Masking Tape Tips

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From the January 2003 issue of The Satellite, the newsletter of the San Valeers MAC, Ralph Prey, editor.

When asked which tools are most essential in model building, most would quickly list cutting tools, adhesives, sandpaper, and.....and.........?   My nomination for a seldom discussed building essential is masking tape. We often find ourselves reaching for it, yet seldom give this resource much thought. I thought that I would find some helpful info on the correct tape use, and one only suggested that thin tape (1/4" or 1/8") goes around corners easier than wider widths.

Better was Bruce Caldwell's tip in Custom Painting, which suggests "it is important to realize there is little difference between the types of masking tape. Only use top quality, fresh masking tape ...old tape usually has a distinct yellowish color and the edges are often brittle." Good advice, of course, and it goes without saying that placing tape in a plastic bag will keep the edges fresh and clean.

Since most free flighters seldom use masking tape in model finishing, as we usually use one color for the fuselage and tissue or film the flying surfaces, why even bother discussing tape? Perhaps one of the best reasons is because tape's usefulness extends well beyond the color separation, chrome protection, panel protection functions it serves in the auto industry. Here are some suggested uses, none of which I claim the slightest originality for:

1. You are sanding a surface (say some detail work on a pylon already in the fuselage) and don't want the sandpaper to remove balsa from, say, the top of the fuselage. Simply apply a few strips of tape where you want the wood protected. Hardly a new idea but a useful one.

2. You want to make some fine adjustments in incidence or stab tilt? Masking tape compresses little, holds well and is easy to apply and trim. Need courser adjustments? Go to 1/64th or 1/32nd plywood.

3. You want to join two sheets of balsa so the seam is as tight as possible? Join the sheets on the front or facing side with masking tape, flip the joined sheet over and separate the sheets so a light bead of glue, say Sig Super-Weld fills the gap, then close the gap and wipe off the excess glue from the joint. Place the sheet, glued side down, on a non-stick surface, like waxed paper, and weight and wait. Your panels will be virtually invisible, assuming they were well fitted to begin with. Lots easier than simply pinning or holding the sheets together. Another idea which is timeless but very handy.

4. You are applying tissue film, for example AMA numbers, model name engine type, etc., and want to do more than simply eyeball the letters for spacing and level placement. Masking tape will serve perfectly here and may be marked as needed for letter spacing. Be sure though, not to use a tape with aggressive adhesive or you will find the tape removes tissue faster than a Taft "pucker bush!" Essential for removing tape from tissue is to peel the tape back on itself, not straight up. Perhaps even more important is to use what Scotch calls, "safe release painter's masking tape." This tape is wrapped in blue cellophane and the one inch width is #2090 and the inch and a half is #2070.