This stuff is brutal on your health if you don't take precautions. Believe me, after 42 years of using all kinds of toxic paint I try to be as careful as possible using these products. I'd like to be doing this for another 30 years!

FINAL

The clear really brings out the color. I wet-sanded the panel using wet or dry 500-grit sandpaper, and performed this clearing and sanding process one or two more times until I achieved a flat surface over all the taped lines. Once you're satisfied with the last coat of clear, you're ready for the final sanding and buffing process. I began my final sanding with 800- or 1000-grit wet or dry sandpaper and worked up to a final 3000-grit sandpaper. I usually begin buffing with a wool pad and 3M Perfect-It III Extra Cut Rubbing Compound, work up to a gray foam pad with 3M Trizact Polish, and clean the paint with a micro towel.

Lastly, I added a little personal touch for my friend: his initials in variegated gold leaf and a little pinstriping design.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Working on his own motorcycle as a young teenager, Andy taught himself how to airbrush and found the passion for the art in 1968. In 1976, he opened Anderson Studio, Inc. a custom shop focusing on motorcycles, vans, tour buses, and, ultimately, T-shirt screen printing. Today, Anderson is considered one of the world's best color-an-black screen printers and his distinguished clients include Jimmy Buffet, Charlie Daniels, Neil Young, Taylor Swift, Keith Urban, and many others. He has earned over 50 industry awards for T-shirt printing and many of his bikes have won "Best in Show." Anderson has been featured in the books, *Pinstriping Masters 2*, *Advanced Airbrush Art*, *Custom Painting Secrets*, and *Airbrush Action* magazine