

Custom Model Decals <https://custom-model-decals.com>



Scale Model Tips – How to Apply Decals Correctly

As you come to the end of a scale model build, you often have a few decisions to make – do you go for a polished finish, or a more weathered look? Do you keep the traditional colour scheme, or go for something more artistic and original? And do you use the provided decals, paint your own designs, or keep it clean?

If you are more of a traditionalist, and an array of decals is provided with your model kit, chances are you'll use them. And for good reason. Decals provide a nice touch of colour, detail, and authenticity to your model, which is especially important for models such as classic planes, or famed Formula 1 racing cars.

Below is an overview of the decal process, so give it a read and get your models looking as incredible as possible!

Essential Decal Tools

Before you apply decals, you'll need to have your workspace cleared and all the necessary tools on hand. Here is a list of the tools you'll need:

- Clear acrylic gloss or matte varnish. Testor's Glosscote and Dullcote aerosols have been used successfully with our decals..
- Sheet of decals
- Scale model you will apply decals to
- Cutting mat
- Bowl of water
- Dishwashing liquid / soap if not using Decalfix solutions
- Decal solutions – probably one for beneath the decal, and one for on top once it has been applied. e.g. Humbrol DecalFix AC6214 or Vallejo Decal Fix 73.213 & Decal Softener 73.212. **PLEASE NOTE: The Humbrol Decalfix we recommend is the new one-part formulation and NOT the original 2 part system.**
- Sharp pair of scissors (preferably small)
- Hobby knife
- Small paint brushes x2
- Tweezers
- A cocktail stick to manoeuvre the decal into place
- Lint free cloth
- Paper towels

It is strongly advised that before you use our decals on your model that you do a small test piece with them to ensure that any decal fixing solutions and lacquers you use on top of the decals are compatible with our decals. Custom Model Decals shall not be responsible for any damage or spoiling of a model by the application of our decals which may possibly be caused by the use of solvents, varnishes and lacquers that have not been tested on the decals by the client before they are applied to the model. THE USE OF NITRO CELLULOSE AND OTHER SOLVENT BASED LACQUERS ARE NOT APPROVED FOR USE WITH OUR DECALS UNLESS APPROVED IN THIS INSTRUCTION SHEET.

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Model Surface Preparation

Once your final paint job is dry, if not using a DecalFix solution, you may need to apply 1 or 2 thin layers of varnish or lacquer to create a gloss or semi-gloss finish before you apply any decals. A matt or flat paint finish may be the best look for your model, but it reduces the points of contact for the decal and can leave small pockets of air beneath the decal causing a problem known as 'silvering'. Make sure this varnish layer is completely dry before you follow the below decal application steps.

The use of a proprietary decal fixing solution is recommended.

Water-slide Decals

Water-slide or transfer decals are quite common, and are made up of the decal, a water-soluble adhesive, and backing paper. Upon immersion with water, the decal literally slides off the backing paper, allowing you to apply it to the surface of your scale model with relative ease.

How to Apply Water-slide Decals

1. Cut the first decal from the sheet.
2. Using the tweezers, pick up the decal and put it on the surface of the water or Decalfix – it may curl or sink, but this is fine.
3. Pluck the decal from the bowl and leave it on a paper towel to drain excess moisture.
4. Using your first paint brush, paint the first decal fixing solution onto the scale model, at the point where you intend to stick the decal.
5. Use the paint brush to guide the decal off the backing paper and onto the decal solution you just applied on the model. You can use the brush to position it correctly. To avoid damaging the decal, pull the backing sheet rather than moving the decal too much.
6. Once you are happy with the position of the decal, dab another paper towel on the decal to soak up any left over water or decal fixing solution.
7. While this is often enough to keep the decal in place, if you feel it necessary you can use the second paint brush to apply the second decal solution on top of the decal. This will set it firmly.
8. Leave the decal to completely dry.
9. To seal the decal completely, you can now apply a thin layer of gloss or matte acrylic varnish and allow it to dry. Solvent based varnishes may be used at your own risk.
Testing of the paints and varnishes being used with our decals is recommended
10. Repeat the above steps for each new decal.

Tip: If you notice air bubbles beneath your decal once it is dry, use a pin to prick small holes in it. Now paint over the decal with decal softening solution before pressing down on it with a moist paper towel or cotton bud.

Once you have applied all your decals, and if you have done it correctly, they should now have the appearance of being painted on. From here, you can either leave the model with a gloss finish, or apply some weathering techniques.

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