

Don't forget the Bumpers

by Don Mock

This month's pet-peeve is "bumpers." An important detail, surprisingly ignored by modelers, is the bumper/strip found on almost every unlimited hydroplane up until the rounded-sponson era. Sometimes referred to as "guard or rub rails," and "molding," the 3/4" or 1" bumpers were attached along the top of the hull from the transom, around the sponson sheer to the tip of the sponson.

Like on pleasure boats, it's job is to protect the hull from damage when banged into a dock, trailer or even another boat.

The bumpers on unlimiteds were usually made of aluminum or sheet metal. It's either milled, extruded or folded into a semi round shape (most I've seen are in a 1/4 round shape). The bumpers are attached with screws to the hull. Although the most popular finishes were chrome or polished aluminum, several teams used anodized colors such as blue and gold.

When it comes to replicating bumpers in 1/8th scale, there are several methods that work very well. The most ambitious of these is to make exact 1/8th scale bumpers out of wood or aluminum and attach with screws just like on the full-size boat. The wood version can be painted or have the appropriate color line tape applied over it.

Using (or even finding) tiny wood screws can be a bit difficult in 1/8th scale, however, check out Bob Hulliger's or Howard Price's 1/6th scale boats. They milled their own aluminum bumpers and applied with mini screws - unbelievable! On his smaller 1/8th scale Miss Pay 'n Save, Bob used a black ink pen to simulate the screws on painted wood bumpers. Others have used pin heads to look like screws.

A easier approach to bumpers is to simply apply line tape. It's better than nothing and is easy to apply and to fix. Hobby and auto supply stores carry many types. Sizes to use are either 1/8" for one inch size, and 3/32" is perfect for the 3/4" rails. If you can't find the exact color, roll out several feet on to a piece of cardboard and paint it. The tape usually comes with a backing paper so it won't stick to everything until you are ready to apply it. It's not necessary, but a good coat of clear over the tape helps seal it to the hull.

So, I hope to see more attention paid to bumpers on club members boat. As far as I'm concerned, bumpers are as important to the look of the boat as any part of the paint job.
