Of “Birds and their Bugs”

By Phil Brown, CTCI #25041

When our Thunderbirds were manufactured in 1954 through 1957, Ford or the glass manufacturer etched dated trademarks on all of the safety glass, including the glass used in the side windows, the windshield and the hardtop rear window (backlite). Replacement windshields and the hardtop backlite often come with no logo present. Windshields and backlites without a logo present a problem for the restorer who is building an original “Concours” car since the rules clearly state that all the glass must have the logos or “bugs”. This article offers a solution to that dilemma.

Figure 1

Figure 1 shows three “Bugs”; on the left is the logo for a tinted windshield made by PPG, in the center is the logo for a tinted side window and on the right is the logo for a clear side window. The PPG logo with the word “SOLEX” indicates it is a tinted glass. On the side windows Ford used the words “SUN X” to indicate tinted glass. The “AS1” or “AS2” is a quality code while the 96 idicates the month and year the glass was manufactured.

To complete my restoration of an early 1957 Thunderbird, I needed to find a new backlite for the hardtop that had the required PPG Herculite logo. I soon discovered that NOS backlites were difficult to obtain but that quality backlites without a logo were available from most Thunderbird parts vendors. After looking for various ways to add the required logo, I found a vendor in Michigan that made kits for adding Ford logos to glass used in early V8 Fords. I contacted Roy Nacewicz at Carlton Glass and asked if he could provide a kit to etch Thunderbird logos. Roy said that they could make a kit if I could furnish the artwork. After photographing bug examples in various pieces of glass that was thought to be original, Roy had enough information to reproduce the artwork for the logos. Let me say that Roy exhibited a lot of patience with me to get these logos right and I would not have been able to furnish him with enough correct information without the help of another Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club member who contributed dating information.

After trading the artwork a couple of times, Carlton Glass made me an etching kit, licensed by Ford, to apply the logos. The kit consists of silkscreens of each of the logos, some Q tips, a bottle of activator and a bottle of etching cream. Using the kit and some simple but thorough instructions, I was able to reproduce the PPG Herculite logo on a new hardtop backlite. Following is how it was done.

Using the silkscreen stencil shown in Figure 2, this is how easy it is to etch the logo.

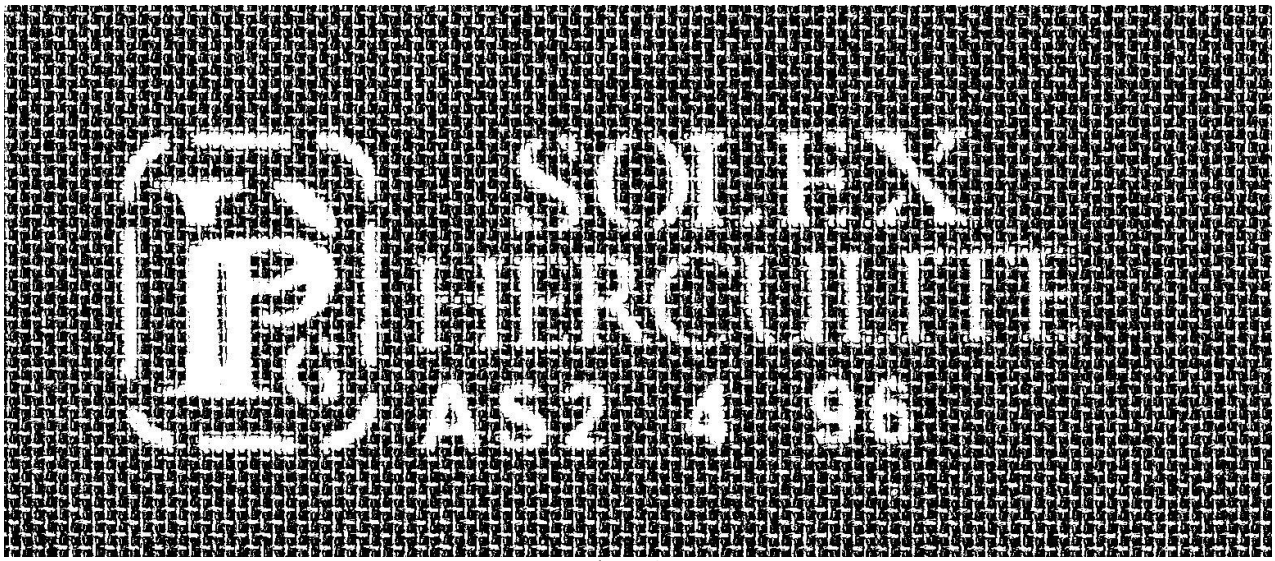

Figure 2

Figure 3

Step 1. Thoroughly clean the area of the glass where the logo will be etched. I used alcohol to make sure that the glass was both clean and free of any oil. Use masking tape to position the logo on the glass. Care should be taken to make sure the stencil is where you want it. There is no re-do on this process. Once its etched, it is not reversible. Shown in Figure 3 is the screen taped in place on a new hardtop backlite.

Step 2. Place a few drops of activator on TOP of the copy in the screen so that the activator actually seeps through the copy and gets under the screen stencil. Just a little is all that is required as a little goes a long way. All you need is enough to spread from the middle of the stencil and cover the copy with a thin film.

Step 3. Using your finger, smooth the activator through all the edges of the copy in the stencil making sure that you have massaged all of the copy, edge to edge. The instructions note; WE CANNOT EMPHASIZE ENOUGH THE IMPORTANCE THAT YOU MAKE SURE ALL OF THE BUBBLES ARE SMOOTHED OUT FROM UNDER THE STENCIL. Any part of the stencil that is not firmly in contact with the glass will etch poorly. Figure 4 shows the stencil with the activator spread evenly under the stencil (note the difference in color at the top of the stencil).

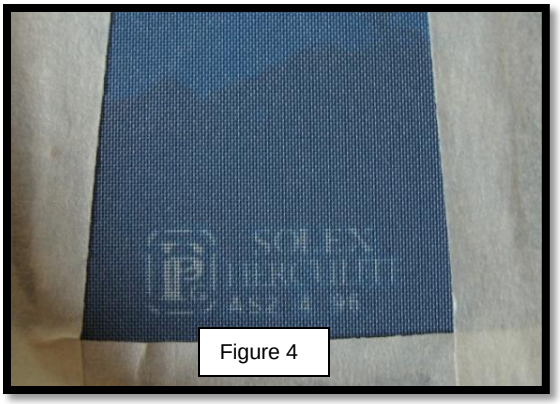

Figure 4

Step 4. Once the activator is covering all the edges under the image with no air bubbles under the stencil, use a paper towel to carefully blot off the excess activator and PRESS DOWN FIRMLY on the paper towel to squeeze the stencil to the glass.

Step 5. Once the activator is covering all the edges, it is important to establish a "bond" between the stencil and the glass to prevent the etching cream from seeping under the stencil. To accomplish this, blow dry the damp stencil. You will be able to see the logo part of the stencil change colors as it dries. While it is wet, it's a slightly greenish color. As it dries it will turn white. BLOW DRY THE STENCIL UNTIL THE LOGO PART OF THE STENCIL IS COMPLETELY WHITE. Once you are certain the stencil is dry, dry it again to insure success. Check again to be sure no air bubbles have developed during the drying process. If there are air bubbles, simply re-apply activator, work out the bubbles, and dry again.

Figure 5

Step 6. Use a Q-Tip to apply the etching cream over the copy in the stencil (see Figure 5). Make sure that you cover all the logo parts of the stencil and also be sure that you do not get any etching cream on parts of the glass that you do not want to etch. Use the Q-Tip to drag the etch cream from left to right and from up to down across the stencil. Be sure to press down firmly so that you actually press the cream through the screen mesh. This is IMPORTANT. If you do not get the cream squeezed through the mesh screen, you will not have a perfect etch.

Step 7. After waiting about 30 seconds, blot off the all the etching cream with a damp paper towel. CAREFULLY remove the masking tape and stencil. Lay the stencil flat aside of the work. Quickly rinse any remaining etching cream off the glass with water. Spray the glass with glass cleaner and rub and dry the glass. Immediately rinse the stencil with water and lay on a flat surface. Now its time to admire your "scripted" glass shown in Figure 6. Before you're done though, note that the stencil should be carefully washed out with water and then stored flat for future use.

Figure 6

With gentle handling, and immediate rinsing after each use, the stencils can be used dozens of times. I am extremely pleased with the results of using this kit. Carleton Glass can supply a Ford licensed kit so that you can do your own glass scripting with the correct date for your car. Carleton Glass can be reached at (734) 654-9190 or on the web at www.fordscript.com. Again, thanks to Roy Nacewicz at Carleton Glass for his help and patience.