Making your own water-slide decals

If you own or have access to a home computer and a printer you can with certain minor limitations produce your own water slide decals. This will mainly benefit those that scratch build `unorthodox` models. I think we are all aware that those that build lifeboats, naval ships etc. can very easily buy off the peg decals in a variety of scales. However, if you are building a powered mud hopper called `Horace Rumpole' in the livery of the `Southend Sludge Co.', you may well have problems sourcing the correct decals, especially in 1/19 scale as you have decided that at that scale the model will fit perfectly on the seat of a No.47 bus!

What is involved? - Briefly the processes are as follows:

purchasing the correct type of decal paper

producing the desired logo as a `Word' or `Excel' document

printing, using an ink-jet or laser-jet printer

sealing the surface using an aerosol lacquer

cutting the decal to size

soaking in water to release the decal from the backing paper

sliding the decal into place

varnishing the decal to prevent peeling

Paper – You need to purchase some `decal paper' which basically is a sheet of paper with a thin plastic coating on one side. There are four types of decal paper to choose from, the choice being dependent upon firstly, the printer type, also the colour of the decal and the base colour, to which the decal will be affixed.

ink jet	clear
ink jet	white
laser jet	clear
laser jet	white

clear paper – used for a dark decal on a pale background

white paper - used for a pale decal on a dark background

If you tried to place a decal of a pale colour such as yellow on a dark background such as black, using clear paper, the more dominant black would *`grin through'* the yellow. However, this can be prevented by using white paper. The only limitation is printing the colour `white', such as this example.

Domestic printers, for obvious reasons, do not print in the colour `white'. However, there are companies that will produce a boat name in white to affix directly onto a dark coloured hull.

The decals on this model were produced using both clear and white paper. *The HORNET nameplate and the smaller fleet number (above the wiper blade) were produced on an inkjet printer using white paper. The remaining decals were produced on the same printer but using clear paper. The round `Harry the Hornet' logo was scanned from the cover of a football programme. The `bridge' shaped logo was found on the internet, with DM added courtesy of `Word'.*

Logos etc. - Hours of fun are guaranteed generating the decal of your choice! Using the previous example of `Horace Rumpole', this boat nameplate can be produced in a wide variety of colours, font styles and sizes just by using `Word'. There are also websites where anyone with a real full size boat can design their own nameplate graphics. Modellers can make use of this facility as well, for producing decals. Just design the nameplate, free of charge on the website, copy and print.

www.thegraphicsboat.co.uk

You can also do a Google search for `SSC logo' and get a logo selection for the fictitious Southend Sludge Co. It probably stands for the Stevenage Sailing Club and you are stuck with the colour, but you cannot have everything!

The PRL logo was found on the internet. The "Pitt River Logging" sign plus the border, to accompany it, was produced using `Word'. The colour match is not too bad.

PITT RIVER LOGGING
British Columbia

Also look at websites where you can design you own business cards. Again, there are plenty of styles and logos to choose from. Just copy your wonderful creation and print off your decal.

SEAPORT BAY SERVICES

The logo, including the SBS, was produced using a "design your own business card" website. The remaining text was added using `Word', hence the slight difference in colour.

Most home computers also have a free selection of images called *Clipart*. These can be incorporated with some text using `Word' to produce your own logo.

Genuine logos are also available via the internet should you require one (or two, or possibly more):

For those with access to a document scanner, another source of names and logos is by using photographs, images in brochures, and letter headings etc. For example you could photograph the nameplate and/or logo on an actual vessel that you wish to model. Then scan the photograph to produce the decal.

This formed part of a letter heading and the text was originally British Waterways London. After scanning, the original text was removed and replaced using `Word' to that shown, using something very close to the original font style and size.

Two Honda logos were required to go either side of the engine cover of a dummy outboard motor, hence left & right hand. The logo was easily obtained from the internet, but in one hand only. The opposite hand was produced via the computer. Remember the computer will also allow you to increase and decrease size so that your choice of decal can be adjusted to the correct scale to suit your model.

Sealing – The decal is printed on the shiny side of the decal paper i.e. the one with the plastic coating and once printed, needs to be sealed with an aerosol lacquer available from the supplier of the paper. Once fully dried (normally a couple of hours), the decal can be trimmed to size.

Soaking and Positioning - Each decal needs to be separated from its backing paper by soaking in water until the two float apart. *This is just the same as you did in 1962, when constructing your Airfix model of a Spitfire, which cost you two shillings from Woolworths.* Then with care, *your tongue squeezed gently between your teeth*, position the decal in the desired place and smooth out any air bubbles. Then set aside and allow to thoroughly dry out.

Varnishing – To protect your beautify produced and carefully positioned decal it is advisable to seal it onto the model. The supplier of the decal paper will normally sell you an aerosol spray for this process, but I now use a product called Humbrol Model Cote product which can be applied with a brush, meaning no masking is required. The product is available in Gloss, Satin and Matt forms to suit the paint finish of your model. This `varnish' is clear and dries with no brush marks. It is claimed to be compatible with all types of paint finish. However, it is advisable to produce a `test-piece' including a spare piece of decal material, just to make sure!

Materials – Decal paper (all four types) and the aerosol lacquer for sealing the printed decal onto the paper can be obtained on-line from:

http://www.homecrafts.co.uk/inkjet-water-slide-decal-paper-white

For the Humbrol Model Cote range i.e. Gloss, Satin and Matt visit a Humbrol stockist or order `on-line'. The other use for this product is to overcoat an item which has a gloss finish to provide a satin or matt finish. Plenty of demos on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXIoOhef0nM

Hints & Tips

Before printing onto decal paper, always have a dummy-run by printing you decals onto ordinary printer paper which is much cheaper. Then offer up the image to the model to ensure it looks correct and fits into the available space. Make any necessary adjustments and then repeat the process.

For economy in the use of materials, aim to arrange the logos to ensure best use of space on the decal paper. `Excel' is normally included on most home computer packages and some make use of this to support this aim. Others make use of `Powerpoint', if available.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions, particularly the Sealing process, which encapsulates the image prior to soaking in water. Remember that `ink' or `toner' getting into contact with water, will result in an awful mess. A decal looking as though it has been created by Alice Cooper's make-up artist in no good to anyone!

David Marks – March 2018