

# Aircraft Painting with Aircraft Paint

A COMMON approach to painting an aircraft is to engage the services of a local spray painter. Whilst consideration will hopefully be given to appropriate engineering supervision during the job, the same can't always be said for the type of paint to be used. This is usually left up to the preference and experience of the painter, the result being that automotive paint is often the product of choice.

While, at least on metal and composite aircraft, there is nothing necessarily wrong with an automotive paint finish, there are several advantages to be had by specifying the use of aircraft paint instead. If there is an increased cost, it is easily outweighed by the long term benefits achieved. Or if the problem is one of reluctance on the part of the painter due to inexperience with the type of job or product, then advice and training are readily available.

## Benefits of Aircraft Paint

Pacific Aero Coatings at Tauranga are the Asia Pacific Distributors for the FAA Certified Superflite range of aircraft covering and refinishing systems. Managed by aviation enthusiast, pilot, and qualified painter Kim Thompson, the company offers the full range of Superflite products. Pacific Aero Coatings specialises in aircraft painting and restoration, in close partnership with local engineering, fabric and when required, additional spray painting support services.

Kim cites many good reasons to specify the use of aircraft paint on your next refinishing project. Primarily these relate to surface flexibility, weight saving, and ease of repair.

Automotive paint finishes are brittle right from the start. They are usually applied in several layers of colour followed with additional clearcoats over the top. This works well on rigid car panels that aren't exposed to regular climate and pressure changes and where an extra 10kg won't matter. The same can't be said for aircraft where especially for light aircraft, the extra

weight really does matter and especially for larger aircraft, the climate changes the paint is exposed to are much more extreme. As well, vibration frequencies of aircraft skins often lead to early fatigue of the paint and surface cracking around rivets and skin joints.

Aircraft should be painted with a flexible paint that is finely ground with

deteriorating in any other way. The nature of the above application process (no clearcoats to change appearance over time or make colour matching difficult) is that a Superflite paint finish is also easy to repair if hangar rash or other maintenance issues occur.

Other benefits of Superflite paint systems include excellent resistance to chemicals, fuel spillage and bird droppings, as well as its state of the art UV protection in topcoats to prevent colour fading, and its long lasting durability.

## Superflite Products

Superflite has been developing and manufacturing aircraft paint systems since 1949. The company began with a focus on fabric covered aircraft, producing traditional nitrate and butyrate products over Irish Linen and Grade A cotton. This butyrate dope system (known as System I) continues to be manufactured and developed today.

Superflite's background in manufacturing flexible paints for fabric refinishing, combined with new technology led the company to develop an all-urethane system which was certified in 1983 and is now known as System VI. Superflite's System VI has become extremely popular, particularly with kit builders, because of its 'easy application and gorgeous high-gloss finish'. All Superflite products are FAA-approved with STC's being available for most aircraft models.

## Pacific Aero Coatings

Pacific Aero Coatings stock everything required for aircraft refinishing of fabric, composite or metal aircraft. Advice and the wisdom of experience are readily available, with Kim being part of the SAA mentor programme and running refinishing courses on an as required basis. Product is supplied to both trade and retail customers.

More recently, Kim is now offering customers the opportunity of full service



Jim Talbot's RV-7 was recently finished in Superflite paint from Pacific Aero Coatings and deservedly won the Grand Champion award at SportAvex this year.



L to R: Willie Johnstone, Jim Talbot (holding trophy) and Kim Thompson.

high build qualities in order that much less paint is required to achieve good coverage and depth. Kim notes that even though the Superflite products require just two topcoats, they can still be buffed and polished "to your hearts content" with a superb finish easily achieved. A paint that maintains flexibility is essential in order that the paint withstand climate and panel flexing stresses without cracking or

restorative work for those who want to bring an aircraft in and later "walk away with a top end job". If required this can also include the organisation (on behalf) of upholstery and perspex refurbishing work.

Proof of the exceptional standard of work on offer comes in the form of Jim Talbot's RV-7, recently crowned Grand Champion at SportAvex in February. Jim constructed the aircraft from a quick build kit in his spare time over four and a half years. When time came for painting, Jim contacted world renowned car painter Willie Johnstone in Tauranga. New to the Superflite System VI painting system, Willie worked closely with Kim throughout the



The camera doesn't do justice to the attention to detail in this paint finish. The stripe was painted onto the same prepared surface as the white and blue colours, to the same depth of paint finish. As a result, the surface is smooth with no ridgeline where the colours meet.

project to achieve an outstanding result for Jim. It's fair to say that Jim's own workmanship in constructing the aircraft was also of an exceptional standard and that the SportAvex award was very well deserved.

## More Information

Kim is passionate about helping people achieve quality results in all aspects of aircraft refinishing. He is happy to show customers how to correctly apply the product so they can do it themselves if they want to. Alternately, customers are welcome to participate in the restoration work undertaken by Pacific Aero Coatings on their own aircraft. Quality is assured by Kim's approach of not cutting corners and his determination to only do the job "the right way". For information about Superflite products or any of Pacific Aero Coatings services, contact Kim by email: [info@pacificero.coatings.com](mailto:info@pacificero.coatings.com) or phone 07 574 2922. [www.pacificero.coatings.com](http://www.pacificero.coatings.com)



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