your sandpaper is cutting as the color disappears.

Sand off virtually all of the primer. The objective here is to fill the paper weave with primer. Be careful not to sand into the silkspan fibers or it will be necessary to repeat several steps, starting with the slurry mixture to reseal the surface.

Now inspect the surface carefully. Low spots or surface imperfections can be identified by using backlighting reflected across the surface. Hold the wing up to your eye with a lightbulb or flashlight at the other end of the wing pointed at you and reflecting off the surface. Any imperfections will show up as shadows, and will be quite noticeable. These surface blemishes should be filled with acrylic lacquer glazing putty; it comes in red and gray colors in tubes. Choose the color most suitable for your needs. The longer you can allow the entire project to dry before final sanding, the better.

SILVER COAT

The next step is to shoot a dust coat of silver. The purpose of the silver coat is to give a uniform base color, over which final colors are painted. This dust coat is sanded *lightly* with 320-400 sandpaper, either wet or dry. Do not sand through the silver coat!

COLOR COATS

You can save weight on your aircraft by color coating only those areas that are to be final finished in that color. For example, let's say you are using blue and orange trim on a white base color scheme. None of the colors should overlap. The traditional method of finishing is to paint the entire aircraft white and then paint your trim colors over the white. You now have two colors on the surface, a base white coat and trim color covering the white. Why add the extra weight? Mask off each color separately so that no color overlaps any other color. It's more work, but you definitely save weight.

Use one color coat only, which consists of a dust or tack coat and then a heavier coat for coverage. Look for consistent color only, not a heavy flow gloss coat. It won't be very glossy at this stage; this is okay, as we're going to sand the color surface which will dull the finish anyway. Don't worry, we'll bring the gloss out at a later stage—the surface will gleam like a mirror.

After the first color coat has dried, you can pull the tapes and mask the second color. The same spraying process is applied, with a tack coat first and then a color coat sprayed for consistent color. Don't load up the surface with unnecessary color, as excess paint only adds weight.

SANDING COLOR COATS

Use 400-grit wet/dry sandpaper with a Styrofoam sanding block and block sand the color coats to a smooth, dull surface with no imperfections. If you've done your base coats properly with proper filling and sanding, you'll have a color surface that is smooth but dull at this point. Gloss comes later.

DECALS

We're at the stage where your decals and lettering are applied to the surface. Small lettering is done with dry transfers, which is like a decal but doesn't have to be dipped in water to transfer it to the plane's surface. You simply lay the letter or number against the surface and gently burnish the backing sheet to transfer the character from its waxpaper backing to the plane's surface.

Dry transfer lettering is available at stationery or art stores in various type styles and sizes and is a great way to personalize your aircraft. The transfers will be sealed with a clear coat in the next step.

You will need a good gram scale to track the weight gain as you go through your finishing process. Weigh all of the parts before and after each stage of finishing to track the weight increase, and keep a log for future reference.

CLEAR COAT

One coat of clear lacquer, thinned 50 to 75%, is now applied over the color. The clear coat consists of a dust or tack coat, then a light flow coat.

Let the entire project dry *completely* before you proceed to the next step. The longer you let it dry, the more permanent your glossy finish will become. If you wet sand and rub out the surface before the color/clear coats have gassed off their solvents, you will have a brilliant, glossy surface...but not for long. As the solvents gas off, the surface becomes microscopically irregular and loses its brilliance.

You may be able to salvage the surface with more rubbing compound, but you only have a very thin layer of clear coat on the surface, much of which has already been sanded and polished away. It's likely that you'll sand and polish right into the color coat, which will not be as durable to fuel stains, cleaning fluids, etc. If you can let your project dry for a couple of weeks before final sanding and compounding, you'll have a finish that looks good and will last indefinitely.

After the clear coat dries as noted above, wet sand the surface with 1000-grit sandpaper until the surface is dull in color. You can now compound the surface to bring it to a mirror finish. Elbow grease and two to three evenings of work is required to bring out a show-stopping finish. We use white Turtle Wax polishing compound and a smooth cotton cloth, usually from an old T-shirt.

PREPARING A GLASS FUSELAGE FOR FINISH

Glass fuselages have a center seam that needs attention before moving into the priming and painting stage. An X-Acto blade works well in scraping the seam smooth. A sanding block with 280-320 sandpaper is then used to further smooth the seam. Bubbles in the glass seam can be filled with

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