

Don't drive around with a crusty chicken on the hood; get gold-chain glory when you . . .

INSTALL YOUR OWN BANDIT STRIPES

By Jefferson Bryant / Photos: Jefferson Bryant



While one person can apply the majority of the decals, the hood bird requires at least two. The biggest trick to correctly applying automotive decals is soapy water on a clean and degreased surface. It serves as a barrier between the decal's adhesive and the car, temporarily deactivating the glue. This allows you to slide the decal in place without it sticking. Once the position is set, the water solution gets worked out (along with bubbles) of the decal. Spraying a little on top of the decal will also help lubricate the plastic spreader, making sure the decal doesn't tear or snag. No amount of soapy water will resurrect a crease, so be careful. If you do get a small wrinkle, snag, or bubble, don't freak out—there are fixes. But a really bad wrinkle can ruin a decal job, and replacement may be the only option.

➔ What makes a Trans Am a Bandit? While the general public believes any black late-'70s Trans Am to be a Special Edition Bandit car, in reality, Pontiac never made even one. The moniker came from the car's movie association with Smokey and the Bandit in which black Pontiac Trans Am SE (Special Edition) cars were used for flipping, pitching, and the wooing of cutesy girls in cutoff shorts.

The SE cars, coded Y82 for T-tops and Y81 for standard-roof models, were built from 1977 to 1978, while Y84 represents the '79-'81 SE models. There were two primary colors: black and gold. The gold SE models, which were

coded Y88, used the same stripes and trim as the black cars. There was also a silver SE model in 1979 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Trans Am. The black cars, however, are the only ones associated with Smokey and the Bandit. An interesting side note is that while most of the cars in the movie were SE models, a few non-SE cars were slipped in.

With the increasing popularity of these cars, especially since the 30th anniversary came around, restoring an SE car has never been easier. Specialty restoration stores such as Original Parts Group and Year One have tons of parts to help with body panels and interior, but what about the distinct

graphics? The SE cars were heavily garnished with gold stripes covering every panel, not to mention the giant screaming bird on the hood, so to be cool, you're going to need to get them right. We've found that Phoenix Graphix offers what most consider the most complete set of correct TA graphics on the market. We say correct because most other kits come with multipiece hood birds. Placing the hood graphic is difficult enough without having to match three pieces together. The original hood decal was one piece, so it should be replaced with a one-piece bird.

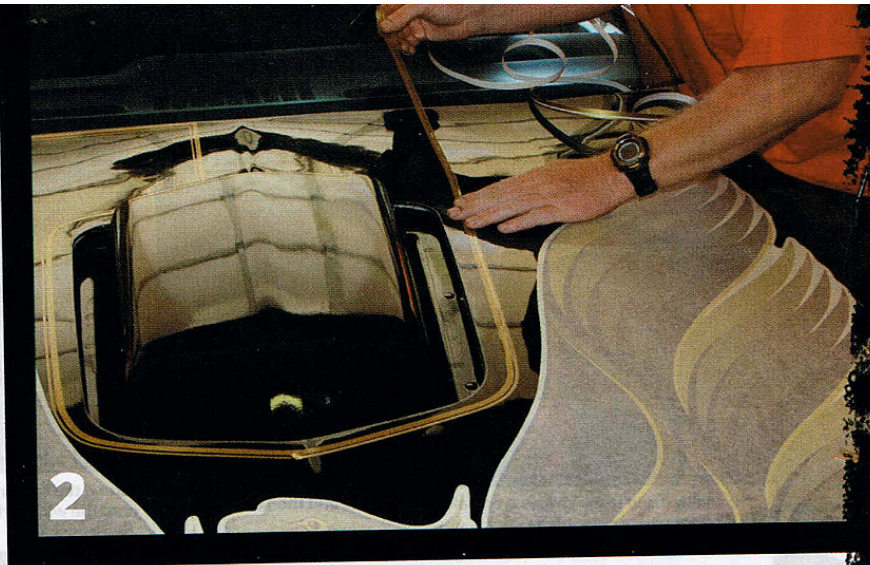
Installation is only part of the process. There are things you need to

know before ordering a kit. There are two styles of SE graphics: '77-'78 and '79-'81. The early SE used an Old English script, and the later SE used block-style lettering. In addition, the engine originally installed in the car makes a difference. The hood Shakers were marked with either T/A 6.6 or 6.6 Litre. The T/A 6.6 was used on cars installed with the Pontiac 400 engines, which have a Z listed as the fifth digit in the VIN. For those who lived in California or high-altitude locations, the Oldsmobile 403 engine notated by a K as the fifth digit in the VIN was offered and marked with the 6.6 Litre decal. The Olds 403 cars are quite rare, with only about 1,200 T-topped Y82 SE cars produced in 1977. You can also have the 6.6 Litre decal with the optional L78 400 engine.

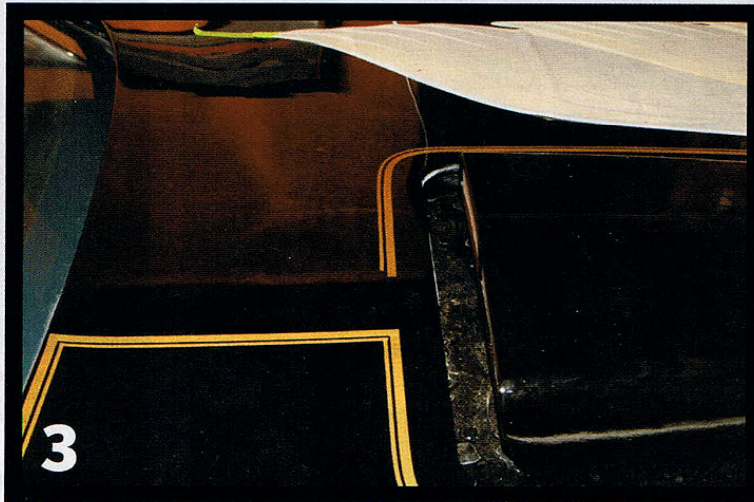
The factory didn't specify a measured placement for the decals, though there are some general guidelines. The hood bird should be centered on the hood, and the Phoenix Graphix decal uses notches in the paper to locate the centerline. The front-to-rear placement is a little different. The tail feathers should rest about 1 inch above the front of the hood. The bumper and fender lines are more generic; these are placed in approximate locations. The rear decklid decals are centered, side-to-side on the panel. The hood Shaker decal should be placed just below the radius of the top and about 1/2 inch past the back of the Shaker (toward the windshield). The double-line striping will take the longest, as there are a couple hundred feet of it on the car.

We followed along with Fred Murfin and the guys at Red Line Auto Sports in the process of striping a '79 Y84 SE Trans Am. The car had been repainted and was in need of fresh decals. The entire process took about four hours. These guys have done quite a few of these jobs, so experience shaves time off a project like this. Expect to take a full day if it is your first time applying decals.

Fred Murfin, owner of Red Line Auto Sports, laid down the roof stripes. The 4-inch spacing on the later ('79-'81) cars is dictated by the T-tops. Earlier cars that had the Hurst Hatches, which were a little smaller, have more roof space, but the 4-inch spacing should be retained.



Laying the stripes down first is the best way to familiarize yourself with decal application. It is pretty easy to start over if you mess up the double lines. Around the Shaker, we wrapped one side first and then matched it on the other side. It took a few tries to get it just right.



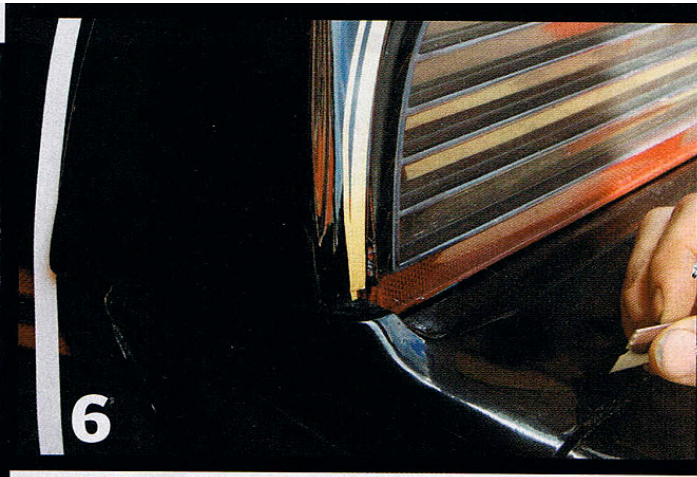
The two parallel stripes that run the length of the car should be spaced approximately 4 inches apart. This spacing needs to be kept from the hood to the roof and on to the trunk lid.



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5 The taillight and trunk stripes were laid as one piece and then cut in the center with a razor blade.



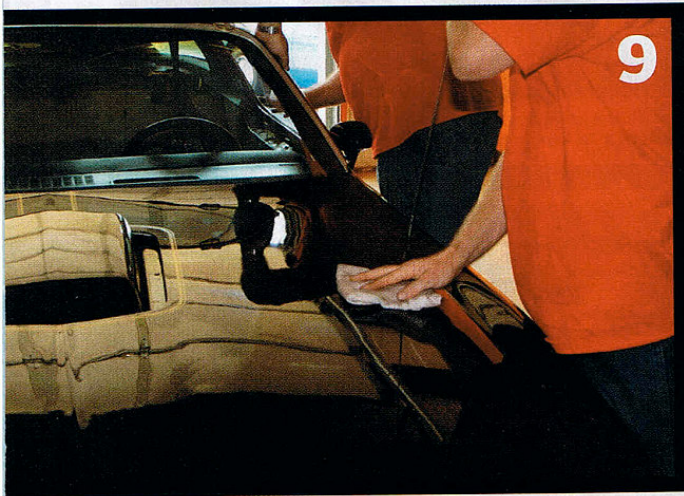
6 To end the tail stripes, we simply overlapped the narrow stripe onto the wide stripe and trimmed off the excess.



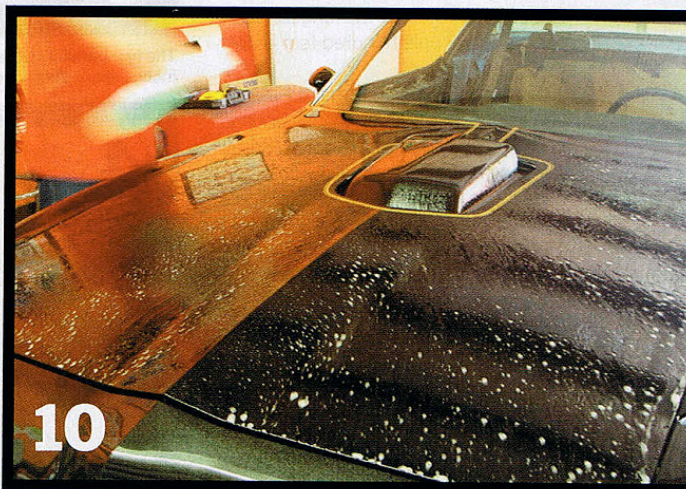
7 The rear Trans Am decal was centered on the decklid from the M and the T, not the smaller Pontiac script.



8 After using a squeegee to work the air out, the masking was carefully removed. The vinyl can peel up, so slowly removing the masking works best.



9 The hood was re-cleaned with wax and grease remover. It must be absolutely clean for the big bird decal to stick.



10 The soapy water was liberally sprayed on the hood right before we started. The decal had been unrolled and pressed flat a few days before.

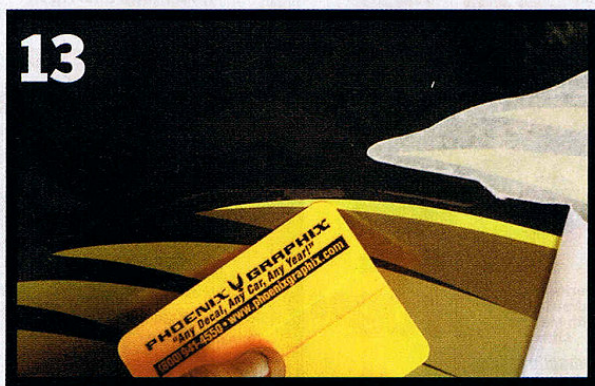
→ Why is Phoenix Graphix in Chandler, not Phoenix?



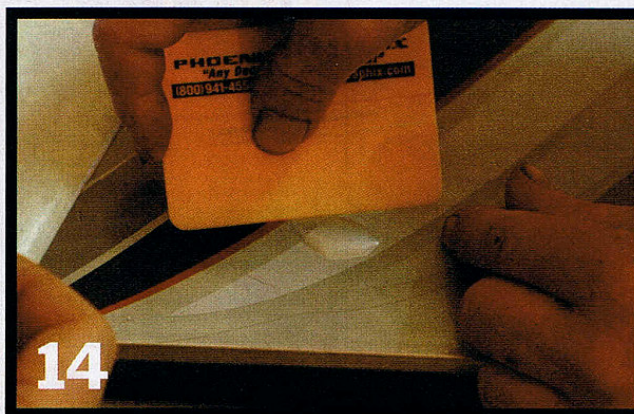
Here is where two people were needed. The backing (not the masking paper) was removed before the decal was transferred to the hood.



The tail feathers and the head of the bird were centered on the hood. The bottom of the feathers should be about an inch above the front of the hood.



The decal was lightly squeegeed with the masking on to lock it in place. The masking was then slowly peeled off, and the excess liquid and air bubbles were worked out to the edges.



If you manage to work up a big bubble like this, you have a problem. The vinyl has been stretched, and you are going to get a wrinkle. The best bet here is to use a pin to pierce the bubble, slowly letting the water out. It won't be perfect, but being careful will minimize the damage.



The finished decal completed the installation and looks excellent. Time to go block for the Snowman.

YIPES, STRIPES

Right after we finished the work on this project, Phoenix Graphix told us about a new version of the SE stripe kit. This kit simplifies the installation by providing the stripes in a placement-style layout, where each piece is laid out on a single sheet with placement and positioning instructions—something that was not previously available. By the time you read this, the new kit should be readily available from Phoenix Graphix. **END**

→SOURCES

Phoenix Graphix; Chandler, AZ; 800/941-4550; phoenixgraphics.com

Red Line Auto Sports; Wilson, OK; 800/580-9299; redlinemusclecars.com