

Confessions of a Former Dope User

by George White

I confess!! In my past, I've been a heavy dope user. For those who've often wondered about me, the kind I used never became an item of interest to the Feds. I was a big nitro- cellulose user.

Mike Isermann's article on this subject in the February issue of the San Antonio Windy Sock newsletter (<http://www.windysock.net/reformeddopeuser.htm>) prompted me to chime in on the same subject and perhaps add some additional information.

For some time I'd heard of folks using UHU glue sticks to attach tissue, but was skeptical that it would hold up under the frequent 100% humidity days on the Florida coast. What changed my mind was an article in a recent issue of Flying Models in which Tom Hallman, one of the country's true craftsmen, described his use of UHU glue.

Hallman made the comment that in nearly a decade of using the UHU stuff, he's never had a cover come loose. The secret of this is that he doesn't pre-dope the airframe. I decided to give this stuff a test on my Heeb Wren — not exactly a small rubber model. I did the entire covering job with nothing but the purple glue stick. I've had it out in very damp weather, including fog, and the tissue puckers from the dampness, but there hasn't been the slightest tendency to pull loose. I also confirmed Hallman's caution against doping the airframe. I have a wood frame I've used previously to preshrink tissue and had been doping the tissue to the frame in the past. There was plenty of dope still on the wood. I attached a sheet of tissue to the frame using a glue stick and let the glue dry over night. When I wet shrank the tissue, about 10% of it pulled loose. So, don't use a glue stick over a doped airframe. Cleaning the dope off won't cure the problem. Once you have dope on it, stick with dope.

Both Hallman and Isermann make the point that one coat of purple glue stick is lighter than three coats of dope, which you almost always need to make tissue adhere. It has no smell — giving you points with she who must be obeyed. It is extremely easy to put on, and you needn't be in a hurry to put the tissue on. If you don't get around to actually putting the tissue on the airframe until the next day, or next week, no sweat. All you need is a Q-Tip and some alcohol. The glue is reactivated instantly, just like lacquer/dope thinner reactivates dry dope. In fact, I prefer to let the glue dry a bit so that it doesn't grab the tissue like it does when you put the tissue on right away. A word of caution here, remember that 91% Isopropyl alcohol contains 9% water, and that will pucker the tissue as you are working with it. I've found a better solution is to use denatured alcohol, which doesn't contain water. OK, as you chemists will quickly point out, denatured alcohol will absorb water from the atmosphere — so keep the stuff closed tightly and pour out small amounts to use when you need it.

Inconceivable as it might seem, if you screw up, or have to repair crash damage, just flood the tissue with alcohol. The tissue comes off without weakening the ambroid glue joints.

As for how long to allow the glue to dry before shrinking the tissue on the airframe; I can't say from experience what the minimum time is. I generally have let it dry overnight.

A bit of advice when buying glue sticks. It is very easy to get one which has been on the shelf a long time and is partially dried up. If it is, take it back. The stick should be soft and creamy as you rub it over the wood.

THEN, to complete my withdrawal from dope habits, I've started using Krylon Chrystal Clear Gloss spray-can material instead of dope to finish my models. The advantage, in my opinion, is twofold. First, Krylon is alleged to stop the shrinking process, while dope continues to shrink for a long time, turning delicate surfaces into Lay's Potato Chips. The second is the problem of doped tissue becoming brittle after a time. Krylon finished tissue has a more leathery feel than dope. I'm not sure it is as water resistant as dope — I don't have enough experience to know that.

So — the final word is “Old Dope Users Arise” — you too can shake that odoriferous habit and your roommate will thank you for it!!!