



Couleur Tech tests the waters

With a throughput of 4000 vehicles per year, Couleur Tech is not the type of collision repair centre that can close for two weeks to test a new refinish method. Yet owner Jean Germain wanted to proceed cautiously toward using waterborne basecoat, so he adapted one area of his vast shop in Dorval, QC, for waterborne paint. He has begun the changeover to low-VOC refinish products that awaits all Canadian collision repair shops if Environment Canada's proposed regulations go ahead as planned.

"We chose the Glasurit 90 Line waterborne system from BASF. BASF has many successful conversions, has the volume and has the experience and infrastructure to train personnel in Quebec. Plus, they're located very close to us," explains Jean Germain, the colorful owner of this high-volume shop, which specializes in fleet accounts. "We didn't want to be guinea pigs. Glasurit's reputation reassured us."

The secret's in the air

"The temperature and the quality of the air for spraying and for drying play a critical role in painting with water-based paint," Germain notes. "You do need air movement and heated air. Mine is a semi-downdraft booth, so we chose to



Couleur Tech installed in its semi-downdraft booth portable blowers on tripods (\$1300 per set), to accelerate the air which should be delivered at a rate of 12,000 or 13,000 cfm, instead of the 9800 cfm that is often found in shops. Nozzle systems that can be installed in the corners are more appropriate for down-draft booths.

use air guns on a stand."

Germain also boosted the air flow in his booth using his existing equipment, and increases the heat when necessary.

"There is no problem making the conversion to waterborne. At least, none that are insurmountable, aside from the price of admission which has the potential to topple many modest shops, especially those which are not currently meeting workplace safety standards.

By Guy Arbour,
Reprinted from
l'automobile,
March 2007



Frank Pacifico, regional director for BASF (at right), congratulates Jean Germain for taking the plunge into waterborne paint.



"It's a little different, but getting used to it is easy. The cleanliness of the finish is more critical. The surface must be more smooth, with no grease. There are still a few volatile organic compounds, and lots of isocyanates, because

water-based clearcoats are not yet available, but the general conditions for the environment are healthier. Even the water we use is absolutely pure, with 10% of (methyl) alcohol, a bit like wine. It's much nicer to work with less fumes," says André P  pin, painter.

Other constraints follow: tracking of hazardous materials, healthy workplace practices, etc. "The federal and municipal authorities run the risk of closing many shops for good. This will cause a major housecleaning in the collision repair sector," Germain worries.

The test

Staff at Couleur Tech were joined by BASF's Frand Pacifico, regional director



and Pierre Marcouiller, technical sales representative, when they sprayed their first vehicle with the waterborne basecoat on February 16.

The result? "It's easier to spray waterborne. There's no problem with frosting or sinking solvent. And, the cost of recycling waste materials is much less," says Germain.

"It's so easy that I'm going to proceed with the conversion of the whole shop starting now."

Germain also appreciates the reduced amount of solvents. "I've noticed it's easier to breathe around the waterborne paint, so switching over will immediately let me better protect my employees' health." B

Pierre Marcouiller is the technical sales representative for BASF. "The spray nozzles are made of stainless steel. That's just about the only difference. The base material comes to about the same price."