

# Step-by-step: Custom graphics for a big rig

By Todd Hanson



Figure 1. Start by laying a level line of tape down the side of the truck.



Figure 2. Next, sketch out your layout, refining the design as you go.



Figure 3. Begin masking off the stripes and planning your colors.

Ever since my article on semi graphics ran in the September/ October 1995 issue of *SignCraft*, I've been hearing from a lot of people who have the same question: "Howjadothat?" Well, these mega-graphics aren't as tough as they look. Think BIG and try to make that rig look like it's going 90 miles per hour—even when it's just sitting there!

My shop isn't big enough for a semi, so I travel a lot to get to my jobs. Most of the time I don't know what kind of striping I'll be doing, so I carry a lot of supplies with me. Besides my paint and brushes, I take sponges, 1½-in. junk brushes for dry-brushing, rollers, at least 20 rolls of fine-line tape ¼-in. and ⅜-in. wide, 2-in. and ¾-in. masking tape, extra knife blades, empty paint cans for mixing custom colors, wax and silicone remover, extra thinner, glass cleaner, paper towels and a big compass.

**Figure 1.** The first thing I do after cleaning the truck is to get a level line of tape down the side of the truck. This gives you a base to work from. To clean the truck, if it is new, I just wipe it down with Windex®. If it's used, I use wax and silicone remover—the standard stuff. But everybody has their own way of cleaning the vehicle.

**Figure 2.** Next, I angle a line down toward the nose of the truck on one side. I take measurements at the two ends and the middle, and repeat this layout on the other side of the truck. Just to give myself an idea of what I might do, I do a couple of small rough sketches on the side of the truck with a Stabilo pencil. About 95 percent of the time, I change the design while laying it out. When you're spontaneous and have a basic feel for a design, this approach can really work well.

**Figure 3.** Now I'm trying to get a flow going



Figure 4. This photo shows all the stripes masked off.



Figure 5. I do any lettering next, keeping my color scheme in mind.



Figure 6. Now, I begin painting the stripes...

with the stripes. Many truck body styles look like boxes, so I try to create some “sleekness” with the design. I also start thinking of possible colors in certain areas of the stripes. In this case, the company that owns the truck really liked the color combo I did on the last one for them, so they wanted the same colors on this one. Fortunately for me, they’re pretty cool people and let me do a different design every time.

**Figure 4.** This photo shows all the stripes masked off. I usually do the layout for the lettering after laying out the stripes. This seems backwards—you’d think the lettering would go on first. I do that on all vans and pickups, but with semis, these guys like stripes before lettering. It’s personalized for the drivers, and happy drivers mean happy business.

**Figure 5.** Even though the stripes are taped off first, I paint the letters before the stripes. This way I can see the shades of colors on the truck before making decisions on where they will go in the design.

**Figure 6.** I begin the stripes by filling in some of the space between the design with gray and bouncing some white on top of it. It’s easier to do this first for the obvious reason—there’s no other wet paint to lay your hand in while bouncing the brush.

To bounce the brush, simply touch the brush to the surface and lift off again, then repeat the process as necessary to achieve the desired effect. I hold the brush firmly in my hand and bounce my entire arm off the surface. It’s almost like I’m pounding my fist on the truck—I hold the brush the way I’d normally hold it when lettering and bounce it along. I’m not dabbing the brush with my fingers—that doesn’t give the same effect.

**Figure 7.** Once the bouncing has subsided, I whip out my trusty flat and start filling in.

**Figure 8.** Now you can rip off huge amounts of fine-line, have a cool beverage and the job is history. It’s as simple as that.

My total time on this job was 7¼ hours. •

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



Figure 7. ...and filling in the graphics.



Figure 8. When the painting is complete, I pull off the tape.



Completed project