



# Graphics

**Andy Yeomans** and his team at Grapefruit Graphics had the task of making the boat look cool... Grapefruit's **Tony Gill** talked us through the process...

**G**rapefruit Graphics have plenty of experience when it comes to making a boat look cool – so we were sure that our Fireball project was in good hands, even before we met with Andy Yeomans and Tony Gill at the company's base in Bursledon, a stone's throw from the M27.

As well as the stunning Farr 45 'Fortis Excel', which wowed the Solent with its silver reflective topsides, Grapefruit Graphics are responsible for a

wide range of stunning graphics jobs, including the impressive 'Puma' Volvo 70 – a great example of how graphics can be used to transform a boat of any size – and the new Open 60 'Estrella Damn'.

Tony points out that the options are pretty much endless when it comes to making your boat look distinctive. As well as cut-out graphics, designs can be printed onto vinyl or even Dacron sailcloth. 'When it comes to a vinyl graphic, the vinyls today cover a massive range, from silver or chrome to fake wood, carbon or Kevlar – there are even vinyls now that change colour, at first view they might be blue and then when it catches the light it changes to purple and pink. Pretty much anything you can do paintwork-wise you can do with vinyl.'

What makes vinyl a good option? 'In most cases vinyl is cheaper than paint, it's easier to repair because it can be done outside on the water and it can be done with a small patch, instead of having to rub it down and re-paint. Also, as much as it is long-term – most of the vinyls we use are guaranteed for anything from five years through to 10 years for colour fade and shrinkage and things like that – it can also be short-term as it's very easy to remove.'

Designs often combine painted areas with vinyl graphics. As an example, on the Volvo 70s 'ABN Amro' and 'Ericsson', both the work of Grapefruit, the lettering was vinyl, but the design on the bows of each of the boats was painted. 'We mask those out for the paint guys, and they do their various different stages, and then we go back and we re-mask it where an area needs to be painted for speed reasons, maybe it's a big area, or for a smooth finish. With these boats they take such a battering you need to be sure it's still going to be there.' Paint is a bit more durable in such extreme conditions, but Grapefruit has developed a way of sealing the edges of its vinyls so they can withstand a lot of punishment. When the boat is sold on after the race, the lettering is easy to remove and you are just left with the general colour theme. In a sponsor change, like with the

**Right** The impressive Puma Racing graphics took a team of four people from Grapefruit three days to apply.



Victory Challenge boats when they got sponsorship from Red Bull, it's much quicker and easier to remove one vinyl and replace it with another. On the other hand, graphics can be easily used to transform a boat completely. 'ABN Amro 2' is a good example, it's now the Puma team's training boat for next year's race and underwent a complete transformation through the application of a massive vinyl graphic that covered the hull.

'That was probably our biggest achievement of the year – it was something that nobody had ever done before,' explains Tony. 'We started off with three rolls of printed material and a white boat with painted swishes on the front – no lettering as that had been removed – and we basically wrapped the whole boat.'

It was a massive undertaking, Tony explains how they did it: 'We were quietly confident that we could do it, but I was glad that we were in a small shed in the centre of Holland with nobody watching us. Four of us went over and we spent three days on it. We probably spent the first three or four hours just looking at it really, we knew what we had to do and we had prepared all the equipment and all the vinyls, but we still took a lot of time making sure we were prepared, because although we could always have printed it out again, you don't want to mess it up. Once we got started, we worked very late into the evening as we got into the system of what we were doing – there are a lot of us who have been doing this for a long time, but still each boat is a bit different. It was an amazing sense of achievement when we saw the finished product.'

## The design process

Where does a design start? 'Usually the customer has a vague idea of what they want,' Tony Gill explains, 'Be it the font or some sort of graphic or design they want, which these days might extend from some sort of clip art through to a visual picture of some shape or form. When you've got a vague idea of what they want you can then take their image or take their drawing or the idea of



Left Designs start life on the computer.

Below The computer is linked to a laser cutter, which cuts the design out of the chosen colour material.



their picture and generate that into a flat image on the computer.'

Now we didn't really have a clear picture of what we wanted for our Fireball, apart from the fact that we wanted it to have some impact and tie in with our winner's personality. We had a long chat with Andy to get some ideas, and hit on the

Below 'ABN Amro 2' before her transformation.



PHOTO: JON NASH

## PIMP MY DINGHY



**Left** The chrome was applied by hand. Once stuck down, the excess was trimmed off.

**Below** Then it was time to apply the pink graphic.

idea of cladding the whole topsides of the boat in chrome. As Kirsten had described herself as 'a blonde water baby' we felt we wanted something girly and a little bit surfy – pink it had to be, and that also gave us a name for the boat – 'Pink my Ride'. Andy sketched a number of designs on paper to get an idea of how the design might look, and we left it in the capable hands of his team.

'Andy sketches quite a bit, I find it just as easy to do it straight onto the computer,' adds Tony, 'You can keep clicking through different ideas and sooner or later you'll get a more positive feedback and then you can start developing the idea – it's got to be what the customer is looking for. Then it's just a case of font work – picking the right style of font for what they want to achieve and how they want it to look – do you want it plain and simple or do you want to jazz it up? We will give them three or four ideas and they will usually like a bit of one idea and a bit of another and you just gel the two together. We keep designing in the two dimensions until somebody's happy, then you can make the change into three-dimensional graphics and get it ready to fit the surface, depending on what the surface is going to be.'

'With the Fireball, for example, the idea was to wrap the topsides of the boat and turn it into a mirror. The chrome is a foil material, quite a tricky material to work with, but it's a good boat to do it



# Professional tips

The Grapefruit Graphics team share a few simple tips that could help you to apply your own event decals or sponsorship stickers...

1. Make sure that the surface is clean, dry and free from grease. Roughly position the decal in place by tabbing the top two corners with some masking tape.
2. Once the decal is level in position, completely tape the top edge of the decal to form a hinge.
3. Lift the decal over on its tape hinge and peel the backing paper off completely – this is best done by peeling the backing paper flat against the graphic itself.
4. This is when it's handy to have someone else to help you – holding the bottom two corners tight hinge back the decal, but hold it just off the surface.
5. Using a plastic applicator (a supermarket loyalty card can do the job), squeeze down the decal against the surface. Work downwards and outwards from the centre of the decal.
6. Once the decal is all pressed down against the surface, peel off the top paper. Work smoothly by peeling the top paper off by pushing it back against itself.



**Below** The graphics for our Fireball were based on our winner's description of herself as a 'blonde water babe'.

on because it's got nice, flat sides, which gives you a great background straight away, and then the additional font design and graphics were just cut on the machine.'

## Preparing the graphics

Everything starts as a roll of vinyl, 'The colour range now is quite amazing,' Tony points to a huge

array of rolls in the corner of the Grapefruit office.

'You start with a solid roll of vinyl and it goes through a plotting machine. The graphics we have produced on the computer are vectorised, and our cutting machine works like a printer – it reads the lines, but instead of having an ink head it has a very small knife blade which cuts the shape in the vinyl, without cutting through the backing paper.' When the graphic is cut out it is only cut out in outline – sticky masking paper is then applied on top of the entire area, which you remove when you are ready to apply the graphic – when you remove that it brings the cut-out graphic away from the solid vinyl sheet ready for application.

## Applying the design to our Fireball

The basis for our Fireball was that we would wrap the hull in chrome – a practical alternative as we were very short of time to paint the boat. 'The chrome itself was fitted off the roll – we cut a length that was the right size, slightly bigger than the boat, and we applied it by hand with a couple of people holding the roll and another applying it by hand. Then after the chrome was applied we trimmed it by hand,' Tony talks us through the process.

'Next we applied the grey and pink graphics on top – which all came masked up and ready to fit. You pin them up first using masking tape so you can get them exactly where you need them, and then the masking tape acts as a hinge, so when you're happy you can remove the backing paper and then gradually apply the graphic using your squeegee, just pushing the air out. It's like pushing the air out of anything, you push the air out from the middle and once it's made contact with the surface it's there, you remove the masking paper. Any little air bubbles you might want to just pop with a little pin and again squeeze the air out and that's that.'

## Coming up next...

Our Fireball gets a new set of sheets and control lines from Marlow, we bring you the ultimate Fireball tune-up from P&B, and our competition winners share their experience of their first Fireball nationals. ■

