

Making Number Plates

The number plates on my RP have always been scruffy. The front plate had raised numbers of an unidentifiable material that had at some time been badly painted over and the rear plate had been very badly hand painted.



Original plates

I decided that it was time for a change.

There are plenty of firms on the internet that offer “vintage number plates” but what they were offering would not have had the correctly shaped digits for a 1934 car. Some firms offered a hand painted plates but at around £150 per set; too expensive! What I did find however was a website that offered to make up DIY stencils for a home made 1934 authentic plate at the cost of £24 plus postage per pair of stencils. The stencils can only be used once so two are required for a pair of plates.

I decided that I would make my own plates. I had no aluminium of a suitable thickness so used steel. Cutting out the plates was not a problem and there is plenty of information on the internet about the legal requirements of spacing, margins etc. that enabled me to make plates of the correct size. Remember to drill any fixings holes required before you apply paint. I thoroughly de-rusted the metal before painting and gave plates two coats of primer, rubbing down between coats and several coats of satin black enamel. I used spray cans of paint and applied the paint with the plate in a horizontal position. I applied fairly thin coats to avoid runs. I allowed the plates to dry horizontally.

When the stencils arrived, I found that the digits were very slightly smaller than the legal requirements but I think it very unlikely that anyone is ever going to notice. The stencils are made from an adhesive backed plastic (not unlike the “Fablon” of yesteryear). Each stencil is for the whole number plate and has a protective backing covering the adhesive side and another layer of protection to the front keeping the stencil in position whilst it is applied to the plate.

Great care is required in locating the stencils on the painted plates as the adhesive is very strong and it is almost impossible to remove and replace the stencils once they have been applied. I took careful measurements and made light pencil marks on the plate as a guide for positioning. Once the stencil is in place, the front covering can be carefully removed to expose the stencil.

Painting in the digits must be done with a brush and not with a spray can. The paint should be pale cream and not white! The plate should again be in a horizontal position. The paint should be applied with a small brush reasonably generously in one coat as the stencil must be removed before the paint is fully dry. Leave a blob or two of paint on the stencil so that after an hour or so you can test these blobs to make sure the paint is 'thickening'.

The timing of the removal of the stencil is tricky. The paint should be tacky but set so that it does not run. For the first plate, I removed it after about 4 hours and that was difficult. The adhesive on the stencil is very strong and it requires a considerable effort to remove and in doing so it is difficult to avoid smudging the paint of the still wet digits, particularly on the part of stencil that has still to be removed. When removing the stencil, peel it back from one end horizontally (i.e. parallel with the surface of the plate), pulling at right angles to the plate could remove the satin enamel paint from the plate surface.

On the second plate, I left the paint to dry for 24 hours before removing the stencil and that was far too long. When the stencil was removed, instead of leaving a clean sharp edge on the digits it took the top skin of the digit paint with it. The resultant paint skin then folded over onto the remaining digit paint creating a nasty mess.

The result was that the first plate was more successful than the second but both plates required quite a lot of delicate repair work with a fine artist's brush to get a reasonable result

If I were to make plates again I would leave the paint longer than 4 hours but nothing like as long as 24 hours. It does depend on the type of paint you use and on how thickly you apply it, but I think I would be looking at less than 12 hours.

Overall, I am pleased with the results and I think they enhance the car, they are certainly better than the plates I removed.

If you do decide at any time to try making your own plates (and save yourself over £100 at the same time) then the following suppliers might be of interest

Stencils	Paint for backing plate	Paint for numbers
Phil Kolbe Fergie Trailer Shop www.fergietrailershop.co.uk Tel: 01536 265326 Mob: 07974 569827	J Mart 118 Widemarsh Street HEREFORD HR4 9HN	Border Automotive Unit 7 Foley Trading Estate HEREFORD HR1 2SF

New plates



Ron Sadler