

PinStriper's Corner

More on striping big trucks by Todd Hanson

It's been five years since I started striping trucks for the Volvo truck dealership in Maumee, Ohio. Things have changed a little (see *Todd Hanson on Striping Semis* in the September/October 1995 issue of *SignCraft*). For one thing, I'm doing more trucks than I ever



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thought I would—about 100 trucks per year for the dealership. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be striping this many big trucks.

I always wanted to stripe cars and motorcycles. Not semis—they're too stinking big! Of course, since I had bills to pay, I had an attitude adjustment. Now I welcome them. It still amazes me how doing one job for one person can lead to more and more work. It also makes me feel good when customers come from other states for striping, because they've seen someone else's rig.

Changes in styling

Another change is the evolution of my designs, coupled with Volvo changing their body style. These changes keep the striping interesting. At the dealership, many customers want more ornate designs, especially those who have seen my work evolve over the past five years. I'd say that 70% of the work is for stock (new trucks that are on the lot). The rest is for customers who are buying a truck that isn't striped yet. If a customer likes the striping on a certain truck that's in the lot, but for some reason the truck doesn't fit their specs, the salesman will tell me, "He likes the stripes on stock number 55 but he's buying a blue truck." I'll do something similar.

The salesmen always explain to the customers that I won't duplicate a design unless it's for the same owner. I've never had a complaint about this. These guys are generally independent individuals, and would hate the idea of someone else driving down the highway with a truck striped the same as theirs. You have to work with customers, not against them, because you represent the dealership just as much as you represent yourself. I keep notes on each customer I work with, so that when I do their next truck I'll know

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whether they liked wide stripes, skinny stripes, or if the door needs space left open for lettering, or whatever.

As far as design changes go, especially on the Volvos, I've started to put more of the weight of the design on the doors. Sometimes it's still at the back, but with the new body style, I've changed my attack a bit. With other styles of trucks, such as Kenworth or Peterbilt, I still have to break the design up, due to their split body and sleeper style. It doesn't matter if it's a street rod, pickup truck, or a semi truck, you have to take what the body gives you.

Many times the owners will put the company name on the lower fairing to let the striping be more dominant. Sometimes it still needs to be on the doors, and if that's the case, then so be it. It's just another challenge to work with.

Working with truckers

Some of the owner-operators, whose trucks I do outside of the dealership, really want some detailed work. For me, detailed



means one to two days on a truck. Remember, most of these guys don't have much "down time." The trucks have to be on the road to pay for themselves. If you decide to do trucks, be prepared to be flexible. Be prompt for appointments. These guys appreciate you keeping their down time to a minimum. Many times I'll change my schedule to fit someone in, regardless if it's the dealership or an owner-operator. Word gets around about things like that.

I think one of the most important things is gaining the trust of the truck owners. If you can accomplish that, you can then let your instincts take over and do a better job. It pays to relieve the fears that they might have, considering you are about to go nuts on their \$100,000 truck. You can gain their trust by other truckers telling them about you and your work, photos of your work, the dealership's salesmen selling your ability, and most importantly, listening to what the customer is saying. Yes, listen. It sounds easy, but it's hard to do. I know I've been guilty of not listening. Sometimes a customer can say a lot by not saying much at all. Just listen.

Finally, working for a dealership can be a huge blessing, simply because of the volume of work that can flow your way. It can also allow a continuous development of design (and speed!) which can enhance all aspects of your work.□



Todd Hanson's shop, Hanson Graphix, is in Wauseon, Ohio.