

How To Pinstripe



Alan Johnson

MOTORBOOKS



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CHAPTER 1

A UNIQUE AMERICAN ART FORM

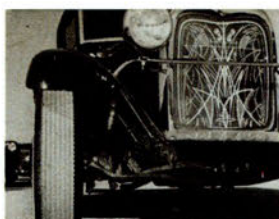
There are many theories about when pinstripes were first laid down as decoration. Some say the Egyptian chariots were highly decorated with pinstriping. I'll let the experts squabble over which theory is correct.

This is how I imagine it all began. Pinstriping started soon after the invention of the wheel. The guy with the second set of wheels didn't want to be second-class, so he found a guy in a cave who had chewed roots into soft fibers that he then used to decorate his walls with paints made from berries. This unusual fellow with the chewed roots decorated this second-class set of wheels into the first custom wheels. Soon all the other cave dwellers were lining up to get their rides to look cooler than the last. Chewing roots into a crude brush had its drawbacks, though. It seems that the roots contained some kind of hallucinogenic that left this artist staring into space for hours at a time. Soon, work piled up that he never got around to finishing. The people waiting got tired of all the excuses; they found another guy living down by the river who was famous for hunting sabertooth squirrels. He also was known for painting cool designs with a stick that had squirrel hair tied to the end. And so the first good brush without side effects was born.

The dust of time passed with numerous other experiments, which led to further developments in the wheel, pigments, and paint technology. Stone gave way to wood-spoked wheels. Carriage ornamentation and coach lining boomed during the Victorian Era. This new prosperity and opulence had neighbors once again trying to outshine each other. This "Carriage Era" was a time of unprecedented development. Carriage manufacturing was at its peak. A variety of ornamentation and decoration was painted onto each and every machine that existed during this time. Also, paint and varnish manufacturers broadened their palettes and developed more durable colors. The demand for ornamentation also moved some "stripers," as they were now called, to experiment and refine their striping "pencils," as they were called during



Thanks to a slew of articles published in enthusiast magazines, 1954–1955 is sometimes cited as a watershed period for pinstriping. The March 1955 issue of *Rod & Custom*, with George Barris' heavily "Dutched" 1949 Ford woody on the cover, also included a how-to feature with step-by-step photos that showcased the striping talents of Art Summers.



• Front fenders are 4-40 x 15s. Rear fenders, 8-20 x 15s, were cast in a special mold, capped with soft gun rubber and have 8 1/2 inch width. No radiator in used; water retained in engine.



• 274-inch Merc used Harmon and Collins mags, Sharp heads and manifold. Art Chrisman worked hands over to handle mixtures of 75% nitro, 25% alcohol. Speed record was in carterhouse.

TORRID '29 TUDOR

Another Chrisman Screamer Hits the Strip

When the Chrisman clan launches a drag job there's never any question on two points—appearance and speed. A recent launch to emerge from the famed Compton, California, garage is a torrid 2100-pound Tudor owned by Jack Chrisman and built with the assistance of his famed nephews, Art and Lloyd.

Chassis modifications include new crossmembers front and rear to accommodate the '46 Merc engine, '39 Merc transmission and '40 Ford rear end (4.11 gears). After reversing the eyes of the front spring, it was found necessary to put a little more arch in the leaves to set the car level. If you are an old Plymouth fan, you may recognize that front axle a refuge from an ex-bellytank lakester. The rear spring setup is strictly stock and handles the load very well.

Sharp equipment dominates the outside of the engine; the manifold fitted with four "31" Stromberg jets for fuel. The inside job is handled by a Perkin 1/2 cam and Forged True pistons pumping 12 1/2 to 1 compression. Displacement is 274 cubic inches. Actually, this lot about the engine should be observed in the past tense since the little mill scattered itself several weeks ago after posting a top speed in the "B" Fuel Class at Pomona at 114.64 mph.

And if the record isn't enough to scare off the competition, that wild Von Dutch striping job should shake 'em up a little. Bought originally from a junk yard for \$11, the A Model was scheduled to be a street job at first. But, as Jack points out, who'd have the heart to send a little jewel like that out into the brutal Los Angeles freeway traffic?



• Fuel tank and seat on side by side. Seat is type used in small English "Thunder" (Ford). Fuel 40-lb. fuel tank, shutoff valve and fire extinguisher are all aircraft surplus items.

DECEMBER 1954



• Battle under way is the thing Chrisman does best. Holding a distinct lead in front, Jack breezed from with a 2.000 sec under the engine. In eight times out, the car was four trophies.



Other pinstriping features that appeared in hot rodding magazines during late 1954 and early 1955 included a piece about Jack Chrisman's Von Dutch-striped '29 Tudor in the December 1954 issue of *HOT ROD* (left) that was followed two months later by Bob D'Olivo's article, "Camel's Hair Capers," in the same publication. The cover of that issue (right) featured an Eric Rickman Ektachrome of the Reed Bros./Leroy Neumayer belly-tank lakester, which had been flamed and striped by Von Dutch.

this time. The hair of choice for these new brushes was, you guessed it, squirrel! The highest designing and artistic standards were developed by respected artists such as, Fred Weber, S. H. Redmond, and others. Safes, wagons, omni-buses, street-cars, and railroad coaches all became works of art adorned in scrollwork as the horse slowly gave way to horsepower.

The horseless carriage was just that—some looked as if engines were retrofitted to existing carriages. Therefore, the art form of pinstriping carried over without much change. But vehicle ornamentation slowly declined to just coach lining until the 1950s, when some guy playing a flute and painting crazy designs, along with some other colorful characters in California, decided to open the paint box again.

Although some believe he invented a line of designer caps and T-shirts, Kenneth "Von Dutch" Howard was the

self-proclaimed originator of "modern pinstriping." His freeform style is still seen today. Many other pioneers like Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, Dean Jeffries, and Tommy "The Greek" Hrones, to name just a few, also helped popularize pinstriping. Again, I'll let the experts argue over who did what first. I'm just truly thankful that this art form is still to this day loved and enjoyed for what it is. Oh . . . I'm also thankful for squirrels.

GARAGE TO GALLERY WALLS

The "kustom" culture enjoyed pinstriping for decades, without really realizing that it really is art. But I don't think it would make a bit of difference if pinstriping were awarded the badge of "real" art by some art critic. Just as that social outcast, the hot rod, slowly found acceptance in society as the more sophisticated "street rod," pinstriping—one "lowbrow" art form



Ed “Big Daddy” Roth signed my striping kit at a car show in 1992. On it, he wrote, “Follow the Spirit.” What a weekend we had, sharing stories that ranged from General Motors to theology. I was thrilled to finally have the chance to meet him and tell him the story of our first encounter at the New York Coliseum when I was a lad of 12. He was a major inspiration for me as I learned to paint.

from the hot rod world—is gaining appreciation as a uniquely American art form.

While many automotive pinstriping artists have had our art displayed in galleries and at shows, most of us would rather see our artwork viewed on the “gallery of the road.” Turning heads and nods of approval always bring a feeling of satisfaction. Without searching too deeply for the underlying reasons, I think the art world today is made up by and for people with serious psychological problems.

The automotive society first started collecting art in the 1950s. Today, just look at auction results, notably from the Brucker auction held in May 2006 at the Peterson Museum.

Kustom culture gallery auctions are not the only place to find hot rod art. “Real” art galleries from coast to coast are beginning to accept art that pioneers like Von Dutch, Roth, and Robert Williams popularized. An entirely new

demographic is beginning to appreciate the art we have enjoyed for years. Today, almost every major auto show hosts a pinstriping jam, after which a sale or auction of the resulting artwork takes place. Terry Cook—promoter of Lead East, the “World’s Biggest ’50s Party”—had the foresight to offer one of the first gallery settings for artists to demonstrate and sell pinstriping. Auctions held at this event have raised thousands of dollars for children’s charities in the past years. Many collectors seek out these types of shows, in order to purchase these pieces of artwork that several artists have worked on.

Annually, artists continue taking pinstriping to new levels of perfection at more and more automotive and pinhead events. And crucial to pinstriping’s growing popularity and further development, new artists are learning new ideas and techniques from older pinstripers who freely give time and priceless information gleaned over years of trial and error.

CHAPTER 2

PAINT, PRODUCTS, AND COLOR THEORY

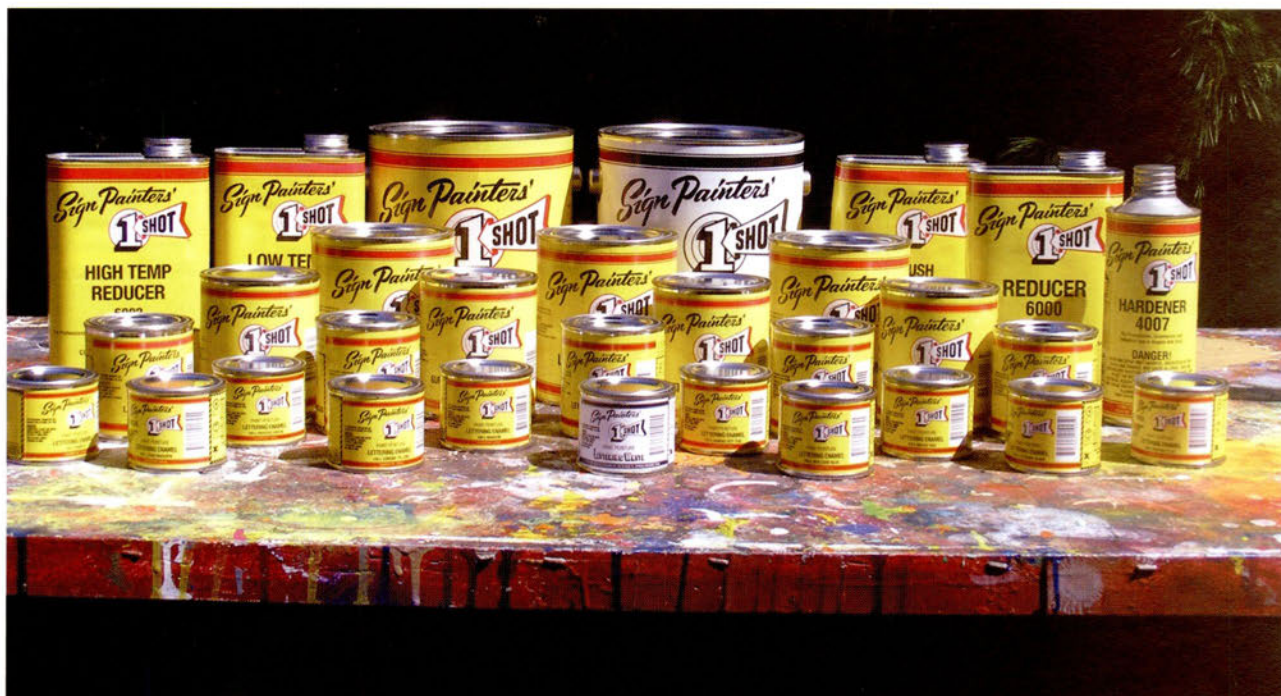
The first time I saw Ed “Big Daddy” Roth, I watched with amazement as his giant hands worked that tiny brush back and forth on a magazine palette. I had no idea who this wild-looking character was, completely clad in hand-painted, airbrushed attire and wearing his signature top hat. I was mesmerized by the way he went about his work, with steady concentration exuding tons of contagious joy.

That magical can of paint, with an arrow and bull’s-eye logo, sat on his palette. Every time I see a 1-Shot label or smell the paint, I’m reminded of that encounter so many

years ago, watching Ed Roth pinstriping at the legendary New York Coliseum Car Show.

Known for its good coverage and high gloss, 1-Shot Lettering Enamel has been the paint of choice for sign-painters and pinstripers for many years. Today, with input from sign-writers and stripers, 1-Shot offers a wide range of colors and reducers made for all types of weather conditions.

Ronan Lettering Enamel is another good paint for striping. Most stripers have both of these brands in their kits, and for many years each manufacturer has been a great supporter of



1-Shot enamel has been around ever since I can remember. It is named, appropriately, for the way it covers—in one “shot.” Additives help the paint to dry harder, which makes it more durable. Enamels can be clear-coated by adding hardener to the enamel, followed by a light sealer coat of clear before the finish clear coat is applied. Using high-temperature reducer made for working in hot weather will keep the paint wetter longer, while a low-temperature reducer evaporates more quickly so the paint will dry faster in cooler weather.



Ronan Lettering Enamel is quality paint available in a good range of colors. I especially like the reds. You will find both the Ronan and 1-Shot brands in many sign-painters' kits, as there are differences in the colors and coverage. Both 1-Shot and Ronan have been very generous over the years in their support of painters, donating paints to letterhead and pinhead gatherings all over the world.



XOTIC Colours is another full custom-paint supplier that has developed a line of good striping urethanes and high- to low-temperature reducers that make these quick-drying paints easier to control. XOTIC has a wide range of colors, pearls, and metallic paints that cover well. I believe that for durability reasons, urethane paint will become more and more popular as stripers become accustomed to using it.



The Alsa Corporation, a full custom-paint supplier, has introduced a striping urethane to its line of products. Stripers have been requesting a good striping urethane for years and this is one of them.

letterheads and pinheads at gatherings all over the world. Ronan offers a complete line of colors and paint products and has a great selection of reds that I like and which cover well.

To comply with government regulations, some ingredients, such as lead, have been removed or substituted. Hardeners have been added to lend durability to the paint. Some stripers use automotive reducers (known as *hot reducers* in the trade) to make these paints perform the way they want. However, some hot reducers tend to break down the chemical makeup of the paint, so glossy paints may flatten out or become dull prematurely. Play it safe: stick with the reducers provided by the paint manufacturers.

Kustom Shop, a new company that clearly has the graphic artist in mind, offers a modified alkyd enamel

designed to provide excellent hiding, superior flow, high gloss, durability, and faster drying time than traditional striping enamels. The EZ-Flow line includes many new vibrant colors, plus a variety of low-luster hues that are great for striping suede paint jobs. EZ-Flow striping and lettering hardener, mid- and high-temperature reducers, and brush-preserving oil finish off this quality line nicely. I recommend you try all of these brands to see which works best for you.

There have been several attempts to produce a quality, water-based lettering and striping paint. Not many manufacturers have had any success promoting them in today's professional market. Because natural-fiber brushes have

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