

T-SHIRT TACTICS

Part 1

Making Money With Silhouettes & Plotters



by Terry Hill

Silhouette designs are easy to produce, rendered quickly for faster money and turnaround, and boast higher sales volume. Additionally, if done properly, silhouette graphics are very cool to the customer because of the perceived value of a seemingly complex design.

Silhouettes are produced with either a positive or a negative stencil. With negative stencils, you spray the desired color inside the "hole" of the stencil. With positive stencils (which I'll cover in the next issue) the opposite is done — you spray to the outside of the shape or image.

Most of my stencils are generated from a plotter. This is an advanced and sophisticated integration of T-shirt art, and it is quite high tech. I strongly encourage all shirt artists to explore this technique. It's not only the future — it's the now — so don't delay the inevitable. A good quality plotter capable of cutting stencils (for those of you who may not know, the design is first created on the computer, and then generated from the plotter) costs from \$1,500 to \$4,000, and the best deals are found through the Internet.

After much searching, I found a perfect image suited for an "x-treme" biking silhouette. It's important to note that I'm always on the lookout for new images, so I frequently archive reference photos for future designs.

NOTE: Detailed instruction on the use of Adobe Photoshop falls beyond the scope of this article. For further information or home-based instruction, I suggest two excellent references: the *WOW* instructional book series by Peachpit Press, and Adobe's *Classroom In A Book*.

Tech File

Airbrush: Iwata HP-BCS Eclipse
Air source: Silenitaire Terry Hill model 50-24-T-Air
Paint Media: Createx textile colors
Surface Media: 50/50 poly cotton blend T-shirts
Masking: Stencils, freehand shields
Projector: Astrascope
Lighting: Daylight-balanced fluorescent lighting
Ventilation: Squirrel cage fans built into easel



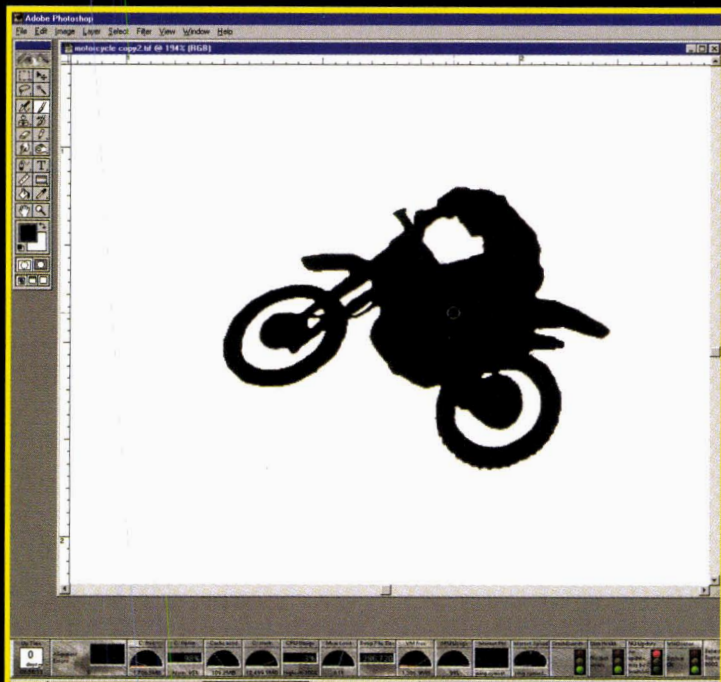
Step 1

Scan the photo into the computer. Working in PhotoShop, I used the eraser tool to create a border around the image. The checker-board pattern around the bike indicates the area that has been erased.



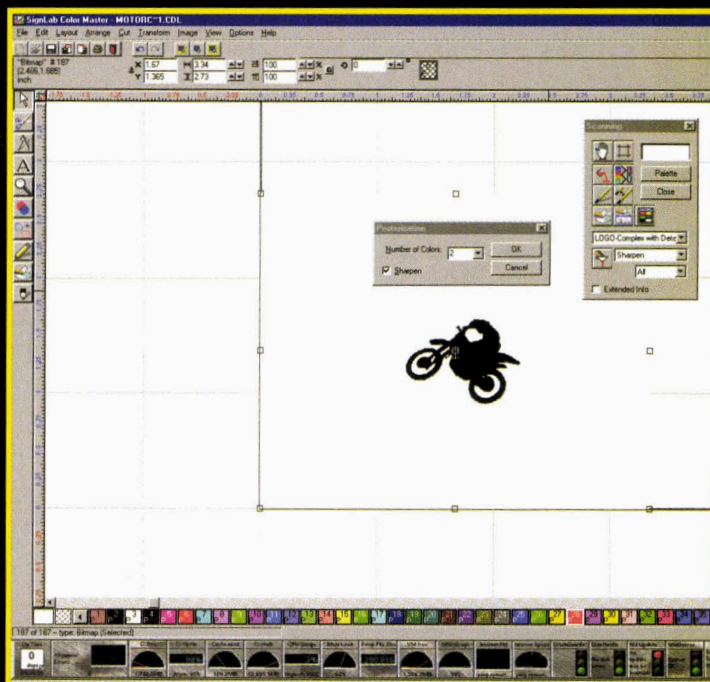
Step 2

Using the Lasso tool to select and protect the desired area, the background is then erased.



Step 3

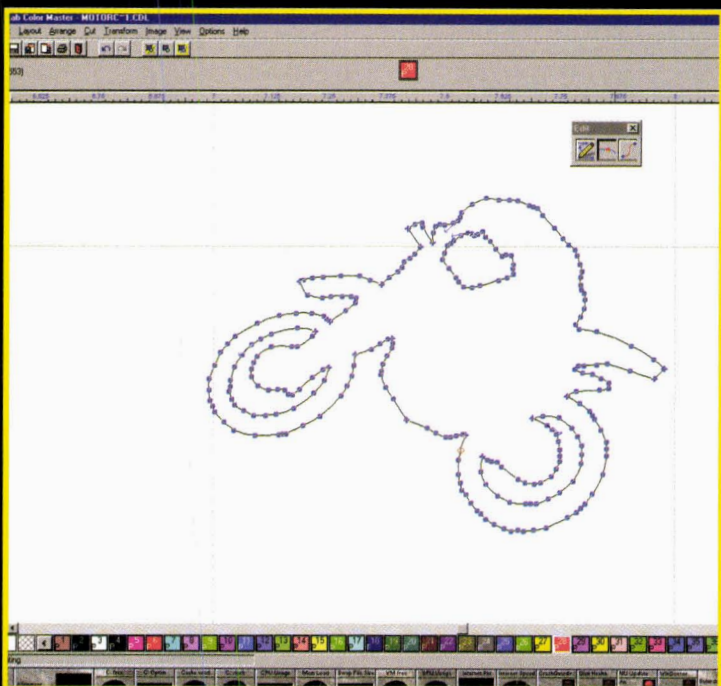
In PhotoShop, I converted the image to black and touched up the irregularities. After flattening it, I saved it as a TIFF file.



Step 4

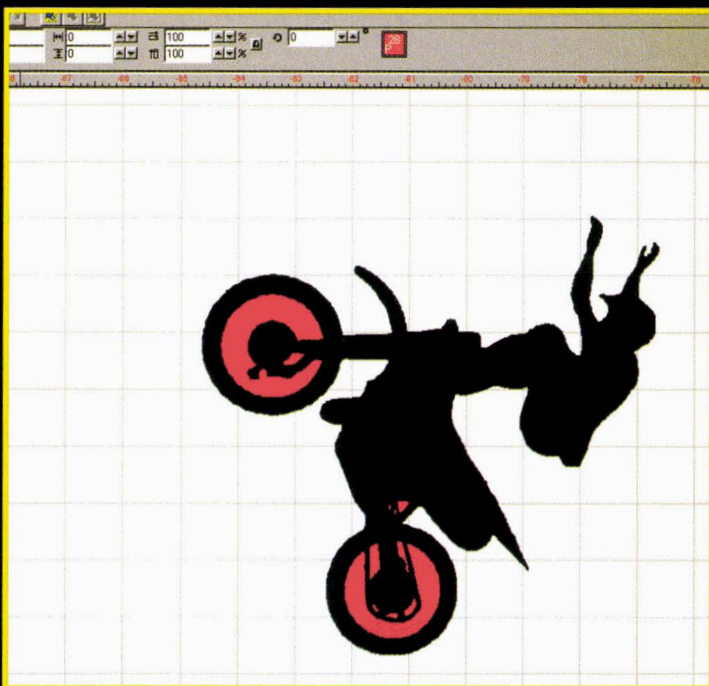
Next, I import the image into my sign program and posterized it to two colors (black and white). Then I converted it into a vector (a mathematical description of a line).

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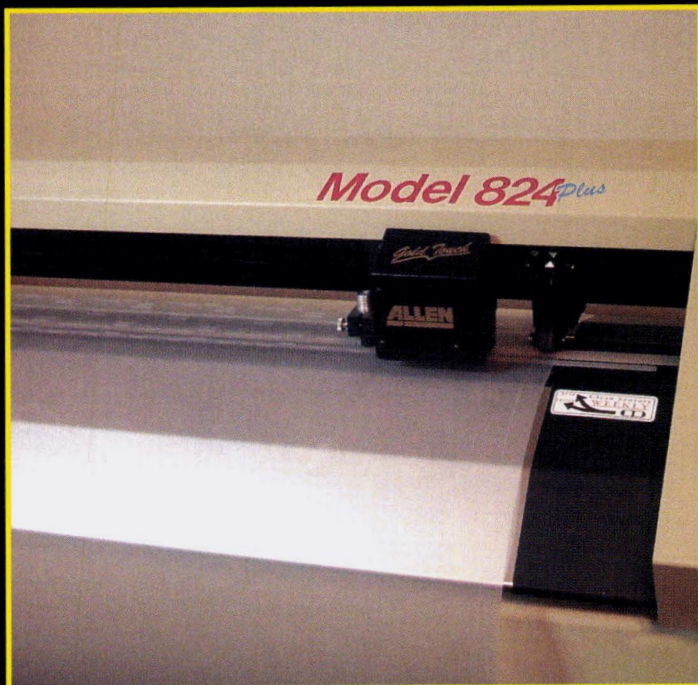
Step 5

The vector line image looks like this with its corresponding nodes and points. These must be adjusted to clean up the image and generate a smooth cutting path.



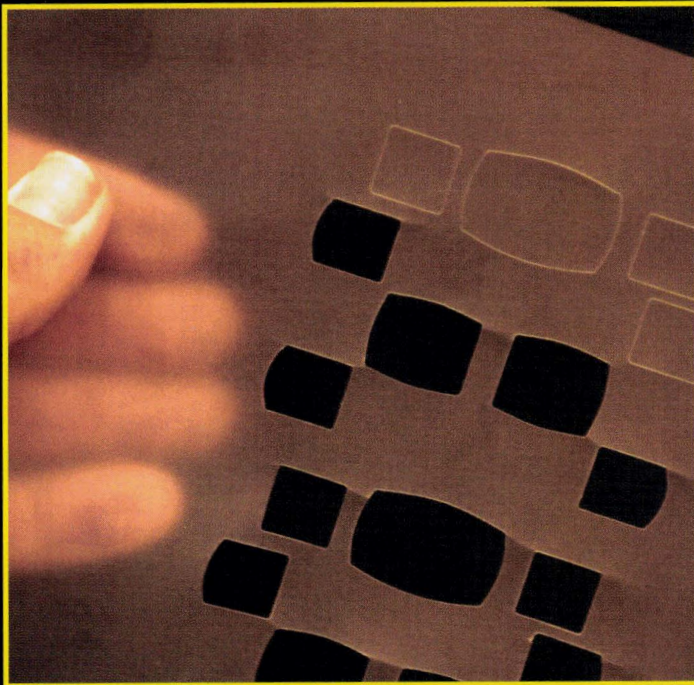
Step 6

Here is a perfect example of a finished silhouette with its designated stencil components. The black area represents the first section of the stencil to be used, and the red area is used next.



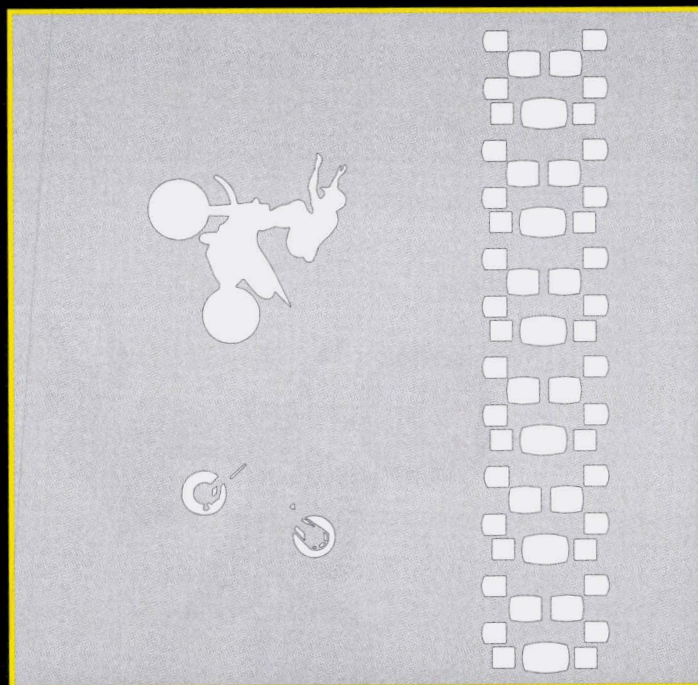
Step 7

This is my Allen Datagraph plotter processing the Lexan Polycarbonate sheeting (.010 thickness). This is without a doubt the most time saving item I have ever purchased for my shop.



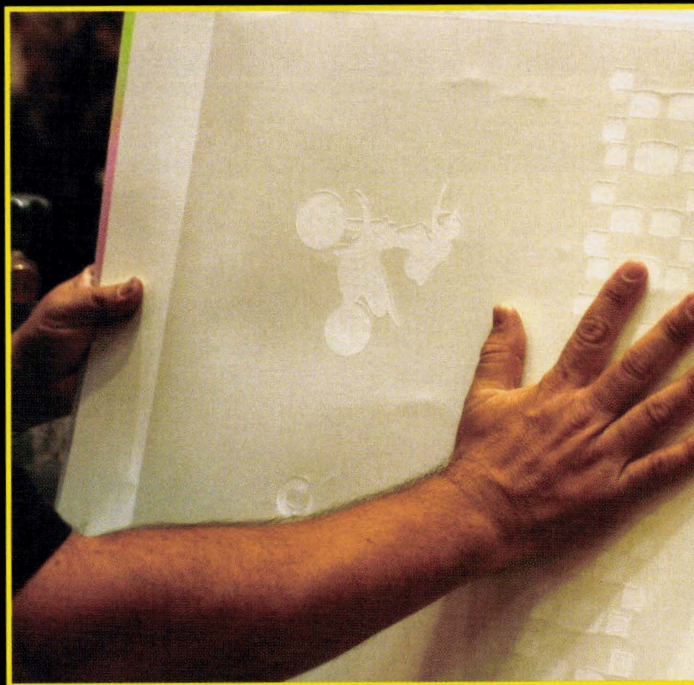
Step 8

The material is scored (not cut completely through) to protect the blade from cutting into the plotter bed. The scored material easily breaks along its edge. I left some of the pieces intact so you could see the difference.



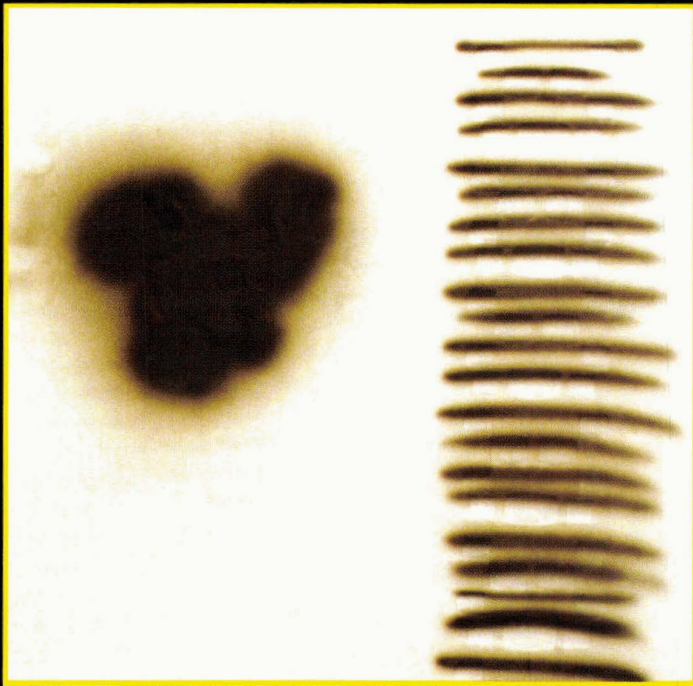
Step 9

Pictured here is a line drawing of the stencil.



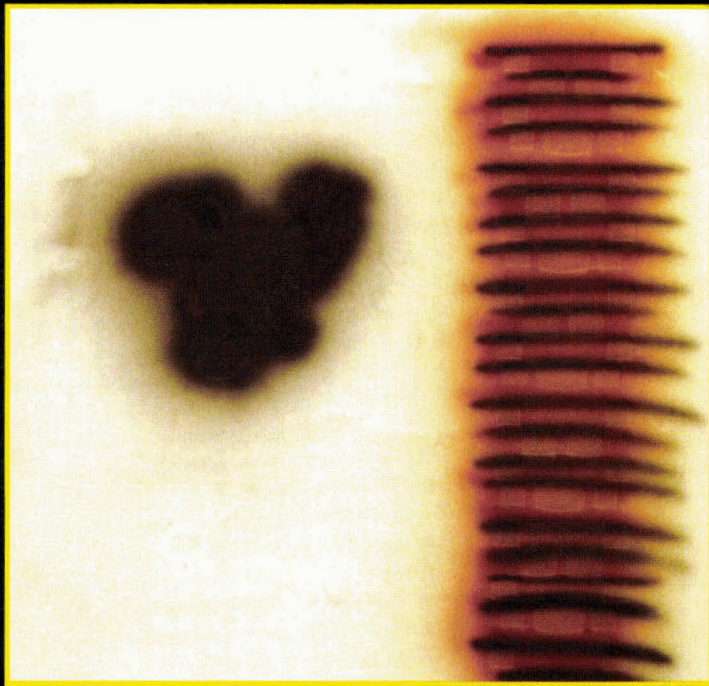
Step 10

Spray adhesive is lightly applied to the back of the stencil and affixed to the surface.



Step 11

I used opaque black to fill in the silhouette of the bike and shaded the knobbies of the tire track.



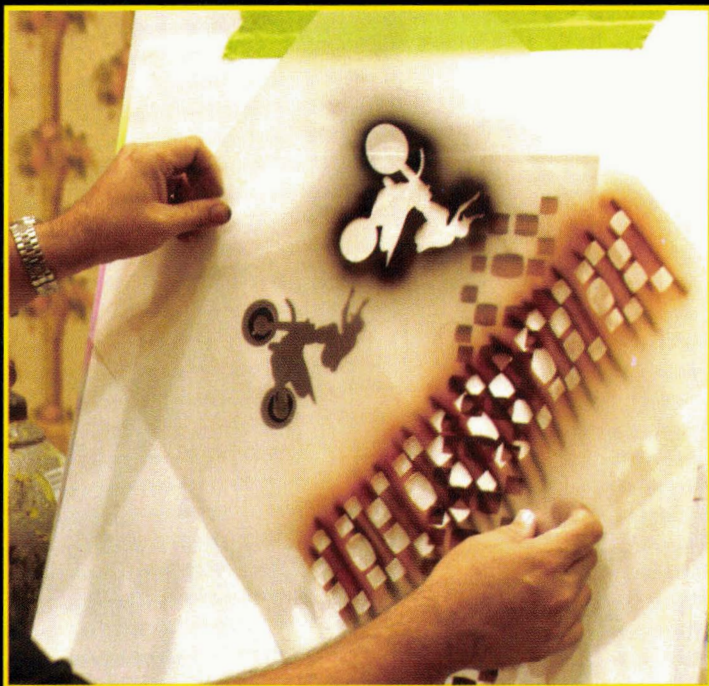
Step 12

The balance of the knobby tire track is airbrushed with light brown.



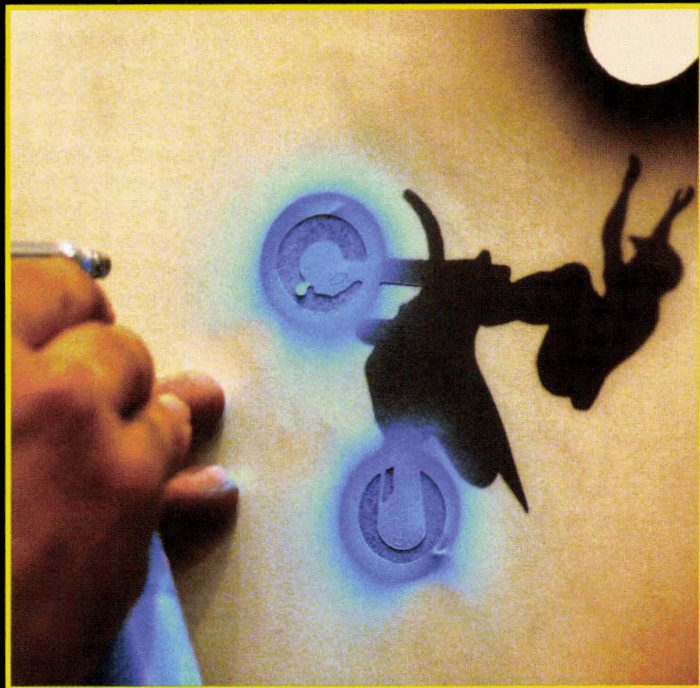
Step 13

To prevent tearing, gently peel the stencil from the surface.



Step 14

The detailed area shown earlier is colored in red on my computer screen. Then it is positioned accordingly.



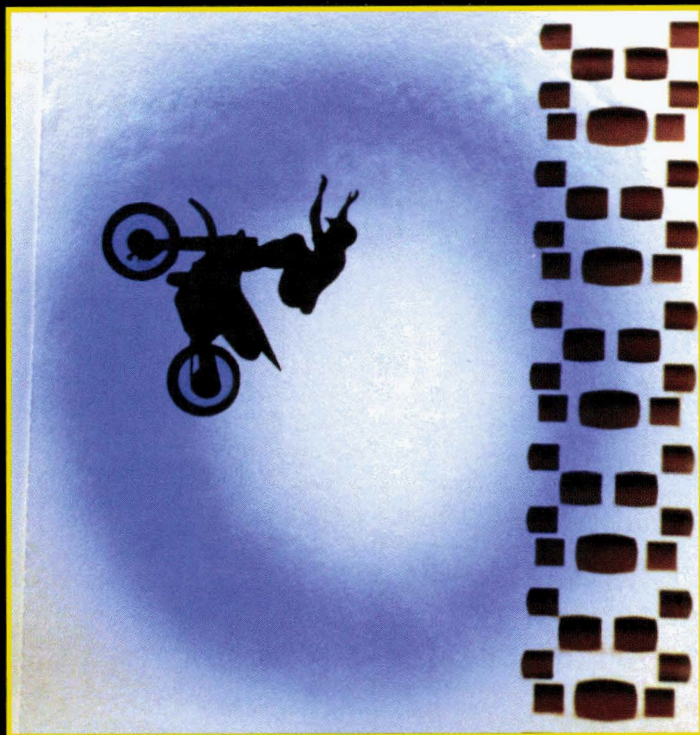
Step 15

Opaque blue is airbrushed into the detail area and used to defeat the black.



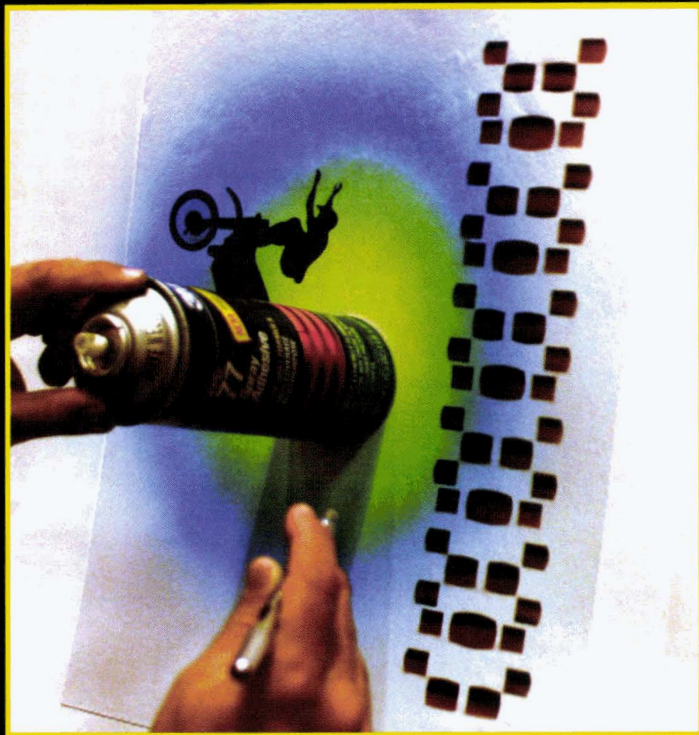
Step 16

The stencil is carefully removed and our biker is beginning to look way cool.



Step 17

Using transparent blue, I create a soft halo around the design. This is best accomplished by spraying from about ten inches or more from the surface.



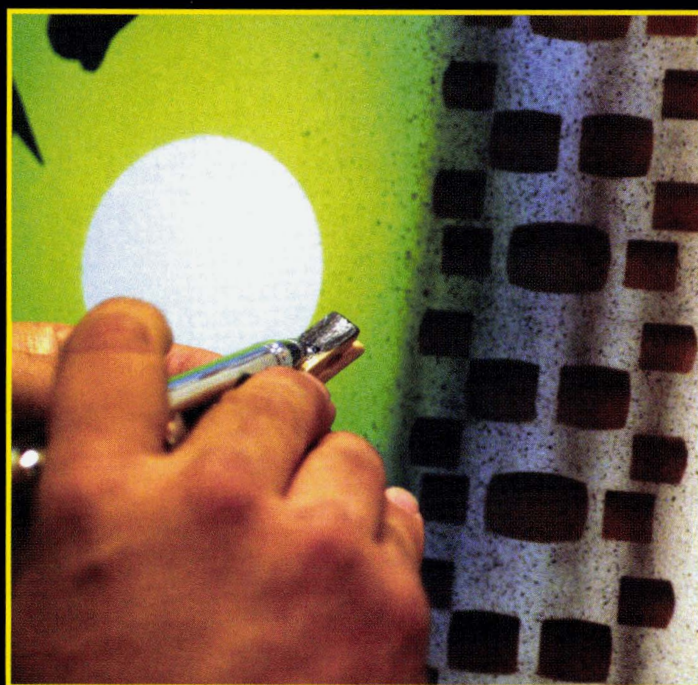
Step 18

Using a spray can as a stencil is a convenient way to create the sun or the moon. I spray yellow around it until it blends with the blue.



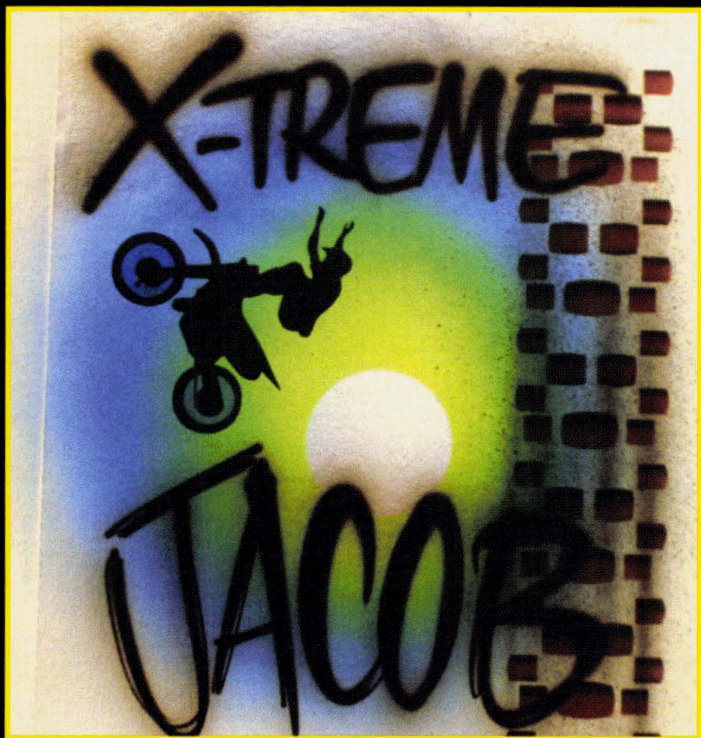
Step 19

Here's the result. Next comes the stippling. Did you know the technique of deflecting sprayed paint off a clothespin originated from shirt artists? It is used frequently in many other airbrush applications, too.



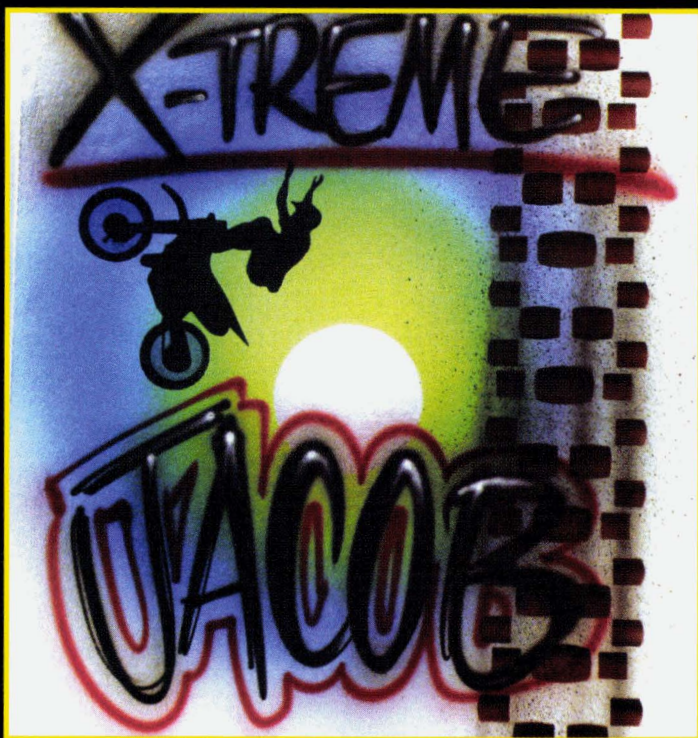
Step 20

For stippling smaller grain patterns, the pin and airbrush are held closer to the surface. For larger stippling spots and patterns, the equipment is held farther back. Simply experiment to find your desired range.



Step 21

Scratch letters look way cool and are among the easiest and fastest to airbrush, not to mention that it matches the "x-treme" feeling of the design.



Step 22

Here, red is used to outline "Jacob" and underline "X-treme." Finally, the white highlights are added.