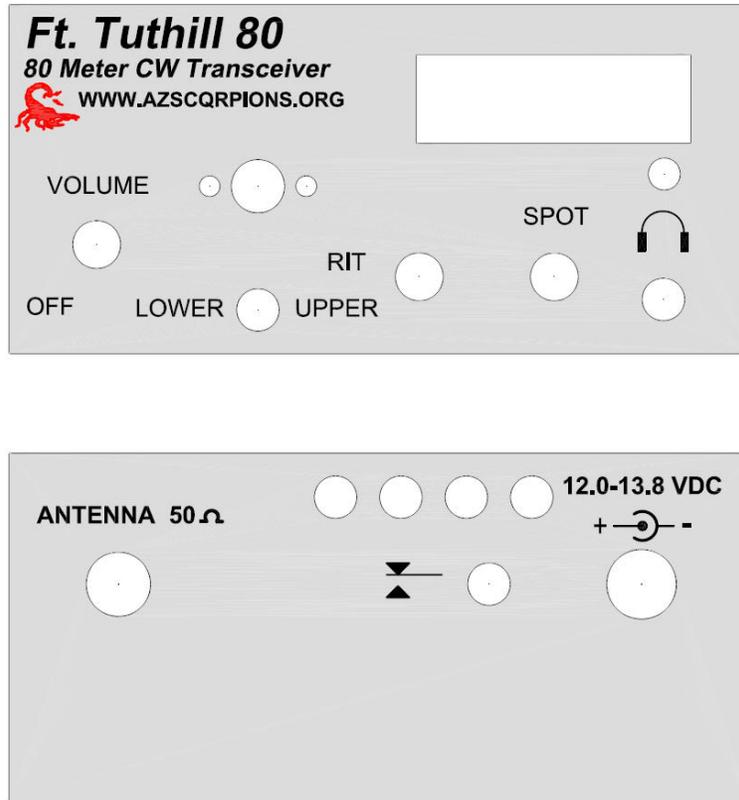


Chassis Decorating



Making your projects look presentable, is not an absolute necessity. Some even prefer the rustic look of their projects and see it as a “red badge of courage”, showing the agony of their efforts. After all, scotch tape and a penciled label can identify just about anything, or merely writing on the chassis. Having said that, there is a very small group of hams that like to see their projects look like they were done on purpose. I will try to address that group.

I use the laser water slide decals on a lot of my ham projects, but while working on a proposed club project, I was tasked with the chassis work. We kicked around how to make a kit that contained a small chassis look better. Of course, there was going whole hog, painting and having silk screen surfaces. This more than doubled the cost of the chassis. Decals were the next best choice, inexpensive and with a little practice, quite a viable option. I wanted something that really presented a nice appearance for the club.

I explored the option of self-adhesive color printed membrane plastic that would cover the entire surface. There are many companies that offer this particular feature, as this look and feel is prevalent throughout the consumer market. After creating and sending them some artwork, getting quotations, and looking at the volume we projected, we were looking at more than double the cost of the paint and silk screened surfaces, plus high setup charges.

While creating, and printing the artwork needed for the quotation, I sealed the inkjet printed artwork in a hot laminator to protect the display for the group at our upcoming strategy meeting. It occurred to me that if we did a 1:1 version of the artwork, we could make our own flexible membrane that could be attached to the whole surface producing a nice looking chassis. As a bonus, I found that laminating brought out the colors brighter.

The next step, was to test cutting holes in the laminate to accommodate controls or indicators that would be needed. This was done easily with an Exacto knife with a sharp point. This operation would be done by the kit builders, we would just supply the laminated sheet. Our application does not require any panel mounted push buttons, but tactile switches could be placed flush with the backside of the laminate for a smooth surface and have the tactile switch function. The application of the laminate to the chassis surface would be done with two sided tape in our application, but also could be attached with some spray or lightly applied adhesive. In your application, If flush tactile switches are desired, just mask so there is no adhesive in that area to stick the laminate to the top of the switch.

Artwork can be created with just about any graphics program you or your commandeered, graphics enabled, friends are comfortable with. It just has to be scaled 1:1 at the printer. Yes, not everyone has a laminator. I took my artwork to a local Office Max. They printed it out on their color laser and did the lamination. The laser color rendition and resolution after laminating was spectacular and at \$1.50 a sheet, with the lamination, is the way we will go if we pursue it. In our project, all the sides needing decoration can be done with a single 8 1/2x11 sheet. The last page of this document shows the artwork, and a scale to get the printing 1:1.

It may not fit your application, or the cost may be exorbitant, or you may not be able to find the old plastic embossed tape writer in the back of the closet, but there's always tape and penciled labels to fall back on.

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