

# POWDERCOATING

WORDS AND PICS: TRENT 'WHITE POWDER' NIKOLIC

ONE OF THE TOUGHEST FINISHES AVAILABLE, THIS MONTH STREET COMMODORES SHOWS YOU THE PROCESS OF APPLYING A POWDERCOATED FINISH

**F**ew paint finishes are more durable and longer lasting than powdercoating. Powdercoating is ideal for numerous automotive applications and is a cost-effective way of restoring tattered, rusty metalwork or simply giving new components an easy-to-maintain finish. And the best thing is that it won't cost you the world either.

If you're in the process of building up your ride, and it doesn't really matter what style of ride it is either, your powdercoater should become one of your best friends throughout the build. Why, you ask? Because you can powdercoat so many different things that you'd be stupid not to consider it for any number of applications. A well-executed powdercoat finish looks awesome and is easy to clean and maintain. Racecar builders have been using it for years, and there's no reason why you shouldn't use it for your street car, too.

Powdercoating was first used in this country sometime in the '60s and is by far the youngest of the surface-finishing techniques that are still in common use today – painting has been around forever, for example. (Well, not forever, but you know what we mean.) Essentially, powdercoating is the process of applying dry paint to a component. Rather than a wet application, such as you'd have seen in the spray booth when your ride is being painted, powdercoat is applied as a dry spray. In fact, once it's been applied and before it's baked, you can simply rub it off with your finger.

When a powdercoated finish has cured, the final result is the same as a two-pack wet paint. Think about normal spray paint that you've seen applied to cars for a moment; the solids are suspended in a liquid carrier. Two basic techniques are used to apply the powdercoat. The first sees the component lowered into a fluidised vat of the powder, which may or may not be electrostatically charged, while the second sees the powdered paint being first electrostatically charged before being sprayed onto the component.

The second is a little more common, as it allows the painter to access just about any area he or she chooses. In the States, custom car builders have even been known to powdercoat the entire underneath of the floor pan and wheel arches for its durability and to make it easier to remove road grime. Powdercoating creates a very strong finish.

Once the powder has been applied, the component is then placed into an oven to be baked. This is much the same process as baking a two-pack finish. Under the searing heat of the oven, the powder particles melt and join together to form a strong, continuous film. As with any surface finish, the key to a high-quality powdercoat surface is in the preparation. Just about any powdercoating failure can be linked back to poor preparation of the donor surface. Colour is added to the powdercoat during the manufacturing process, which takes place





before it reaches your powdercoater. Once the colour is supplied to your technician, there's little that can be done to alter it.

Having said that, the sky is the limit, and the choice of colours is almost limitless if you have the money to specify a certain colour to be created by the manufacturer. When powdercoated components are installed without damaging the finish and they are maintained regularly, the surface finish should be reasonably permanent. While powdercoat is not metallurgically bonded to the component, it should not crack, chip or peel in the same way as standard painted surfaces. Do you see why it's a good option for the underside of your ride?

I stumbled upon the benefits of powdercoating when I needed to restore some semblance of respect to the finish of two rims for my 1957 Vespa scooter. Having sat out in a paddock near Nimbin for years, they were tattered and rusty, and that's putting a positive spin on it! I spoke to Vinny at MK Sandblasting in Greenacre, and we made the decision to sandblast the rims clean before powdercoating them silver. The results were spectacular to say the least.

It's amazing how clean the rims are after the blasting process, and even though some of the pitting that had eaten away at the metal over the years was fairly serious, once they had been powdercoated they looked brand new. Possibly the most effective use of powdercoating for modifiers is going to be in relation to the treatment of rims, suspension components and driveline components.

Want to strip the chrome off your rims and coat them white or black for a subtle street-racer look? Powdercoating is the answer.

If you're rebuilding the suspension for your ride, you might just want to consider powdercoating any suspension components while they're out from under the vehicle. Whether you intend to show your vehicle or not, they'll be a lot easier to clean and will stay free of rust and corrosion well into the future.

Vinny prefers to blast any components that you want powdercoated himself. "You need a perfectly clean surface to ensure that you get the best final result," he says. "And you can't guarantee that unless you do it yourself. "It's also important not to strip an item and leave it sitting in a bare-metal state for a few months before you take it to be powdercoated. It's only going to need to be blasted again to remove any surface corrosion that's built up while it's been sitting there anyway."

Vinny uses carefully applied sand to cut through years of built-up grime and paint, or even just to cut through the factory paint finish. The sandblasting that he does is extremely carefully monitored to ensure there is no panel damage, and he is one of very few operators to guarantee his work before he starts. You can rest assured that anything you leave with him will be returned to you exactly the same as when you left – only a hell of a lot cleaner!

The next step is to apply and bake the powdercoat finish, and then you just take home your brand-new items. As you can see in the photos that we've taken, the application of the final coat is a relatively straightforward task once you've donned all the correct safety gear. It took a little less than 20 minutes to completely coat each and every piece that you see hanging from the large frame in the images and just over 40 minutes to bake them.

After that, you can load them into the car and take them back to your workshop or back home to be fitted. It's not expensive considering the finished product, and the results are well worth the expense.

Look after your powdercoated components correctly and they'll stand the test of time for years to come. *SC*

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