

Color Sanding for Show

All that body work, fixing dents, building a surface and shooting on quality paint is just the beginning. After that, you have to color sand if you want to win at shows.

Have you ever wondered how they do those flawless paint-jobs like the ones you see at prestigious shows? Well the secret to it is color sanding. It is not easy, and it has to be done by hand, but the results can be spectacular.

Believe it or not, top quality paint work is just the beginning. After you've fixed all of the rust and dents down to the tiniest ding, and after you've shot on the top quality lacquer or enamel with the proper hardeners in it, you still need to color sand to get that deep, flawless glow.

Here is how it's done. First, make sure your work area is clean and dust free. The best way to do this is to sweep it out carefully and then mop it. Wash down all horizontal surfaces. Any little bit of grit can scratch a paint job. Don't just blow your shop out with compressed air. All that will do is get a lot of dirt airborne. If your car is apart, find some carpet remnants on which to rest your parts. I like to use a couple of sawhorses with carpet over their cross beams to support my work while I'm sanding. Go lightly over the part of the car you'll be sanding with a sticky tack rag. You really can't be too careful with this task. Any little piece off grit under your sandpaper could scratch and ruin your paint job.

Fill a plastic bucket with water and shoot in a couple of drops of liquid dish detergent to help soften and lubricate your sandpaper. You will need to go over the entire car three times - slowly and carefully. First use micro fine #1000 grit sandpaper, then #1500 grit paper and finally #2000 grit ultra fine paper. Many pros won't bother with the #2000 grit paper, but if you want to go that extra mile in your efforts to produce a perfect Pebble Beach finish, it's worth the effort.

Let the paper soak in the water for about half an hour to soften it. Then wrap it around one of these soft rubber sanding blocks to keep your fingers from making grooves in the paint. Now start sanding in a diagonal, cross-hatch pattern. Use a light touch, dip your sandpaper every few strokes, and throw the sandpaper away when it gets clogged.

Make sure you keep your work wet at all times. If you are working outdoors, you can even use a steady stream from a garden hose. Keep sanding until all of the orange peel is gone. Use a soft rubber squeegee to check your progress. Be very careful not to sand sharp edges such as those along hoods, deck lids and doors. There will be very little paint on these areas, and you will break through in a hurry if you use sandpaper on them. In fact, it's a good idea to protect them with masking tape while you are working.

Go over everything one last time with the #2000 grit paper. Your car will almost shine at this point. In order to polish it out to a deep, brilliant glow, use 3M's Microfinishing Compound and soft rags. Work a small area at a time, and keep your hand flat. When your paint work is almost perfect, it will still have those little spider web lines left over from the polishing compound. Take them out with 3M's Finesse-it II. Then finish by going over the whole car with 3M Imperial Hand Glaze to get that dazzling shine so deep you can almost walk into it.

Remember to take your time, work carefully and keep things clean so that your classic will look magnificent!