

HowTo::

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YOU'LL NEED

- Suitable spray paint cans of your choice of color
- Masking or electrical tape
- Scotch-Brite pad
- Lexan scissors
- Sandpaper or Dremel Moto-Tool
- Window cleaner

PAIN A CANOPY

How to paint a clear canopy in 6 easy steps

Almost all helicopter kits come with a plastic canopy and graphics and look pretty good. But there are still some kits that come with clear plastic canopies, or maybe you want to make your heli stand out from all the rest at the field. Painting a canopy is not difficult and by following these simple steps you'll be rewarded with an eye-catching, professional-looking heli. We'll be using the Pro-Line Assault canopy, which has the added bonus of being lighter than the stock T-Rex or Mini-Titan canopy.



GET READY

1 For your first try, a single solid-color scheme will be easier and increases your chances of a good finish. Gather the required equipment and supplies (see sidebar) and make sure you are using the correct type of paint. Tamiya spray cans for polycarbonate plastics work great and are available in a large variety of colors.



SCUFF IT UP

2 The finished canopy will only come out as good as the prep work you do or don't do. If you want a durable finish, scuffing the canopy's interior is worth the few minutes that it takes. Use a Scotch-Brite (or similar) scrubbing pad and roughen up the interior. Avoid the windshield area if you want to keep it clear. The paint will have a better surface to bond to and there is less chance of it flaking off. The scuffing will not affect the finished appearance.



WASH IT

3 A mold release agent is typically used during the manufacture of plastic canopies and paint won't adhere well to it. To clean the release agent and any other contaminants from the canopy, wash it in warm soapy water. Make sure you rinse it well afterwards to remove any soap or detergent residue.



MASK IT

4 The Pro-Line Assault canopies include a self-adhesive window mask. These are easy to apply by positioning them over the windshield. If your canopy doesn't include one, use masking or electrical tape to mask the windshield area. Make sure the edges are sealed tight to get a clean separation line. The Assault canopies also have an overspray film on the outside. Again, if yours doesn't, you'll need to protect the outside of the canopy from overspray.

KEY TIPS

- Scuff the surface before painting.
- Spray in a well-ventilated area.
- Always spray light coats.
- Hold the can 6 to 8 inches away from the canopy.
- Keep the spray can moving.
- For multiple colors, paint the darkest colors first.
- Back the color with white or silver for a more brilliant finish.
- Use the tip of a hobby knife to apply small decals.

ADD COLOR

5 Before you actually spray any paint onto your canopy, practice applying a very light film on a piece of cardboard or glass. If it runs, you applied too much paint. The key to a professional paint job is to apply a very light mist coat for the first coat. Just spray enough paint to fog the canopy and keep the can moving. Too much paint will cause runs and it will be susceptible to cracking and flaking after it dries. The paint in spray cans can be "thinned" by placing it in a pan of warm (not boiling) water for about 10 minutes prior to spraying.

The paint must be dry before applying subsequent coats. The Tamiya paints dry fairly quickly, but you can use a hair dryer to speed the drying. Hold the hair dryer about 10 inches away from the surface and don't let it get too hot. The paint's surface will change from wet and shiny to dull and flat as the paint dries. Don't use a heat gun as they get too hot. Also, don't use the hair dryer if you suspect you put too much paint on as it could cause cracks in the finish.

Usually you will need to spray on three or four light coats of paint to get complete and solid coverage. These can be slightly heavier than the first mist coat, but keep the layers thin. If you want to keep the weight to a bare minimum, two or three light coats will be sufficient with a final backing coat of white. The white will brighten the finish and enhance the looks.



FINISHING TOUCHES

6 A curved pair of Lexan body scissors will make quick work of trimming the excess plastic from the canopy. After trimming the canopy, smooth the edges with sandpaper or a Dremel Moto-Tool fitted with a sanding drum. Remove the overspray film and carefully apply any graphics. Wash your hands before applying and you'll be less likely to get fingerprints on them. Spray glass cleaner or use water with a few drops of detergent to apply large decals. This will allow the decal to float and give you time to properly position it. Squeegee the excess fluid after it is positioned with an old credit card.

That's all there is to a simple yet professional looking finish. Now that you have the confidence, try a multi-color scheme to really make your canopy stand out from the rest. ::



See the Source Guide for manufacturers' contact information.

