

Using KW Decals

The KW Trams decals are produced at home on a standard inkjet printer using decal paper.

There are limitations on the colours etc. that can be printed on an inkjet printer – I can't print gold, silver, white etc. Also the colours come out quite thin, so in particular light coloured transfers cannot be seen on dark painted backgrounds. Therefore almost all of the decals are produced on white decal paper. In order for them to be useable, I try to match the decal background colour to the paint I recommend in the kit instructions.

The decal paper is quite thin, and although the decals are sprayed with multiple coats of clear lacquer, they need to be handled correctly or the edges of the decals can fray and the decals can stretch. But if they are treated gently and you follow the suggestions in this document, you should find that they give a reasonable result.

But they are homemade and are not as easy to apply as professional decals, but the price reflects that.

Preparing the surface.

The decals should be applied to a gloss surface. If your model is to be matt or semi-matt, then apply gloss varnish to the section that the decals will be applied to, and then when they are all done, apply matt varnish.

Cutting out the decals

The decals are printed on a large sheet of decal paper, so need to be trimmed to the correct size. I have found that using scissors or snips gives better edges than using a knife to cut them out as a knife can drag the edge of the decal causing a ragged edge. If you must use a knife, use a new very sharp blade and a straight edge such as a steel ruler. The ruler should be placed on the part of the decal sheet that you want to use – this stops the lacquer from splintering off.

Applying the decals

The decals do not need long to soak. If you leave them too long, the decal will start to fray at the edges, the colour will run and they will be more likely to stretch when you apply them.

Soak them for the minimum amount of time. For small items such as crests and numbers, they should only need around 20 to 30 seconds in cold water. Larger decals will take a little longer. Test that the decal is ready by lifting it out of the water and very gently see if the decal slides on the backing paper. For large decals, test the whole decal to see that it moves. If it doesn't, then soak it for a little longer.

If applying large decals, then lay the model so that the surface you want the decal on is flat, then use a brush to put a thin coat of water onto the gloss surface of the model before applying the decal, this should allow a small amount of slide so that you can position the decal properly. Slide the decal so that it overhangs the backing paper at one end, then place this in the correct place on the model. Gently hold this end in place against the model surface and slide the backing paper out making sure that the decal is in the right place as you do so. Check that everything is right.

If you need to move the decal once it has been applied, then use a soft paintbrush dipped in cold water to get under the edge of the decal and slide it underneath. Attempting to pull or push the decal is likely to damage or stretch it. When you are sure that the decal is in the right place and you are not going to want to move it or remove it, then you can blot the decal with a piece of kitchen roll, tissue, a decal sponge or equivalent, making sure that the decal is flat against the surface. At this stage you can apply Decal Set, Decal Cote or similar to help shrink the transfer back onto the model, though I don't usually do this myself. Allow it to dry thoroughly before varnishing etc.

Be careful when using tweezers or a knife etc. to move the decal into place as it can damage the surface or edge of the decal. If you want to remove a decal after it has dried, then use something like a wooden cocktail stick to chip away at it – don't use a knife or hard metal object as it may damage the paint surface.

Finishing the decals

To protect the decals once they have been applied, give them a couple of coats of varnish. A thick varnish is better than too thin (which may cause the colours to run). I use Humbrol 35 gloss enamel varnish.

Some of the decals for side panels do not include the lining. When using these I apply the decal, then 2 coats of varnish and then I use HMRS pressfix lining. Then more coats of gloss varnish.

Leave to dry overnight before handling

I try to match the decal to the paint colour as best as I can, but you may find that it is not a perfect match or that the decal has white edges. I usually trim the decals to have the minimum amount of background before I apply them. Even so, a small amount of paint may help to mask the edge of the decal and match the colours.

Final words

The above notes may suggest that it is difficult to use our decals, but they are not actually too bad as long as you are gentle with them and pay attention to the tips above. Certainly with practice they can produce a reasonable result.

I usually apply 4 coats of lacquer to the transfers when I make them. You may find that applying additional coats of lacquer or clear varnish helps to make them easier to use.

ABS Transfers

Some of the transfers we sell came from ABS. These are professionally produced transfers and are produced on clear backing. They will require longer soaking to get them to lift off the backing than the KW Trams transfers.

If they curl up in the water, let them continue to soak. Be very gentle in straightening them or they may crack and fall apart. You may find that giving them a couple of coats of clear lacquer or a coat of clear varnish before soaking will make them strong enough to use. If you do this, you will need to cut the transfers out to use them.

In some cases the carrier film has become discoloured. The discolouration may not matter depending on what you are putting the transfer onto. If necessary you may be able to trim the transfer so that there isn't any excess film.

Most of the transfer sets contain more transfers than you actually need, so we suggest using one of the excess ones to test how they will work.

Once the transfers have been applied and allowed to dry, then a coat of Decal Cote may be applied, followed by a coat of clear varnish.

KW Trams Laser Printed Transfers

We are now using a laser printer for some of our transfers, which means slight differences to the transfer process.

Because they are laser-printed, the transfers no longer need to be sprayed with clear lacquer to stop the ink running, but the light colour transfers still need to be printed on white decal paper with a suitable background colour.

The process for using these is the same as for our normal transfers, but you don't have to worry about the lacquer flaking off or water soaking the transfer and making the ink run.

In the same way as for the normal transfers, these decals only need a short time to soak.