



This is where all the magic happens- Gene's custom, one-off colour swatch.

Gene Winfield
MIX MASTER

HOT RODS, CUSTOMS, SALT LAKE RACING, GENE WINFIELD HAS DONE IT ALL — FOR 70 YEARS!

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This work area is PPG's brand spanning new training centre – the trade guys hadn't been let in yet. In fact NSW Premier, Barry O'Farrell, officially opened the facility the following Monday. Talk about special treatment – but what else would you expect for a living legend like Gene Winfield

IN THE world of custom cars, few have as an impressive CV as the ever-young Gene Winfield. His portfolio of famous cars have filled coffee table books. He started customising cars at 15 and by 1951 (at the ripe-old-age of 24), he had his first run at Bonneville – mind you he'd already run at El Mirage two years earlier! His body of work is not just limited to customs; Gene's turned out a string of trick stuff for Hollywood blockbusters. He even worked in the design studio for model car company AMT. The old saying: 'Forgotten more than the rest of us will ever learn,' has never been truer than of Mr Winfield.

Even though he's nearing his 87th birthday, Gene still runs a shop at Mojave, California. On top of that, he travels the US and other parts of the world conducting a series of highly informative metal working and fabrication workshops. He's also known to lay down one of his legendary paint jobs onto the occasional customer's car. Many will be aware that Gene is responsible for the stunning finish on Mario Colalillo's King of Custom's winner,



Gene Winfield

Gene is a machine. This was just a few hours before pulling on the painting overalls – having completed a 17-hour stint helping the boys prepare the car the day before. Wow!

WildCad as well as Slammed 60, his wife Catriona's FB panel van. Many have tried to emulate Gene's famous blended, fade away paint jobs, however few have mastered that iconic Winfield look.

Ben Erdahl from Lucky's Speed Shop approached Gene during his 2011 trip down under, to come back and work his magic on customer, Joe Valore's, '51 Chev. The answer was, "sure". So Joe and Ben got together and came up with the Jade

Dragon concept – a tribute to Gene's famous custom, Jade Idol. So when we heard Gene was back in town to lay on the Jade Idol-inspired fade job, we jumped at the invitation to watch the master at work.

GENE'S SECRET

"I KEEP laying it on until I'm happy. There is no hard 'n' fast rule, I just do whatever I think looks right. I mostly make it up as I



The crew from PPG tell us that Gene used quite an array of products on Joe's '51 Chev – about seven to eight thousand dollars worth in total

The fade wraps right into the door jambs and is just as consistent as the exterior bodywork



go." Pretty simple, eh? As for the colours themselves, there's not a whole lot of measuring going on, "I do it all by eye," says Gene, "I wing it the whole time, it's the best way."

He has his palette of colours, which don't appear to be in any specific order. Even after having laid on several different mixtures, over a several hour period, he can point out what went on what. Sure some of it is memorised, however I feel that it's more about being able to see it in the paint on the car rather than purely remembering the exact sequence.

MASTER CHEF

IT'S A lot like watching a master chef make the perfect stew; there's no set recipe, no set ingredients list. Gene's approach is more; a pinch of this, a splash of that, give it a quick mix and see what it looks like. If it's not quite right, add a dash of that and

smidge of the other for good measure. It's in stark contrast to the ultra-precise, regimented mixing procedures normally associated with painting.

Creating a one-off custom fade job is a real seat-of-the-pants creative process, as opposed to a set formula. This is probably one of the reasons few people are able to recreate the same result. Mind you this whole shooting from the hip caused a few anxious moments. Gene would shout out, "I've run out of that, give me some more." The guys would look down, see an empty mixing tin and nervously ask, "Urm, what was in that one?"

GIMME MORE

WHILE Gene's series of metal working, welding, leading and top chopping DVDs are revered throughout the modified car world, I couldn't find a book or DVD covering his secrets to custom painting. I'd

A colour-matched steering wheel, nice touch Mr. Winfield



Gene's a very efficient mixer, a couple of quick swirls, pull the stirrer up, let the paint run off and see what it looks like – tint to satisfaction

say his mix 'n' match approach is difficult to convey in a succinct matter. Nonetheless, Gene's methodology certainly works, as Joe's Chev looked killer when finished. His advice for aspiring painters: "You've got to experiment, lay on some paint and see what it looks like."

Considering the crew from PPG estimated the job consumed \$7000 to \$8000 of material, the cost of a mistake due to inexperience can get very expensive. So maybe practice on something smaller before tackling a whole car.

PLAN OF ATTACK

GENE doesn't rely on drawings or renderings to determine the ideal layout. "I'll look at the car in the flesh," says Gene, "I'll study the contours and lines, then work out in my head where and how the colours should fade into each other." For him, it's



Ben from Lucky's Speed Shop and the owner, Joe, were very happy when Gene said: "It's a really, really nice car." They've known how they wanted this car to look for a long, long time now. And now it's almost there."

AGE SHALL NOT WEARY

WHILE this might be a paid job for Gene, the enthusiasm and drive the bloke has is astounding. He thrashed for 17 hours with the Lucky's crew to prep the car the previous day. It was another hard thrash the following morning (paint day) to get the undercoat rubbed back and ready for sealer. But he never stopped, never showed any more fatigue that any of the other guys – most of which were at least half his age. At lunch everyone was just starting to chill out, gettin' into some good conversations and Gene jumps up and states: "That's it, I wanna get paintin', I gotta start paintin'!" It is obvious that Gene remains completely passionate about his work.

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FADING AWAY

After the spearmint-tinted sealer/undercoat, black candy was added along the sills and upper body line – this was the last solid colour used. From there Gene only uses clear base coat (very different to clear top coat) to create the fade – a total of 20-litres of clear went onto Joe's Chev. For each successive layer, the clear base coat is lightly tinted with the desired candy colour and is

Pushing 87, Gene has more energy than most guys half his age, on a previous encounter, he was asked where he got his energy, "good diet and plenty of sex," he replied, to rapturous laughter.

not about using paint to create artificial highlights, it's more about using paint highlights to emphasise the lines that are already there.

And Gene is full steam ahead; it's mix, mix, mix. Rush into the booth, spray it on. Back out for a refill and back into it again – there's no disputing his work ethic, the man is a machine. I asked him how long it typically takes to paint a car. "It varies tremendously," he replied. "Once I start I like to finish, it may take me five hours or 25 hours, I just keep going until I like it."

Reaching all the way into the car to do the dash is hard and risky. But it came up a treat and looks bitchin'

highly translucent. Although Gene used two main greens, the finished job utilises a total of seven different green candies. Some incorporate pearl (including gold pearl over the dark areas), with varying densities. On other occasions, the pearl was added to straight clear.

It's impressive to watch; coat after coat is laid on, and you're thinking to yourself, "I can't see any difference." But gradually and inexorably the effect becomes more and more pronounced – it messes with your head.

FULL COVERAGE

To allow Gene to make the door jambs just as nice as the exterior, the door locks were left out. To then stop paint build-up on a protruding edge (which would make it darker), the doors were packed out to sit flush when pushed into the shut position. Gene also continued the fade across the full width of the dash and even painted the steering wheel to match! It's touches like this that sets a good job apart from a stellar one.

As well as taking one of Gene's highly-recommended two-day metal working classes (where we chopped Mario's Slammed 60 FB panel van), I've now had the pleasure of watching Gene paint three cars, Mario's WildCad, plus Slammed 60 and now Joe's Jade Dragon.

As for the finished job, Joe is mental for it, he was so happy he was nearly in tears. Gene Winfield, a living legend in action, what more can you say? 🙌



With the fade side of the job done, Gene gets some help to seal it all up and lay on some clear top coat

Gene Winfield

Nicknamed Jade Dragon, Joe's 51 Chev is inspired by Gene's Jade Idol

