

VIVA LAS VEGAS

**A Kustom-Painted Viper
for a Kustom-Painted Town
by Craig Fraser**



bout once a year, all of the Viper owners, executives, and special and project designers from Daimler Chrysler get together for a Viper party. What they celebrate is probably one of the biggest phenomenons of car ownership bonding known to mankind. If you remember, about two years ago, Bob Soroka — one of Viper's "special project" guys — airbrushed a viper hood mural that was used at one of these events, and the tech article appeared right here in *Airbrush Action*. While the hood mural was originally conceived for attending owners to sign, it has since blossomed into a full-blown kustom Viper that serves as the show's centerpiece.

This year's show, appropriately entitled "Viva Las Viper," was held in Las Vegas. The concept was pretty literal — anything to do with Vegas, the strip, gambling, money, etc., as long as the snake was tied somewhere into the design. Since the previous hood mural had really wowed them, the bigwigs at Daimler Chrysler wanted to blow the crowd out of their socks this year. Like the old saying goes, be careful about what you wish for...

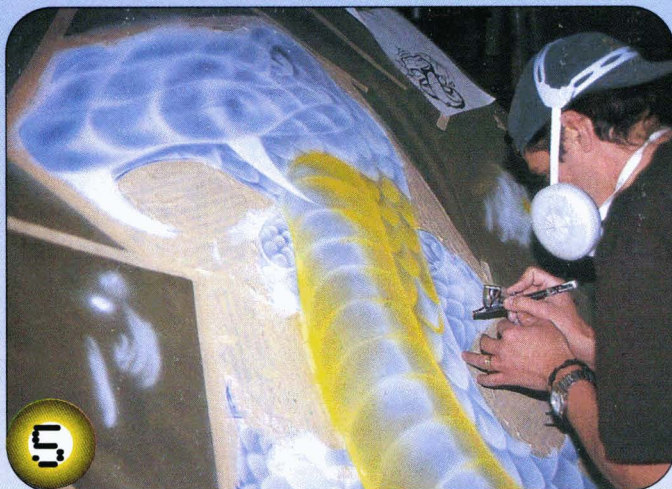
The Viper arrived from the factory red, but the final color would be the new midnight blue pearl that will be used on the 2001 Viper. We decided the best way to ensure consistent finish quality was to have all the paint/finish work done at our shop in California. That way, we reasoned, those middle-man paint problems (that almost always occur when work is shared between two shops) are eliminated. This basically ensures that any problems are our fault, because there's no one else to blame.

It's not often that I get a chance to work on projects with other artists, let alone one of my students. Bob Soroka had attended one of my New York Getaway workshops and was already an accomplished airbrush artist, but he wanted to learn more about using House of Kolor urethane on automotive projects. Coincidentally, House of Kolor ended up being one of the material sponsors for the Viper project. (Wow, who saw that coming?!) I figured if Bob can put up with me for four days at a Getaway, then we definitely can work together. So we flew Bob, and trailered the Viper, all the way to Kal Koncepts/Air Syndicate in Bakersfield, California.

Between Bob, Dion, K-Daddy, and me, we actually got the thing finished and out in time for the show.



STEP 1 After the clearcoated midnight blue pearl (applied by Dion over the original red) is sanded down, the Viper has more of a flat black look. For the initial design sketches, I use a piece of white construction chalk to "rough in" the snake and the surrounding Vegas strip.



STEP 2 Since the mural's primary elements — like the playing cards and the snake — should stand out from the background, they are masked off and sprayed first. Bob uses white to lay in the base color of the cards. Detail will be added later.

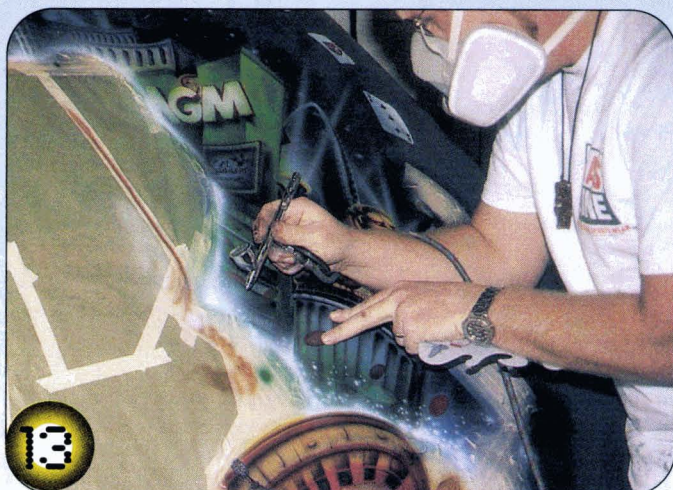
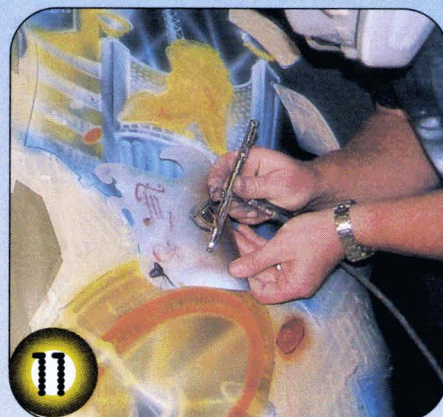
STEP 3 Using HoK (House of Kolor) Euro Red and BC-25 black basecoat, I airbrush in the individual detail of the card surfaces with my HP-C Top-Feed Airbrush. If you dig out your magnifying glass, you can see how I airbrushed all of the face-card characters as Vipers.

STEP 4 With the face cards finished, Bob masks off the entire background design and begins laying in the initial base design and snake color with BC-26 HoK white. The larger tipped Eclipse CS is used for better coverage. While Bob works on the hood, I keep busy by prepping the back trunk and sides for the upcoming airbrushing.

STEP 5 With a little SG-101 Lemon Yellow basecoat, Bob starts bringing color into the snake. Yellow will be the primary base color. Without the white base, the yellow would take on a green tint because of the underlying midnight blue.

STEP 6 After laying the yellow into the scales, Bob switches to Kandy Organic Green basecoat and continues to darken and detail the design. Notice the respirator the Bob is wearing — though there is little, if any, overspray from the small amounts of green he is spraying, it is important to wear a respirator at all times when airbrushing. (This goes for water-based colors, too!)



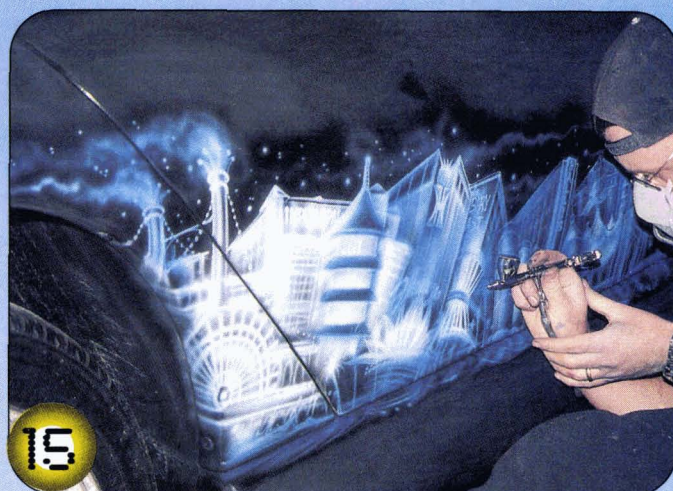


STEP 7 As Bob proceeds to lay in the snake's tail color on the trunk, I finish the detailing on the viper's head. Sticking with my CS Top-Feed, I add red to the snake's eye, (notice the dice shape in the retina) and continue to increase the detail and depth of the design by working with a darkened mixture of Kandy Organic Green and black. A little Oriental Blue is brought in for shading and coloring to the snake's underbelly.

STEP 8 After wiping down the design with precleaner to clear away any excess, Bob removes all the tape from the masked areas, preparing to begin the back painting. The snake will be remasked to protect the separating edge from any overspraying of the background strip scene.

STEP 9 Again starting out with yellow, I begin rendering in those areas of the mural I wish to read as true yellow, or any colors with a yellow base. This style of "process" base painting is important when working with any transparent paint system. It's also important to do all of the opaque spraying early on to reduce the chance of overspray.

STEP 10 Normally I wait until the infrared spectrum has been painted to bring in the blue. Since the Tru-Blu Pearl mixture I chose is partially opaque and covers a large area, I decided to bring it into the detail layering early. I follow up this step with a transparent Oriental Blue kandy. This kandy knocks back some of the overspray and creates a cleaner transition to the green areas to come.



STEP 11 Using a mixture of Pagan Gold kandy, and Sunset Pearl basecoat, I begin toning down the yellow and adding detail to the roulette wheel. A freehand shield is an excellent tool to get the clean, soft edged lines necessary for the wheel without building up a nasty tape edge.

STEP 12 After blending in the green areas of the MGM Grand with a little Kandy Organic Green left over from the snake, I detail in the chips, roulette wheel and assorted goodies with my Euro Red. I work the red very tightly to prevent overspray — there's nothing nastier than an opaque red fog over blue and green.

STEP 13 Continuing to build depth and shape, I use a mixture of transparent violet, cobalt blue, and black to push back and define the details. A little over-reduced yellow is also brought in to redefine the lights. With the majority of colors defined, a bit of white is brought in to create a "halo" effect on the snake and punch out the spotlights and bright areas.

STEP 14 After removing the masking tape, detailing and shading continues. As you've probably noticed, the bright halo has been slightly subdued with transparent shading and the reintroduction of other kandies into the background. I want the snake to have a distinct separation from the background, but I don't want it to be clean-cut masked edge. The minimal overspray from the transparent detailing naturally softens the edge.

STEP 15 To give you a little break from the hood mural, here's a little of the mural work going on along the Viper's side. The entire strip is rendered in blue shades along the whole length of the car. Each side corresponds to the side of the strip. Because of the bizarre surface contours, I decided to work the design appropriately in a Barry Jackson "Kool World" distorted reality.

STEP 16 Switching to my Micron detail brush, I layer in over-reduced white basecoat for all the highlights and individual lighting on the strip. Again, the Artool Freehand shield comes in

handy for all the soft reflected edges of the buildings. Upon completion, this entire mural will be fogged in with a layer of HoK Red/Blue Kameleon. This causes a pretty "kewl" color shift effect as you walk around looking at the murals.

STEP 17 Even the original Viper logos have been removed and hand painted with the appropriate Vegas flavor. In this case, a pair of "snake-eyes" dice. The outline is all in metallic silver HoK lettering enamel. This will shine like a mirror when lights hit at just the right angle. (Viva las Viper, baby! Got to have it shiny!)

STEP 18 Using his trusty Iwata HVLP spray gun, Dion begins one of two clearcoating sessions that the Viper will receive in the booth. The LPH-400 is Dion's choice because of the high volume spray and easy-clearance, top-feed color cup. Each of the two clear sessions will consist of a tack coat and three good wet coats of Valspar AC-2135 urethane clear.



STEP 19 After giving the last clearcoat 24 hours to cure, Dion prefers to do the fun part on his own. Color sanding with 1500 grit wet/dry sandpaper, the surface shine is knocked down in preparation for the final buffing, polishing, and waxing.

STEP 20 Bringing in our local pro, Alfonzo shows his expertise with the electric buffer as he cuts and polishes the entire Viper to perfection. The Viper will get a final coat of hand glaze and sealer, and then it is off to the show!

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

MICHIGAN KREW:

Bob Soroka resides in Michigan where he works for Daimler Chrysler in the special projects department of Viper.

KALIFORNIA KREW:

Dion Giuliano, Kyle, "K-Daddy" Gann, and Craig Fraser are the krew that makes up Kal Concepts/Air Syndicate Kustom paint. Specializing in kustom paint and Harley graphics, Kal Concepts is also known for their kustom street-rod work and sport truck designs. Their clients include: Truckin' Magazine, Colorado Custom wheels, House of Kolor, and Jesse James' West Coast Choppers (and now Daimler Chrysler). You can give the guys a call at their Bakersfield, CA. Shop (805-833-8486), or cruize their website <www.gotpaint.com>.



JACKPOT!!!!

Well there you have it, one Las Vegas Viper, built to order. After being shipped back to Michigan for refitting, new upholstery, and some kustom one-off rims from Hallibrand, it's off to Las Vegas' MGM Grand for the world's largest Viper owner's show. Viva Las Viper! With Jay Leno doing the intros and over 900 actual Vipers (and their owners) on display, it was quite an event.