

# TRANSFERRING SKILLS

By Jeff Knight

Steve asked me to write an article on transfers, with particular reference to John Hopkinson's transfers which include many "Methfix" transfers. So here goes!

"Many a good model has been ruined by a poor paint job and badly positioned transfers" – so goes an old article I read many years ago – probably in the dark ages.

It's best to cover the different types of transfers first, with useful tips on each. I will however concentrate on the "Methfix" transfers. However, many of my suggested methods apply to all types of transfer.

## Varnish Fix Transfers

Once upon a time, back in the mists of the past, all transfers were varnish fix. In the days of steam, all the railway companies used these transfers. There is old film showing the fixing of these transfers on to the tenders or tanks and cab sides of locomotives.

The method of application is quite simple. The transfers are printed in reverse onto gummed sheet. First you mark out on the model where you want the transfer to go. In steam days the painters would mark out in chalk, first putting on a base line, then measuring out exactly where each letter or crest would go on the chalk line. On models, I use a very soft pencil – a 3B. To fix the transfer, brush paint the face (actually the back) of the transfer with varnish. Then firmly press the transfer onto the surface of the model using the marks as your guide.

The transfer, together with its paper, is left overnight for the varnish to dry. Next day, soak the paper in water. This releases the transfer from its gummed paper. The transfers are then sealed onto the model with a coat of varnish. Original pre-war Trix transfers were varnish fix, but as we know, Trix never sealed in these transfers. Consequently, they tended to rub off by handling, or be destroyed by the natural acids in the skin.

## Waterslide Transfers

We all know these from our childhood days destroying plastic kits on a Christmas morning. These transfers were screen printed onto gummed transfer paper. All have a carrier film over the transfer. On older transfers this carrier film can be quite thick and unsightly on a model. To avoid this, cut out the transfer as close as possible to the actual printing. I use the small pair of very sharp scissors on my Swiss Army knife – remember to take your time to get the best result. Then place the transfer into water – usually in a small saucer. A good tip is to add a few drops of washing up liquid to the water. This really does help. After a couple of minutes remove the transfer and slide off the printed image onto the model. The release time of waterslide transfers varies quite a lot, and sometimes it is best to put the transfer back into the water for a few seconds if the transfer does not release properly. However, do not leave too long in the water as the transfer will float off the paper, and you will lose the gum on the back of the transfer and it will not stick down onto the model properly. I move the transfer into position with a cocktail stick. I find this the best method to position the transfer correctly.

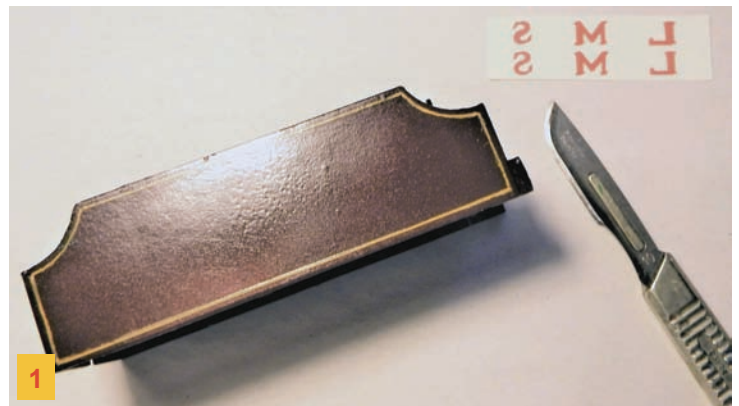
Leave the transfer to dry overnight and then fix with varnish. With waterslide and many other transfers, do not spray with cellulose or similar varnish. It will crinkle up! You can get very good acrylic spray varnish by Vallejo on eBay or Amazon and it works fine if handled with care.

## Rub-On Transfers

These transfers are printed onto a plastic film in reverse. The whole sheet is covered with a sticky film. The transfer sheet is then covered with protective paper. Cut out the transfer, leaving a reasonable border. Position the transfer onto the marked out model (plastic film up) and then rub down the transfer. You will need a suitable round, domed object. Do not use anything sharp or pointed. I use a nice round domed end on the handle of an old paintbrush. This is perfect. These transfers can be protected with varnish straight away.

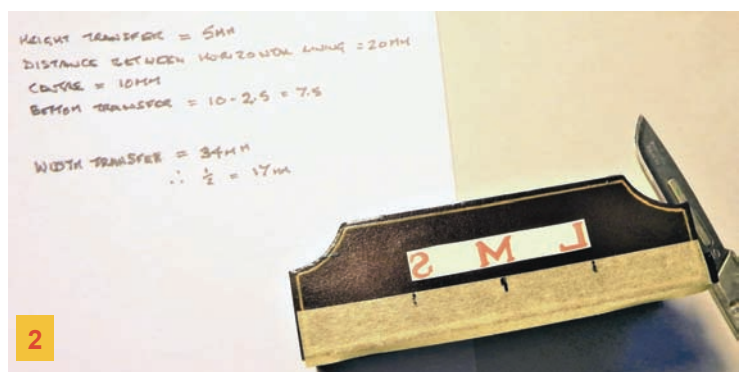
## Methfix Transfers

Methfix Transfers were pioneered by PC Models back in the 1970's. They are in my opinion the best quality transfers that you can use. Methfix transfers are still marketed by the Historical Model Railway Society (HMRS) and are available through their website. There is also a sister product "Pressfix" of which I will give more details later. Let's concentrate on Methfix for now, as these are the majority of John's transfers. These transfers are a very close relation to the old varnish fix transfers. They are thin, do not have much of a carrier film, and when varnished blend into the surface of the model. They are printed in reverse onto tissue paper with a thin film of adhesive which is activated by the meths solution. Methfix transfers come attached to a backing paper sheet which has to be removed. This is what I do:



Get the model onto the work bench (with paper underneath for protection of the paint). Firstly, you will need a scalpel and a cocktail stick for the application.

You must then mark out carefully where the transfer is to go. Some simple maths here will tell where the centre of the transfer should be. Then set a baseline for the transfer (I add about 0.5 mm and then place the transfer so that there is a very small gap between the transfer and the baseline). To mark the baseline of the transfer I normally use masking tape if the livery of the model is dark (eg LMS lake) and my soft pencil will not easily show. DO NOT use the normal masking tape you can get from motor spares suppliers. If you use this you run the risk of pulling off the paint when the tape is removed. You can get Tamiya model masking tape from eBay or Amazon. This tape is very "plastic" and can be

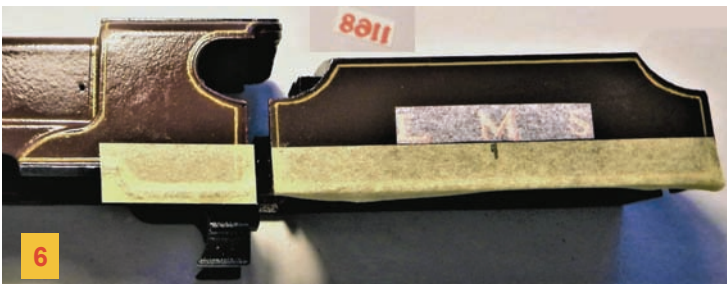


pressed down easily around any detail on the model. It is designed to have a gentle “peel off” effect. If you have any doubt, and to be safe, you can brush on lighter fuel as you remove the tape. (The adhesive on masking and other tapes is hydrocarbon based).

When you have fixed the tape to the model mark out carefully where the transfer is to go (pic 2). You will have cut out the transfer close to the edge of the lettering or numbers. The transfer now has to be removed from its backing paper. I use a scalpel (pic 3). This is a delicate operation. The transfer on its tissue is very flimsy. When you have started to peel away a corner of the backing paper, carefully get hold of the corner of the transfer carrying tissue between your thumb and forefinger and peel it away.

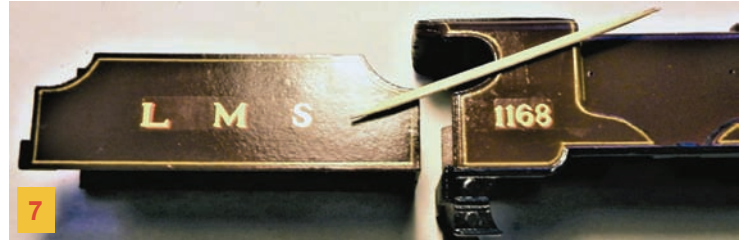


Place the transfer (correct way up) onto the model and double check the position (pic 4). You can fix the transfer in place with a couple of tiny drops of water. The transfer has a thin film of gum. When you are sure you have the transfer in place, brush on your fixing solution which should be 1 parts water to 2 parts of methylated spirit (previously mixed in something like a saucer). You have to move reasonably fast at this point because you cannot reposition the transfer when you have applied the meths solution, and the solution evaporates quite quickly (pic 5).



You MUST then leave the transfer to dry and harden for several hours (overnight is good). While this is drying you can add any other numbers, such as the loco number (pic 6). After the transfers have been in place for several hours you then brush on PLAIN WATER and leave for a minute or two. The tissue will then gently slide off. I use a cocktail stick for this. You can then gently wipe off any residual gum with a moist cotton bud. There will often be the

shadow of where the gum was, but this should disappear when you give the model a coat of varnish, as the gum film is very thin (pic 7).



You need to be aware that John’s old transfers are NOT the same size as the original Trix transfers. If you want to re-transfer an old model with damaged transfers you will need to position the transfers over and in the centre of the old Trix transfers. John’s transfers seem to be a little shorter but the same height (pic 8).



After you have fitted the new transfers, brush-paint out the bits of the old transfers that are still visible. You will need to carefully match the paint colour.

For those that are interested, the HMRS also sell the old PC transfers in “Pressfix” format. These are easier to use but the gum film seems to be thicker and raises the height of the transfer. These are simply applied by removing the backing paper as in Methfix transfers, but then just pressing down firmly onto the model. They will certainly need protecting with a coat of varnish. HMRS transfers come with instructions. Some final notes on fitting transfers:

- ▶ Always take your time – do not rush. Do a dry run first so that you are sure of what you will be doing.
- ▶ Use the best quality materials. For example, use a good scalpel, do not use an old well-worn modelling knife.
- ▶ Get everything ready before you start and place to hand (materials and tools).



If anyone has any queries about fitting transfers, please contact me. I will be pleased to help.

c. Jeff Knight 07.02.23

## RESTORATIONS and REPAINTS



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