



The first time I saw a HUMMER was the summer of 1994 and it was love at first sight for me. We were on a family vacation when we passed a military caravan of Humvee's. As I slowed down to get a better look, I said to my wife, "Whatever those things are, I'm going to have one someday." After our vacation I did some investigating and located a dealership 50 miles from my home in Buffalo, New York. Two years later after many hours of negotiations with both my wife and the dealership, I drove away the proud owner of a bright white 1997 2-door HUMMER hard top. In Buffalo we have two seasons; winter and construction. The HUMMER is a perfect vehicle because I can play in a natural winter off road course for 6 months and then it's potholes and construction barricades to slalom through for the next 6 months. I drove my HUMMER every day, mostly on the road but I have attended a few Club off-road events over the years. After 5 years of mud, road salt, snow, ice, rain

and summer sun, my pride and joy was showing signs of age. When I made the investment in the HUMMER, I intended to make it last forever, so I decided to spend my summer restoring it. I've done a small amount of custom painting but never attempted a major project like this. I started without a finished plan or color, figuring ideas would come to me as I got into the complicated project. Four months and roughly \$5000.00 later, I have a bright red soft top with gold and silver design accents. Here's how it all came about...

The Disassembly Process

This was the easy part; it's always fun ripping stuff apart! The nice thing about the HUMMER is that it comes apart easy, with no special tools needed. As I started taking the HUMMER apart, I found more road salt damage than I had anticipated. It was soon obvious a lot of parts would need repair or replacement. Most of the electrical components such as the headlamp assemblies, signal and marker lights and most nuts and bolts throughout the body were

corroded beyond repair. The aluminum body was in great shape except in a few areas where salt and dirt were trapped for a long period of time. Corrosion also appeared under the rubber housings of the rear brake lights and gas tank shrouds. The black steel parts such as bumpers, suspension parts, brush guard and D-rings needed sandblasting, epoxy primer and painting. There is an area on my truck that has always had a problem with rust due to a slight design flaw. Right behind the door where the steel roof meets the aluminum body there is an area that I had already repaired twice but it was rusting for the third time. After removing the interior upholstery I found water and rust running along the top gutter area above the door, inside the truck. There was also a leak where the windshield frame met the roof. A good indicator of this problem is when the small rectangular courtesy lights mounted in the headliner are filled water and don't work. There was only one way to fix it properly; remove the roof. Now this project was starting to lean towards "going too far". I called AM General and found the roof was bolted and bonded in place and though not an easy task, it could be removed and replaced. I said, "what the heck, I've gone this far, I might as well go all the way"! I called a couple friends and we started. After 2 hours of cutting, pounding and tugging we lifted the roof off. I really liked the look without the roof and decided to take it for a ride. One cruise around the block with the top off and it was totally clear; the roof is off for good! I called my good friend Dennis Marion at Kascar and found out that I could buy a military soft top for the 2-door model complete with mounting hardware and soft doors. He told me the civilian 2 door cab was 8 inches longer than the military model so I would have to modify the back of the top. I ordered the soft top, replaced the roll bar with a military "B" pillar, designed a new roll bar that would become the frame for the modified soft top, and found a canvas guy to modify the soft top. I removed the hard doors along with the unnecessary wiring and before I knew it, my HUMMER was a mere skeleton and I had a garage full of parts for refurbishing, one piece at a time. The looks and comments that I got from neighbors and friends were great! Some walked away shaking their heads and mumbling while others were excited with anticipation to see the completed masterpiece.

The Paint Job

Painting a vehicle by yourself is not something I would recommend but if you have a lot of time and patience, it's not that difficult to learn. Safety is very important, especially with the new high tech paint products. Lacquers and acrylic enamels are history; base coat, clear coat and polyurethanes are the new wave. They are easier to work with but ventilation and breathing protection are of the utmost importance. The new spray equipment like the HVLP (high volume low pressure) spray gun has made it very simple to learn how to paint. Special dust free environments and wetting down the floor are in the past. A simple window fan and clean area are all you need for a good result. Painting the HUMMER was different from normal auto painting because I painted it in pieces and reassembled it after it was painted. I used homemade rubber gaskets and silicone caulk wherever there was direct contact with a freshly painted surface. All in all the process proved successful and if I paint it again, I'll do it the same way. Here's a brief outline of the entire process, for a more detailed description, refer to the Club web site for the complete story.

Preparation

The preparation process is the most important part. The entire truck must be completely free from dirt, oil, grease, wax, road salt and any other outside contaminants. I scrubbed the entire truck, 1 rivet at a time. All the areas with corrosion were sand blasted and treated with a bare metal acid specially formulated for aluminum. The bare metal areas and sandblasted parts were coated with a 2- part epoxy primer. Next, all of the body parts were primed with a primer surfacer, which fills in small scratches and provides an adhesion base for spot putty and sealer. Then, all small dents, deep scratches and sandblasted areas were filled with spot putty and sanded smooth. Once the bodywork was finished, the entire truck was coated with a two-part white epoxy sealer. The white makes the basecoat color as bright as possible and the sealer promotes good adhesion for the paint.

Basecoat and Artwork



The base coat is the main color of the vehicle and easy to apply. I chose a custom mix of red pigment because I wanted the brightest red. Once the base coat was applied I began the artwork. I started with the tailgate using the structural lines as a guide and came up with the dagger-like design. Next, I drew up some freehand



shapes that complimented the tailgate theme. I made templates out of cardboard and taped them in place. Tracing the templates with fine line masking tape and painting the designs with gold and silver base coat made for a time consuming but interesting effect. I spent at least 50 hours on layout and artwork painting. There were two colors and they overlapped in areas, which made it very difficult. I wanted the gold to match the tan soft top and the silver was needed to bring out all the stainless steel hardware I would use to put the truck back together. At last it was time to remove all the tape and masking paper and finish with clear coat. What a reward to see all my hours of hard work and patience take shape!

Clear coat

The paint job finale is the clear coat. The heavier and wetter the clear coat, the better the artwork and gloss retention. It's critical to apply the clear coat at a time when there are no bugs and dust particles in the air. Wipe down the entire vehicle with a tack rag before you spray the clear coat. I sprayed on a cool morning right after a rain and was very happy with the outcome.

The Re-assembly Process

The tedious process of remembering how to put it together while being careful not to damage the new paint begins. I replaced every bolt and nut with bare stainless steel. I painted all the black trim parts with Rustoleum satin black and used stainless steel hardware to mount them on the red body. The soft top lined up perfectly, with the military hinges using the same bolt holes as the hard doors. I replaced the civilian mirrors with military mirrors because they mounted to the truck body. In the summer the doors can be removed in seconds and the mirrors, which are now mounted to the body, stay in tact. The nice thing about the soft top is on a nice day, I can roll up the rear window curtain and lift off the doors and drive with just the roof section. Now my custom HUMMER is really taking shape. With some finishing touches like license plates, weather stripping, tailgate decal and the cargo rack, I'm ready to roll! It was four months of work but worth every second! I love the looks and questions I get driving my rig around town...quite a vehicle!