



The art of PRE-SHADING

How to apply underlying contrast and break up color for added realism • BY AARON SKINNER

Outlining panel lines before painting can lend emphasis to details for a realistic finish, as on this Portuguese Fiat G.91.

Look at the surface of a vehicle or airplane, especially those with single-color schemes. It quickly becomes apparent that the color is anything but uniform. There are color shifts and variations.

A lot of what modelers refer to as weathering is aimed at replicating these changes for more realistic

models. And most are done after applying the major color or colors of the camouflage or livery.

Pre-shading, as the name implies, is done before painting. It involves a little prep work, but the results can be terrific. I'm showing the basic technique here, but there are endless variations for different effects.



1
Italeri's 1/48 scale Fiat G.91 is a great example of a kit that benefits from pre-shading. Originally produced by Esci, the kit has raised panel lines, making washes ineffective. I wanted to do it up in a light gray camo worn by Portuguese fighters in Africa in the 1960s.

2
Since the point of pre-shading is contrast, a light primer is essential. The Fiat's light gray scheme made white the logical choice. I used Tamiya fine surface primer, which produces a smooth, sturdy base.



3

Thin paint is essential for pre-shading, so I added more thinner to Model Master flat black enamel than I normally would. Lightly applying thin paint allows for more control over the effect and makes mistakes less obvious.



4

Now for the fun part: tracing all of the model's surface detail with black paint. I set the pressure to about 10psi and dialed the brush to spray a fine line. The thin paint will require multiple passes to achieve good density.



5

Spraying black into corners of the airframe, such as the pylon attachments and wing roots, creates natural shadows. Take your time. It doesn't pay to rush; the tighter and darker the pattern, the better the effect.



6

Here's the G.91 after pre-shading and before paint. It's not the neatest job ever, but it doesn't have to be because there's more paint to come. Besides, camouflaged finishes are rarely even.



7

After the pre-shaded lines dry, it's time to add the body color. I used Model Master enamel light ghost gray, again thinned slightly more than usual. Begin by painting panels one at a time, leaving the black outline showing. This allows you to refine the pattern by covering up mistakes. I used a fine nozzle and 10psi pressure.



8

Next, widen the pattern and lightly spray the body color over the model, blending the panel lines and panels. Work slowly, gradually building up the gray over the black. The dark lines should still be there, but just barely perceptible.



9

Once it's done, you should have a model with the panels picked out. If the paint is too heavy and the lines disappear, you can selectively reapply the black and repeat the process. Adding decals and weathering will further blend the effect. **FSM**