

Script For Shirts

BY RICKY PATRICK

Sound instruction on one of the critical aspects of shirt airbrushing



Neglected by most beginning T-shirt airbrushers, lettering is and always has been one of the most important aspects of airbrush T-shirt customizing. Personalization is the key factor in this business, giving customers the opportunity to tell the world who they are, publicize their opinions, advertise their business or organization, and even express their love and devotion. To become a top-notch T-shirt artist, one has to develop talents and skills not only in drawing but especially in lettering.

Learning good freehand lettering takes lots of patience and many hours of practice. With enough practice, however, you will discover that you gain not only more readable lettering but also much better control of the airbrush. Remember, you may be able to draw extremely well, but if you can't master lettering, your success as a T-shirt artist will be limited.

There are several styles of freehand airbrush lettering that have been developed and used over the years, among them script and bubble. I wish to concentrate on script lettering in this article, with examples on how it should look and the strokes necessary to achieve this desired style. Script is used by a large number of professionals and is a very fast style to complete. It is a rather loose style, allowing a great deal of personal embellishments and elaborate flourishes.

LOOSENING UP

Loosening up applies not only to your mental outlook but of your physical stance as well. Place yourself in a comfortable working position. Beginning letterers tend to tighten up, thinking they

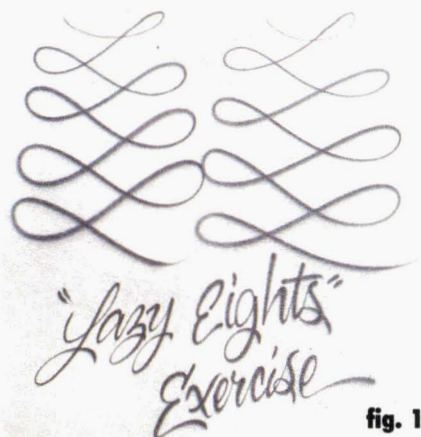


fig. 1

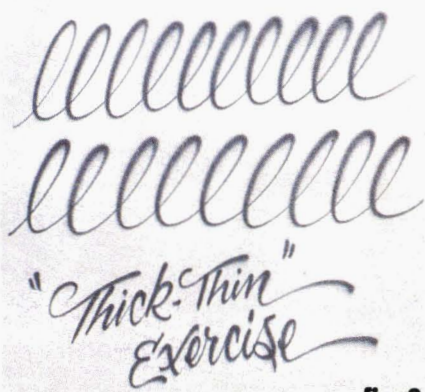


fig. 2

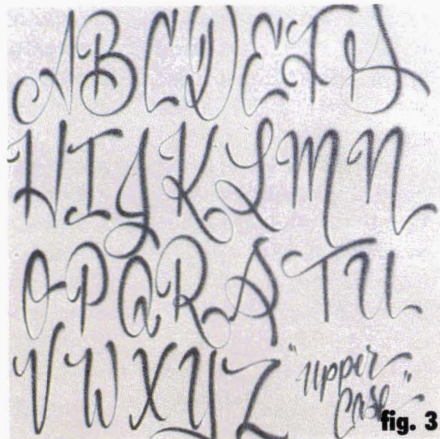


fig. 3

will gain control by being rigid. Lettering, regardless of the style, works best when working in a flowing motion.

PROPER SPRAY GUAGING

Many artists start lettering by holding the airbrush 2 to 3 inches from the shirt. You will find that a finer and more distinct line will be produced the closer you work to the shirt surface. The perfect distance between the brush and the shirt is approximately one finger width. One way to achieve this distance consistently is to allow the fingers holding the airbrush bottle to touch the shirt lightly as you go. This will also give added stability to the gun as you work. Do be careful, however, of dragging your fingers through any wet paint on the shirt and leaving smear marks. This is where practice pays off.

The script style involves circular motions and careful eye-hand-trigger coordination. The first exercise is called "lazy eights" (fig. 1). Start at the top of the surface with a fine line and work steadily down in a criss-cross pattern, gradually widening the line as you go. This exercise is used to learn about trigger reaction and to build a flowing rhythm into your motion. This is also a great warm-up exercise for those who haven't painted in a while and feel a bit rusty.

SCRIPT STROKES

Script involves a "thick-thin" style that is done in one stroke. This can be somewhat difficult to master, so here is another exercise to help prepare you. Figure 2 looks like a row of lowercase l's. Notice that the line is considerably thicker on the

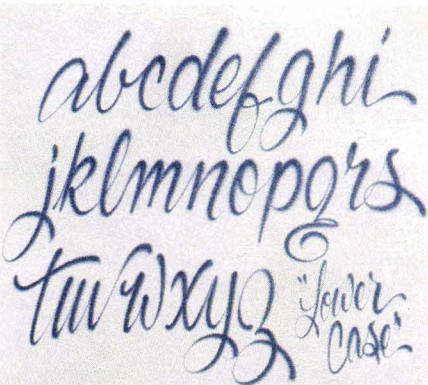


fig. 4

downswing than on the upswing. This is created by pulling the trigger back more on the downstroke and releasing it somewhat on the upstroke.

It is important on the upstroke to not cut the paint supply completely off but rather have it return to a thin line before resuming another downstroke. This gives continuity to the lettering. In script, the lowercase letters will connect most of the time, but you will have to work out the logistics of how they connect according to your own personal style. This exercise also gives the flowing motion needed in other lettering styles. Practice this exercise as often as possible until it becomes second nature.

Script is basically a fancy version of your own handwriting. Even if your normal handwriting is atrocious, with work you will be able to develop a nice, legible script. Script uses an upward-downward stroke (fig. 1). I've given some exercises and examples to copy and build on. Truthfully, no one can turn you into a good airbrush T-shirt artist except yourself. The best way to learn lettering (and airbrushing in general) is to practice as much as possible and learn from mistakes. Remember that readability is the all-important factor. If the customer can't read it, he or she won't buy it. In the process, perhaps, learning to use the airbrush correctly will open your horizons and creativity. ✍

Ricky Patrick's airbrush T-shirt career has spanned nearly a decade. In that time, he has traveled to many parts of the country and has studied various styles of airbrushing. Color-blind, he has had to work harder than most artists in a field that demands color coordination. Patrick, 23, currently lives and works in Marietta, Georgia. Ricky was featured in the March-April 1986 issue of Airbrush Action, and will continue to contribute to our regular column on shirt airbrushing commencing in this issue.

If you have questions or comments regarding T-shirt airbrushing, you may contact Ricky Patrick in care of Airbrush Action Magazine, 317 Cross Street, Lakewood, New Jersey 08701.

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