

Canopy Molding Simplified

By George White

A few months ago in this exciting rag Mike Isermann wrote an article on molding canopies. This article follows up on that and makes the process as painless as possible.

Molding a canopy involves making a solid wood mold around which to form the canopy. However you choose to actually mold the canopy, whether it be plunge molding or vacuum molding, you've still got to make that positive mold.

In building a Chambermaid racer, I carefully carved a balsa mold in the exact shape of the canopy. Then came the hard part. You can't just mold a piece of clear plastic over a wood form unless you've got the wood form flawlessly smooth. Doing that requires some very time-consuming filling and sanding until the thing is as smooth as glass.

Being congenitally lazy, I didn't want to go through that routine. I called my friend Mike Midkiff in Texas to ask how he gets the mold smooth. I told him I'd already applied several coats of sealer, but was still a long way from finished. In his usual ever-so-gentle manner, his reply went something like: "Hell! Bells, you don't want to screw around with that stuff. Just get some .020 styrene and plunge mold the styrene over the wood mold and you automatically have a smooth mold upon which to mold the clear acetate. The styrene will smooth out all the imperfections in the wood."

I did as he said, and sure enough, it worked, as seen below. I left the styrene on the wood mold, then plunge molded the acetate canopy over it and it turned out fine. So, unless you just enjoy filling and sanding, give the styrene thing a try. You can get the styrene at any good hobby shop, or if you don't have one handy, you can always order a sheet from Bobe's Hobby House, 5719 North "W" Street, Pensacola, FL 32504, or www.bobeshobbyhouse.com. I don't recall the cost, but it's cheap.

