

Restoring your vintage bow

Restoration (Part 1):

I wiped the bow down with some acetone just to remove surface crud immediately. While I usually start sanding with 220 grit sandpaper, I decided to get the 4 layers of paint off with 150 grit to save my elbow. Once most of the paint was off I switched to 220.

Typically, I would start a bow refinish with 3 rounds of quick 220 sanding the old finish off before taping the logos and coin to protect them. But the silkscreen logos were already compromised here. I'll buy some rub-on decals from Al Harford to replace both. When logos are in good shape remember that as you sand around the taped logos you'll create a hump and you'll want to feather in edges. The coin is taped to prevent scratching. Later I will treat the coin with Citristrip stripping gel to restore it...



Restoration (Part 2):

After the first three rounds of initial light sanding work, I taped over the serial number to protect it for the next few rounds of sanding. At this point, if your limbs logos are not going to be replaced with new decals, tape them over too. Some of you prefer to remove the coin before sanding and then glue it back in with hot-melt. That's great. If I can, I prefer to cover the coin with tape and work around it carefully if possible. In any case, most coins will have finish over them that can be cleaned off with a couple applications of Citristrip stripping gel. It will restore

that shine too. Keep the chemical OFF the wood, so maybe tape around the coin as it will eat the finish on the wood and may cause an uneven finish when done!

Did I mention sanding is where most of the time and effort goes? With about 8-10 hours of meticulous sanding invested (to include removing paint & finish in the string grooves and in the string nocks), I'll work on dings and scratches more carefully to reduce them as much as possible.

On the limbs, checking (crazing) of the old finish will start to fade as you sand. I will start to see the long, parallel glistening fiberglass fibers on the limbs emerge with more sanding. The glass fibers will have a metallic sheen in the direct sun. I will not allow streaks of old finish in the limb glass. Limb glass will be completely stripped of old finish.

On wood, the old finish sanding powder will look off-white but if you get into the wood you'll see the difference in sanding powder color. I like to get as much of the old finish off as possible but leaving old finish residue where it is stubborn is acceptable and will blend in well with the new top coat. On the overlays I'll work to remove finish while watching for all the yellowing in the white glass carefully.

I wipe the bow down with a damp wet rag regularly between rounds to check progress during the sanding process. At the tail end of the sanding process, you can opt to fill any stress cracks with Loctite 420 if you wish to, then sand flush...



Restoration (Part 3):

With the sanding effort nearly completed, I will now work on other repairs like filling drill holes, treating any stress cracks, and removing finish off the coin medallion. I might also work to reduce any remaining dings with a little extra shaping/sanding.

Drill holes: These can be filled with Loctite instant mix 2-part epoxy, wood bondo or Fix-it-Stick bonding putty. I typically inject Loctite instant mix 2-part epoxy but this time I decided to use some Fix-it-Stick bonding putty. I sliced off a sliver of the putty and kneaded it into a small ball. When it is well mixed, I take a small chunks and roll them into thin tubes that I slide one by one into the hole and push it in sliver by sliver with a wood dowel until full. No matter what you decide to use, sand flush. I close my eyes and feel across the filler with my index finger to make sure it is flush.



I will carefully finish with 000 steel wool sanding over the whole bow to smooth it out.

At this point, you can tape off and spray paint to match or otherwise by mixing paint to be brushed on as required. For holes in the limb glass, I will take a small square of painters tape and hole-punch it and center it over the hole for painting to match.

Coin Medallion: Whether you removed the coin (or button medallion) or not, apply Citristrip stripping gel over the coin at least twice or as much as is needed to remove all the finish and restore the shine. Once the gel dries (follow the label directions), the finish will flake off in little bits and you may need to carefully scrape some off with your thumbnail (or toothbrush or toothpick). Rub it out with a clean cloth and the coin medallion will look new and shiny.

Stress cracks: These can be treated with application of instant set super glue, Loctite 420 or the like in a thin layer. Sand it flush.



Replacing decals: I will have completed sanding the limbs and wiped them off with alcohol before the new decals are rubbed on. It helps to preheat these with a blow dryer until warm as they'll transfer better that way. These are still in the mail....

Restoration (Part 4):

Get a NEW can of Minwax high gloss wipe-on polyurethane and shake the can. I put on a rubber glove, shook the can and grabbed a 2- inch square cut from an old sweatshirt. I use the fleece side of the square folded in half and soaked but not dripping to avoid runs in the application. I wipe once over the whole bow. I grab the bow so that I'm looking at the shelf head on. I wipe the top coat on that far end of the bow starting with the edges first, then the belly side lower limb, then the back side limb followed by the riser.

Now since I don't have a ceiling hook I'll hang it from a looped fishing line hung from my paddle fan in my "dust free" drying room with vents closed off. Now I do the belly side of the upper limb followed by the back side of the upper limb. Another loop of fish line helps to secure the limb in place while wiping. I let it dry one full day...



Restoration (Part 5):

After the 4th coat of polyurethane, I noted some lint and dust nubs had adhered to the finish. Dang!! Only one thing to do: Wet sand with 600 grit sandpaper made for wet sanding (it will be dark on the back). The water acts as a lubricant. I sand lightly and check between rounds to see if the dreaded lint and nubs are removed finally. I will sand a whole surface (e.g., the entire side of

limb) for uniformity. Be real careful if you applied rub-on decals as these will rise above the surface since it's not silk screen paint!

Once the water dries, it will leave a milky film (see the second photo). This is sanding dust. After I am done, I will wipe the bow down with a damp rag and dry it with a clean rag. I will apply 3 more coats of polyurethane. The next set of upcoming photos will show the finished bow.



Restoration (Part 6):

After 6 coats of polyurethane I looked it over. I'm done messing with it! I may give it a 7th coat but it looks so good I don't think it is necessary. Here are some before and after comparison shots of the riser section and a few of the limbs and a tip. Done!!! Now to put a rest, side plate and new string on her.



The End