Aardstorm Models

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Custom Decals
Preparation Guide

This guide is for those who wish to commission some custom decals from me. It describes the sort of information I will need from you, and how to prepare it. Please also see the companion guide for preparing artwork yourself for me to print for you.

For detailed information about how to apply the finished decals, please see my application guide.

Decal Content

First of all, I will need to know what lettering, markings or other features your decals are to contain. If you require decals to match a particular prototype, clear photos of the appropriate areas will be very useful, so that I can match the shapes as closely as possible. Where the source is in a book or other printed document, a high resolution scan or photo of the relevant page(s) will be required.

The resulting images will need to be sent to me electronically, by e-mail. To keep the file sizes down, please crop the images to the relevant area, while retaining sufficient context information. To send large files to me you could use some sort of internet file-sharing service, in which you upload your file to the service, then send me a link to it that I can use to download your file.

I use an Apple Mac (Mini) computer, so the actual file formats you use to send your images to me need to be compatible across computer types – I will probably have difficulty reading native Windows formats, especially of the very latest versions. The most portable file format is Adobe's PDF, which can also handle both vector and bitmap images, and indeed a mixture of the two in one file. Alternatively, for bitmap images TIFF and PNG should be suitable, while for vector images (electronic drawings) I should be able to read SVG files. The JPEG format can also be used, but use a very high quality setting to minimise the impact of the lossy compression inherent in this format.

Decal Size

I will also need to know the size your decals need to be, both the sizes of features within the decals, and if the decals are to fit within a specific area of your model, also the overall size of the decals too. The dimensions you supply can be in terms of the prototype size, which I will reduce to your required scale size, or of the size of the finished decals.

Prototype Photos

Where you supply me with prototype photos, rather than specifying the sizes of decal features, it can be more accurate to specify the size of adjacent features. Vertical dimensions are the most reliable (e.g. the distance between easily visible ridges or edges above and below the decal pattern) provided they apply at the same distance from the camera as the pattern.

Model Photos

If your model already exists (not necessarily complete, but in kit form or unpainted), then photos of the relevant areas of your mode where the decals are to go can also be useful, especially if the decals are to fit within ridges or recesses of the model's surface.

Your photos should be taken with the camera (or phone) perpendicularly above the model surface, and with the plane of the sensor (back of the camera or phone) parallel to that surface. This is to minimise perspective distortion effects. Do not use a wide-angle setting as this can also introduce significant distortion, instead hold the camera further away and zoom in to fill the frame.

The model should also be well-lit. On-camera flash can be used, provided it doesn't create reflections on the model surface. A bright light source a bit to one side of the model (or above/below) can be better by emphasising shallow ridge or recess features.

To be useful for dimension specification, you can either specify the dimensions of features clearly visible in your photo, or include a clearly defined scale such as the edge of a ruler in your photos. The scale/ruler should be the same distance from the camera as the main surface of the model, and lie parallel to it (e.g. against a long edge). Where you specify dimensions instead, these should be of reasonably large features, such as the overall width or length of the model.

Colours

You will also need to specify what colours are to be incorporated into your decals. Colour prototype photos can be useful, but for a more precise specification you will probably need to specify a paint colour or even provide me with physical samples. To cover this subject in more detail, I have prepared a separate companion guide to help you specify colours to be incorporated into your decals.