



REMEMBER THAT JUST BECAUSE THIS IS AN AUTOMOTIVE COLUMN DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO stick to painting cars and bikes. These stencils can be used for everything from body art, to wall murals, to cake decorating, and they're made with a solvent-proof polymer, so you don't have to worry about what you paint them with because you aren't going to hurt these babies.

PICKGUARD PIRACY

**COMBINING A LITTLE
STENCIL WORK,
AND FREE-HANDING
TO CREATE A
KILLER PRODUCTION
PICKGUARD**

In the previous issue, we covered the two new camo stencils from Artool. Luckily, for this 25th installment, I was in the middle of working on a few new guitar designs for Fender/Jackson. One of the new concepts is a piracy guitar that mimics the "Piracy" bike, and matching guitar done for House of Kolor's booth at SEMA in 2006.

The guitars that I've painted for Fender/Jackson in the past are either one-offs or limited production (usually 10 to 20 numbered artist editions). The goal to making limited production guitars is to make them all look the same, while trying to repeat the artisanship of a one-off guitar. Much mass production is accomplished with silk screening or computer-cut designs, but artist-numbered editions must look hand-painted. For my guitar art success, I typically use a combination of stencils, masking, and freehand airbrush work for the best results.

The pickguard starts out as bare aluminum. Jackson had manufactured a few extras from the last design run, so I first tested this design for this article on one of them. I decided on a monochromatic design to contrast with the highly colored paint-job of the guitar. I sprayed directly on the bare aluminum with HoK black to achieve a dark sepia image for a tin-typed appearance; a very classy, artistic statement, yet not something that will take me forever to reproduce. >>

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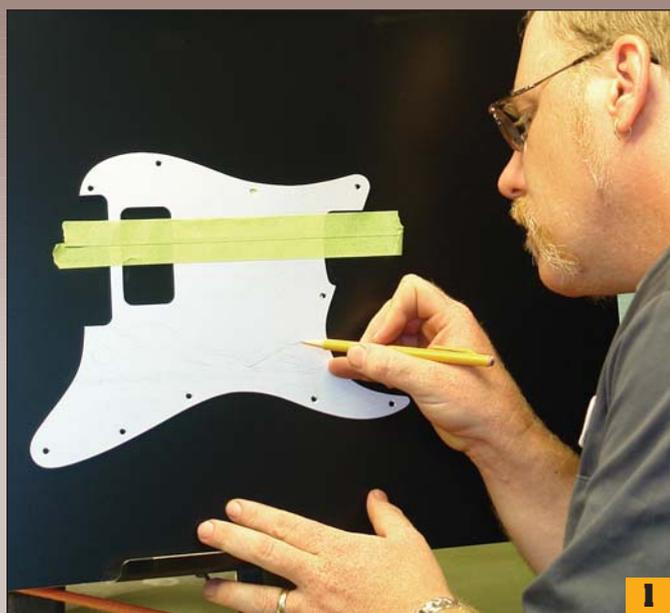
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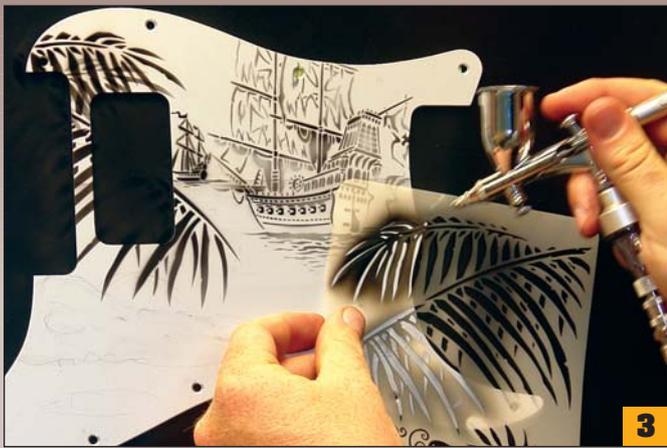
because airbrushing without Custom FX is a garden sin!



1. Bare aluminum substrates must be sanded clean first to increase adhesion. I also sprayed a light coat of House of Kolor (HoK) AP-01 Adhesion Promoter to further bolster the adhesion of the basecoat to the aluminum. It will even survive direct masking. Aluminum can be very unfriendly to airbrushing. And because pickguards receive a fair amount of abuse the end result must be durable. After the AP-01 dried, I sketched my basic concept onto the surface with a pencil. Draw very lightly so it won't show up later through the artwork.



2. Because the pickguard is so small, I used Artool's Mini Series version of stencils, which are literally half the size of the originals (the minis are also killer for use on RC cars, golf clubs, and helmets, too). With the horizon line lightly airbrushed in (that's what the green tape in the previous pic was for), I used the *Flying Dutchman* stencil from the new Piracy series. This gave me a couple of killer pirate ship designs for the background. No need to hammer these stencils with paint; I'll detail them later. I used over-reduced BC-15 black in an Iwata Kustom Micron C airbrush.



3. Using the *Fronds* stencil from the FX-4 line, I airbrushed some greenery. Having the palm fronds coming in from outside the picture lends the overall image a sense of depth, and frames the piece nicely. Plus, greenery can be a good space filler. Because the palm trees are in the foreground, I made them exceptionally black. Barring connecting some of the leaves to the stalk, these are done.



4. Next, I wanted to airbrush some skulls. After all, what's a pirate mural without skulls, right? I airbrushed larger skulls on the right and left sides of the foreground and added smaller ones to the background. You'll notice that this helps establish a sense of depth. Up to now, I'm merely sketching and composing the design with stencils.



5. Using the *Gator* stencil, also from FX-4, I airbrushed gator skin on the alligator and will finish rendering that later. The overall shape of the alligator was sketched in the first step. I'm very careful not to airbrush the stencil outside of the pencil lines, but any accidental overspray can be easily rendered into rippled water.



6. With the stencil work finished, I started the freehand fun. Using the same airbrush, I added a bit more RU-311 reducer to the mix to reduce any spitting, and to allow for more graduated shading. I began on the skull. Just a little detail work and some shading, and you can't tell that the skull was done with a stencil.



7. The alligator was next. A little detail work, some shading and shadows, and it's starting to look like a dragon. Although I'll be back later with white for highlights, I don't want to depend on the white for repairs or fill-in. So, I needed to be very minimal with my airbrushing, and leave as much aluminum showing as possible. This will give the end piece a very cool anodized-metal look when cleared.



8. Switching gears, I used a homemade stencil to add some of the soft lines for the water effect. The whiskbroom stencil is an oldie but a goody. Basically, I just cut off a bunch of whiskbroom straws and randomly tape them together. This type of stencil is great for grass, hair, water, fire effects, and more.



9. Time to start detailing the pirate ships. Most of the work here is connecting the stencil lines and then adding a few more of my own. A few clouds in the sky, a couple of birds, and the mural is really starting to come together. Remember not to make any of the areas too dark because there's no turning back with aluminum, and you really don't want to sand or scratch the paint as a removal technique.

10. The final step is reserved for the white highlights. With BC-26 HoK over-reduced by 200%, and with a bit of SG-100 added, the white is thin enough to be translucent and help reduce spitting when working on fine details. I only use this white for the thinnest and brightest highlights. Any more, and the overspray from the white will kill the effect. Just a little creates a very cool 3-D effect once cleared and viewed from different angles.



FINAL

As you can see, the monochromatic effect has a very cool look, especially with the aluminum underneath. Certainly, the terrific benefit to using stencils is the ability to create an entire piece fairly simply, quickly, and accurately. And this is key for most production airbrush work. I need the ease and continuity without compromising the look or sense of hand-craftsmanship. Typically, for numbered editions, I'll make slight design changes, and incorporate the number of the edition into the design. This makes the piece look less assembly-line, and more unique than other production pieces.

Paint to live, live to paint, and sometimes on guitars.

– Fraser ✂



Craig Fraser has been airbrushing for more than twenty years, is the owner of Air Syndicate Inc., and, since 1992, has been the in-house airbrush artist and designer for Kal Concepts, of Bakersfield, California. Kal Concepts/Air Syndicate specializes in automotive kustom graphics and the fine art of the Kustom Culture. Craig divides his time between the shop, teaching workshops (the esteemed Airbrush Getaway, House of Kolor, Coast Airbrush), and writing articles. He's also the author of *Automotive Cheap Tricks and Special F/X*, and the star of 15 instructional DVDs on kustom painting techniques. You may view more of Fraser's artwork at www.gotpaint.com.