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Duke Takes A Look At The Age Old Art Of

HAND PINSTRIPING

WITH THE CATS AT THE PAINT CHOP

A Tale By Tarrin Duke



I'm getting' the Caddy ready for summer and I'm thinking that some new lettering across the trunk is in order. I know some cats that are getting a shop going so I go and check them out. On my way there I start thinking about pinstriping and where it came from. I know I've had custom stripes on everything I've ever owned, but I wondered how far back in history this began.

It turns out, the art of hand pinstriping has been around for longer than anyone can remember. Some say that its roots are tied to early line art over 23,000 years ago in the caves of Central Europe. Others claim that the true form started with the Roman Empire through decorative line art on chariots and carriages. More elaborate versions of its evolution can be found in examples from steam locomotives and stage coaches in the states. Anyway you look at it, the art has been around a long, long time before automobiles were even invented. Although it has always been a part of automotive design, it really became popular through the 40's and 50's when the great masters picked up the brush and made it into modern line art, laying down crazy new designs on hot rods and customs.

One such man was Kenneth Robert Howard, you probably recognize him by his formal handle, Von Dutch, who is considered to be the father of the modern line. Back in the late 40's it was Howard that

started the trend of freestyle pinstriping on cars & bikes during the early years of the hot rod movement out of Southern California. His style became so popular that everyone tried to copy it. Money was never an object for him and as depicted by his Flying Eyeball, now an icon, represented the idea that his master was the visual eye. There were so many more cats out of So. Cal. that carried this movement, but that's a story for another day. For now, we go back to my buddy's place, the Paint Chop.

Casey Kennell and Dave Huey are a rare breed in today's industry. They've been friends for many years and just recently decided to partner up and go after the custom paint scene. They learned all about custom paint together as kids and by combining their talents today, they lay down some of the best

candy, pearls, metal flake and gold leaf paint jobs anywhere. When you throw in their talent for custom pinstriping and hand lettering, their work is unparalleled.

Casey started looking into this work at the age of 12 after seeing a hot rod mag. Right away he was striping t-shirts and selling them at school for 50 cents. At 14 he was metal flaking and building chopper bicycles, hand pinstriping them using Testors model paint. At 18 he striped his first car, a '36 Buick and did his first bike at 19. He would always try to attend the car shows and watch the old masters at their craft, but they knew what he was up to and sent him down the road. He figures it took him ten years from that point to teach himself how to stripe and letter. He was determined to be one of the masters himself one day and wouldn't let anything stop him. He's been at it for 33 years now and even though I've known him for much of that time, it still blows me away to watch him as he effortlessly pulls lines. Since he is a humble man, it was hard to get this story out of him, but here's what he did share.

He's never used a stencil, laying out all of his lettering using his hand as the only system of measurement. He will only use Mack Sword Stripers (squirrel or camel hair brushes). His paint of choice is One Shot lettering enamel and most importantly, all of Casey's brushes are stored in animal oil. This preserves their shape and longevity between uses.

Since the master's ways are still somewhat protected, this article isn't meant to serve as a "how to" on pinstriping, there are books on that. Instead this will show you the method. After that, it's up to you to go after the knowledge, if you think you have what it takes.





Step One – Prepare the surface with wax remover and clean your hands and brushes to remove any oil.



Step Two – Layout lettering with grease pencil. This is meant to be just a rough outline, Casey admits he never follows it that close.



Step Three – Thin paint with Xylol thinner. This thinner allows the lettering paint to cut into the new clears used today.



Step Four – Dip brush in paint / thinner mixture. Work the brush over the pages of a magazine (hey man) to get an even consistency, even line.



Step Five – Start pulling them lines. *Tip from the artist: If you are right handed and are pulling a line from the left, never pass your right eye or your line will drop.*



There are several traditional hand positions used for stabilizing the brush during application.



After Casey pulls all the white lines to make the body of the letters, he begins to apply a fatter shadow with purple.



The final touch is applied in a yellow single outline around the shadow and the body of the letters. And with that, we wish you good luck pulling lines!



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