



HAWAIIAN TIKI BUG

See what happens when
West Coast retro Tiki meets
the Polynesian "real thing"

By Craig Fraser

After a few phone calls to Hawaiian automotive airbrusher Dennis Mathewson, I decided that I had to make a road trip—well, more like an "air trip." Dennis is the owner and founder of Cosmic Airbrush in Oahu. Originally from Las Vegas, Dennis migrated to Hawaii about 20 years ago and has been painting the island ever since. Cosmic Airbrush is well known throughout Hawaii for wall murals, fine art, and kustom bike and auto work.

One of Cosmic's most visible clients is Cutter Volkswagen. Cutter has been famous in Hawaii for their "Cosmic Beetles" ever since VW came out with the new "bug" in 1998. Cosmic Beetles come with custom wheels and out-of-this-galaxy paint jobs laid out by Dennis's crew. After spending a week doing a workshop and painting some Harleys with Dennis, it was time to paint up one of these notorious Cutter Cosmic Beetles.

Dennis gave me total freedom with the paint job, but I wanted it to fit in with the local kustoms. Coincidentally, I have been working with a lot of retro images and have always been intrigued by "Tiki Lounge" culture. Many of my latest aluminum paintings at the CoproNason Gallery in Southern California have taken up this theme. So I decided to paint this Cosmic Beetle Tiki style!

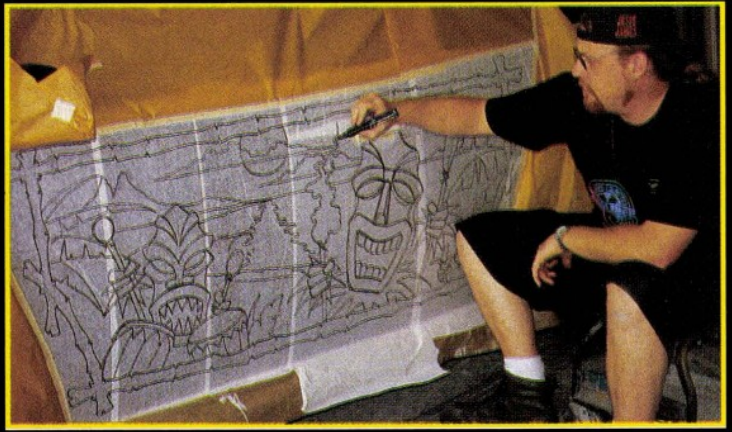
I was very happy to see that the Beetle they gave me was black—it's one of my favorite car colors and gives a



good contrast to the bright colors I wanted to use in the Tiki mural. Plus, the black background gives the same contrast that black velvet gave to Edward Leeteg's Polynesian velvet paintings—must have that cool retro look! We decided early on that the artwork would be only on the sides and hood. This way we could mask off the roof, trunk, fenders, and roof pillars at the seams so that when it's done, the paint job will be seamless. You won't know which areas we recleared and which areas we left factory. So without any further jabber, lets get to it.

STEP 1

After we've masked off the areas we don't want to paint, we prep the rest by wet-sanding it with 3M 600-grit sandpaper. Be careful not to sand through the factory finish. The sanding is necessary to knock down the shine so the paint and final clear will stick. With the surface prepped, I mask off the entire area with 18-inch transfer tape. This tape allows me to sketch out my design, without damaging the underlying surface. I use a black Sharpie marker to darken my pencil sketch so that I can tell where I need to cut the mask.



STEP 2

Using an X-Acto knife, I proceed to cut and peel away the areas I want to paint first. I call this system of cutting and spraying "sequential masking." Instead of unmasking and remasking, I just continue to cut, peel, and spray until the entire design is unmasked. In this system, I first unmask and paint the brightest images, such as the eyes, teeth, and bamboo-style design border.



STEP 3

With my airbrush, I begin adding the base white (House of Kolor BC-26) to my design. It is double-reduced in a 1:1 ratio so that my airbrush will spray without any spitting. Whenever you're spraying, you want to be sure you have proper ventilation and wear an automotive respirator. A dual-cartridge active charcoal is the best choice for automotive paint systems. Of course, painting in the middle of a spray booth isn't bad either.





STEP 4

I lay out the entire base for the mural in white because I work with transparent colors. When working with transparents, you need a white base so the colors stand out. Even opaque colors look better over white. You can see I have combined freehand techniques with the masked images. When it is finished, the freehand work will make it difficult to tell what was masked and what wasn't.



STEP 5

Using a layering system, I come in with my brightest color and work along the spectrum until I'm finished. In this case, the color is HoK Lemon Yellow basecoat (SG-101). Working with transparents means that the yellow will not be just for the fire; it will also double as the base color of the wood and even the palm trees (you know, yellow and blue make green...the whole Ziploc thing!).



STEP 6

In this step, I want the green in the palm fronds to really punch out, so instead of using a transparent blue over the yellow, I used HoK Kandy Organic Green (KK-09). Mixing this Kandy Koncentrate with some SG-100 intercoat clear gives me a nice transparent green basecoat, which almost looks neon when the sun hits it. Very hip!



STEP 7

I use my HoK Oriental Blue Kandy to color the sky, horizon, and ocean background. I use mostly the blues in the background to give the look of night on the water. The gigantic moon in the background helps the image along too!

STEP 8

Using a combination of HoK Kandies Root Beer and Tangerine, I come in with the top-feed airbrush and begin layering in the texture in the wooden Tiki figures as well as their bongos. With the paint still wet, I like to smear some parts of the wood grain. This gives a natural burned grain look around knotholes and helps add character. Plus, it keeps the other painters guessing as to how you sprayed it!



STEP 9

I continue building up the colors, detail, and depth of the wood grain. The nice thing about working with transperents is that you can paint with multiple layers and darken your image by adding more color without losing your chroma, which is what happens when you add black to a color to darken it.



STEP 10

I continue to work with the Root Beer and Tangerine throughout the entire piece. This works well in the Tiki wood, the volcano, and even over the palm fronds when darkening them. Although it was not the first color applied, this Kandy will be the dominant theme for this piece.



STEP 11

To finish off this color layer, I add a few drops of Kandy violet to the mixture and begin finishing details in the wood. I'm using this violet instead of black. You can add violet to a color to darken its value without damaging the color. I use the pure violet by itself to blend in the blues and tie the whole piece together.





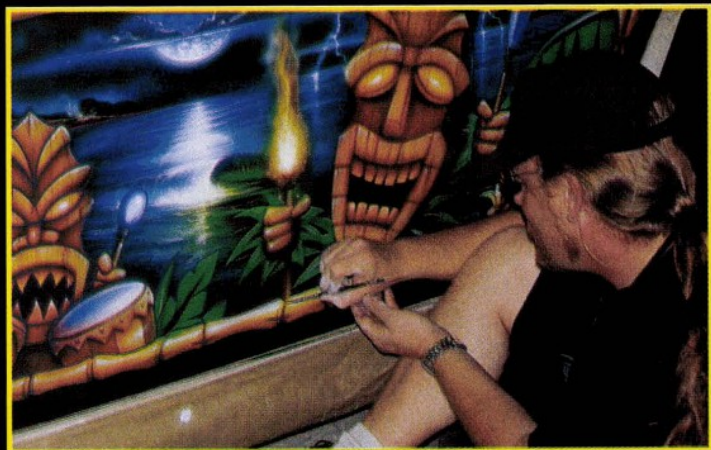
STEP 12

The final painting step is the completion of the highlights with BC-26 basecoat white—it's sort of like coming around full circle. The airbrush works well for large areas as well as for tight detail work. The only drawback is that I have to add about 20% more RU-311 reducer to keep from spitting when working with the tight detail work. I don't highlight everything, just a little here and there to make the design jump out.



STEP 13

With the airbrushing finished, I unmask the outside area surrounding the bamboo border. The rest of the car is still masked off because this is the area we will clear-coat. To remove all the tape adhesive, as well as any overspray or contaminants, wipe the surface down with precleaner. You should always wipe precleaner off after you apply it so it will not leave a residue. Be sure to test a small spot to see if the precleaner you use will remove your airbrushing.



STEP 14

To finish off the design, I come in and outline the bamboo border with HoK Lavender striping urethane. Using a #0 liner quill, I also outline the palm fronds and the two main Tiki figures. This lavender outline will help the objects in the foreground separate themselves from the background. (It's an old Renaissance fresco trick that's been around a little longer than kustom bugs!)



STEP 15

With highlights and touch-ups complete, it's time to clear-coat. That means busting out the monkey suit and kicking all the airbrushers out of the spray booth! Using a top-feed automotive spraygun, Dennis's top clear-coater, Will, puts a couple of nice wet coats of urethane clear over the artwork. At Kal Concepts, we like the Iwata LPH-400 and House of Kolor UFC-19 clear.

STEP 16

After giving the clear a good 12 hours to cure, we remove the masking and buff the entire vehicle to perfection. When removing the final masking, you must be careful to remove the tape by pulling away from the design. If you pull into the artwork, you risk peeling or lifting the clear, so be careful!

As you can see, our Tiki mural comes to life with a nice coat of clear. Although I used the same theme on the other side, I painted a different mural. When it comes to graphics, the same design on both sides is cool, but with murals, you're just lazy if you copy the same dang thing! What a waste of canvas! Even the hood got a facelift, courtesy of a little Tiki dude with torches and a kustomized VW emblem.



Although I had to leave before the bug got its rims, I got a chance to see it on display in front of Cutter VW on my way to the airport to head home. These road trip jobs show that kustom painting is a universal language no matter where you go. If you have automotive or motorcycle dealers in your town, you have a whole mess of possible canvasses. Don't think that just because they never have endorsed kustom painting, you can't sway them for a little work. Show them your portfolio and convince them that their vehicles

would look much better with a little bit of your work on them. You may not get a mural job right off the bat, but an occasional pinstripe job doesn't hurt. And that could lead to bigger prospects!

Remember that kustom painting has no borders and does not live just in the kustom shop. You don't have to come to California to find it, and you don't need to move here to do it. So there's no one painting in your area? That's killer! No competition! So go out there and paint something!

ABOUT THE ARTISTS:

Craig Fraser is the owner of Air Syndicate Studio in Bakersfield, Calif., where you can find him painting just about anything that's not bolted down. In the same complex, you can also find Kal Concepts, where Craig is the in-house airbrusher and designer. Reach him at the shop at 661-836-3084 or check him out online at www.gotpaint.com.

Dennis Mathewson is the owner and operator of Cosmic Airbrush in Oahu, Hawaii. Cosmic is the place for all your airbrush needs, whatever island you're on! From wall murals to Harleys to fine art, Dennis and his evil horde of local airbrushers (Will, Kamaile, Gary, and Lui "Fisheye") will crank it out for you. Don't forget, they are also the home of the infamous Cutter "Cosmic Beetle." You can call Dennis at 808-521-8833 or cruise Cosmic's Web site at www.cosmicairbrush.com.