

This article is provided by FMES for your interest thanks to the kindness of the original publishers. FMES makes no representations or warranties of any kind, express or implied about the completeness, accuracy or reliability with respect to this document and any sentiments expressed are not necessarily supported by FMES. Any reliance you place on this document is therefore strictly at your own risk

Making water slide transfers

This document was written by Mike Wheelwright and was originally published by Worthing and District SME in their newsletter in the Winter of 2013.

A FANCY BIT OF ARTWORK

Towards the end of each model comes the part that I call “difficult” but which those with other skills brush away lightly: painting! After painting comes the matter of dealing with the insignia and numbers using transfers, for the majority of builders this is not a problem as their locomotives belong to the post-grouping era and as far as I can make out our suppliers cater for letters, numbers and armorial devices (pseudo or authorised) for the “big four” and BR in the principal scales. However, once the prototype moves back a generation, things get quite bleak, some pre-1923 GWR devices are available as are a few Midland and L&Y items and, thank heaven, the LNWR coat of arms (someone got his priorities sorted out there!) One major supplier of paint and transfers lists quite a number of old railway companies in his on-line catalogue but a click on each of them reveals that stock is always “0” (virtual stock?)

In general, you are on your own, which is where I found myself with the Midland post-1905 livery.

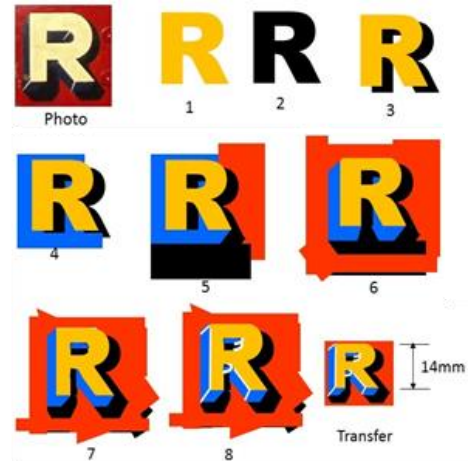
Fortunately, the modern age came to the aid of someone like me who is mainly interested in bygone technology: of course it was the computer. Believe it or not there are useful and productive things it can be used for and this gadget can be quite easily used to collect the source information for transfers and then to make them. The key to it all is the waterslide decal sheet; this is a sheet of blank transfer material that can be run through the usual ink-jet printer to produce a transfer (decal) of whatever you want. In effect we can quickly make a suitably sized transfer for a model starting with anything for which we can get an electronic photo, or alternatively anything we can make (draw) in PowerPoint. These transfer sheets are available from “craftycomputerpaper.co.uk” and come in two types: transparent and white backed. At first sight it seems easier to use the transparent paper but the images produced are nowhere near as good as those using white backed paper in terms of colour and intensity. I use the white paper and trim round the sides of transfers before wetting them and applying them.

First consider a crest (coat of arms), a search through the internet will reveal quite a few from pre-grouping railway companies, alternatively (but not as good) an electronic photograph from a preserved artefact in a museum or steam railway can be used but of course it can involve quite a bit of travelling. Once you have the image in the JPG format used for photos it can be edited for brightness, contrast, etc and cropped to just outside the shape. The next stage is to copy it on to a PowerPoint (PPT) slide: it is then an object that can be made smaller or larger by pulling it diagonally so as to preserve the horizontal and vertical proportions. Simply print out the slide (in black on ordinary paper for cheapness, Crewe style) and measure it. If not right, it can be expanded or contracted bit by bit until it is OK, and then printed in glorious colour on the decal sheet. Now let’s have a look at letters and numbers, these require more work as they often have to be constructed. I will use the example of the MR letters on the buffer plank of my Compound. I recently discovered that the transfers I had used were of the serif script that was abandoned when the livery was simplified in Deeley’s time. Luckily, I had a front photo of No. 1000 in post-1905 livery good enough to see the lettering but nowhere good enough to use directly for transfers.

I constructed the letters using PowerPoint and for the “R” I cropped a photo to leave just the letter and then inserted it into PPT: this was what I was trying to reproduce and it was put there so I could use it as a reference for shape. On the same slide I typed R in very large font and tried all of the likely font types, simple and boldface, until I found the best approximation. Not surprisingly for the time in which older engines were

painted I discovered that signwriters often adopted different letter shapes on a single item according to the space available so a mixture of fonts is sometimes needed. The best way to choose the font colour is to make another slide with small rectangles filled with colours judged to be reasonably close, after printing off on a spare decal sheet the colour of the best match can be chosen. It may look a bit different when the letter is a couple of inches high on the screen but by the time the shading has been applied and the result reduced to the smaller size on the engine a passable replica can usually be made. The shading may also need matching if it is not a basic colour, most railway insignia is shaded and sometimes with two sets of different colour on each side of the letter. My example of the Midland "R" has black shading to the right and underneath plus a sort of isometric depth effect to the lower left in medium blue. The steps I used to build up the letter are illustrated.

1. Large R of nearest font and colour
2. Black R of same font
3. Black R sent back "behind" the main letter and slipped under to produce curved shading
4. Blue background on LHS
5. Black background to lower RHS with some red
6. Blocks of red background to create outside shape
7. Various corners trimmed off with red background triangles
8. Light grey highlights put in.



The final operation is to "group" the assembly so it is just one image that won't come to pieces when manipulated on the computer; this is copied on to its own slide and then saved as a JPG (photo) image. In this photo format the image can be cropped to the finished rectangular shape of the transfer. I find it easier to adjust the size of things as an "object" in PowerPoint so I put the cropped JPG image back into PPT where the whole transfer can be expanded or reduced to the final size to be printed. Strictly speaking the red background bits and cropping are not necessary as the transfer can be cut to the correct outline before applying, however it is easier to do this with a background in place so that a slight excess will merge into the painted surface rather than showing as white.

This may sound tricky but anyone with a bit of PowerPoint experience can soon get the hang of it. For me it definitely beats miniature signwriting!