

March Meeting demo: Weathering Tires

Truck wheels plow through all sorts of terrain and your model's wheels should look similar. The last thing you want is a perfectly black tire. There are many methods you can deploy to give your wheels that 'lived in' look. Here are just two.

AIRBRUSH METHOD

- If you're comfortable using an airbrush, you can quickly paint wheels if you're only interested in dusty effects.
- Use clamps, sticks or whatever you can find to mount your wheels so that you have a handle to hold while airbrushing. This keeps your fingers off the painted surface and allows you to rotate the wheel with one hand while airbrushing from the other.
- Airbrush the entire wheel first with a very dark grey color. Never use black because tire rubber quickly turns grey and takes on the shades of the environment that it's in. I like Vallejo Model Air Black Grey for tires but other similar colors exist. You can also mix black and grey (mostly 1:1) to get a shade you like.
- Change out the dark grey for the body color of your model. Get a good mixture that sprays soft lines of paint with no splatter or speckling. Hold your wheel steady and start at the

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hub's center and begin applying a light application of paint. Start to move your airbrush in concentric circles that widen more as you reach the edges of the wheel's rim. Spraying a little past the rim's edge is okay, since the dust will cover it later. You may also elect to stop before reaching the rim's edge, leaving it black. Again, the subsequent steps will cover the color transition.

- Note: if your wheel hubs are a light sand color, you might have to be more careful when you get to the rim's edge because of the high level of contrast in the colors. In this case, you might have to touch up your rubber until the transition is more distinct. Olive Drab, Dunkelgrau and dark greens are dark enough where the color transition doesn't matter.
- Now that you have the basic colors of your wheel applied, you can apply some dust. Load up your airbrush with a dust color of your choosing. Tamiya Buff is hard to beat but Tamiya Deck Tan and Vallejo Model Air Hemp are also good choices. Thin the paint more than when you paint the model's hull. It will depend on your paint, but try 50% at first and go with more if needed. You want the paint somewhat translucent.

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Below: A) basic colors of black grey and olive drab; B) airbrush method of dusting with Tamiya Buff; C) pigment method with black artists' oil paint



- Aim at the center of the hub and move the airbrush in a circular motion as you paint over the hub. When you get to the rim's edge, you can spray over it a little. Go light on the first pass and look at your results. Repeat if you want more saturation.
- You can also spray straight lines from the hub's center and across the tire sidewall. Rotate the wheel with after every pass and you'll get subtle streak marks this way.
- You can also aim your spray into the tire grooves and the surface that contacts the road.
- When you're done with the dust, it might look like you went too far, but don't panic. The next step is to bring out the tire's lettering or texture by dry brushing with dark grey. I prefer to use an artists' oil paint such as Mars Black, Lamp Black or Payne's Grey. The paint is squeezed out onto an old business card or paper and allowed to sit for about 15 minutes while the linseed oil wicks out. This is an important step that makes the paint flat and quickens the drying time. I prefer to apply this paint with my finger tip--not a brush--because it tends to catch the highlights better and doesn't leave brush strokes. A little goes a LONG way so be sure to wipe your finger on paper first until you only see a faint smudge coming off. Don't worry about hitting the bolts on the hub--it will help define them just like the tire lettering.
- An option to this technique is that if you want a thoroughly dusty wheel, skip the part where you paint the hub altogether and spray your dust color all over. Use dark grey or black artists' oil paint on your finger tip to bring out the rubber.
- Final options include grease stains on the hub and splatter marks made by flicking a wet paintbrush loaded with your dust color or a dark mud color.

DRY PIGMENT METHOD

- Start by painting the wheel just like the airbrush method, using a tire color and the body color on the hub.
- Then mix up a wet slurry of dry pigment or ground pastel chalk that is suitably dusty colored. I have used Createx Airbrush Cleaner for years as the solvent for this job, but you can also use Tamiya acrylic thinner. Sometimes distilled water works but you have to test your pigments first. Some pigments have drying agents mixed in and they might not react well together. If your pigments clump, then stop and try another solvent/pigment combination or you will be sorry. Mix the pigment slurry thoroughly to the consistency of brush paint, perhaps on the wet side. If it's too dry it will be thick in spots and the effect will not be realistic.
- Apply the pigment slurry with a large, soft paintbrush and make sure it covers the entire wheel. We'll address coverage later.
- Brew some tea and wait for it to dry completely or use a hair dryer for instant gratification. It may look like crap at this stage but stick with it.
- Locate a medium stiffness paintbrush, a cotton swab or soft cloth and gently rub on the wheel at the wear areas and the dry pigment will start to come off. Go slowly and deliberately, taking off pigment to get the effect you desire.
- As a final step you may want to use dark grey or black artists' oil paint on your finger tip to bring out the rubber.
- Splattering and grease stains can be added as desired.
- This finish is not as durable as the airbrushed method, so touching the wheels is not recommended unless you seal them with a clear matte or wear blue rubber gloves.

