Colour *how to choose it and use it to show off your design*

A monochrome sketch is given more life with some colour additions on the glass, bonnet and sill area. In real life all glass has a green tint.

The Use of Colour to Show Form

Cars are coloured not only by their paintwork but by their environment. In real life there are many hues evident on a car's bodywork and glass. They may not always be consciously noticed but if you can illustrate them in your renderings you will add another level of realism and impact.

If you are a keen photographer you will understand the value of light quality in a scene. It's easy to take nice photos at dawn or sunset partly because the soft warm or cool light will give an extra dimension to your subject. In a car rendering, these subtle hues and lighting effects can enhance the form greatly and raise the level of communication to the viewer.

If a form is reflecting two different colours on two different sides it logically has surfaces which face in different directions; a rendered design with this characteristic will be immediately readable as being three-dimensional, full of form with solidity. An example of this is the technique car designers often use of illustrating reflected blue sky colours in the upward facing surfaces and warmer ground colours in the downward facing ones. Also you will often see a pale yellow tinge applied in-between where the glow of the sun is creating a warm edge to reflections. All other areas of bodywork will be the actual colour of the car which the environmental colours will blend into. This is a simple breakdown of what we see in real life outdoor conditions and it can be achieved so easily in computer that it is worth trying to see if it enhances your sketches.

Dawn light reflects as a pink stripe on this blue Ford

An opposite example of warm background and cool foreground colours being reflected in each side of the vehicle. In this case a lot of expression was wanted which suits the dramatic styling so the colours are suitably bright. The car itself is a muted warm grey but this doesn't prevent the sketch from being colourful.

In Photoshop for example, you can put an overlay (dramatic) or soft light (subtle) layer on top of your rendered sketch and use the airbrush to add colour in areas where different light is being reflected.

If your design has a ridge running along the sill area there will be a surface on it which faces the ground. If you add a ground colour and then show that colour in this surface, it will be easier to read it's character. This is using colour to show form and not necessarily just to be eye-catching or dramatic. You can then sample the colours that you have created in the overlay or soft light layers and apply them to other places with a hard brush as hard reflections.

Multi-coloured images are not necessarily more convincing or attention-grabbing than monochromatic ones if the contrast, depth and composition are not handled well. The colours I am talking about here are either subtle additions to a rendering that already works and is communicating the design well, or bold statements that will be a major part of the final effect and need to be included early on. I often prefer to work in monochrome at least until a basic form has been established. I might add some subtle colour right at the end or a block of reflected colour part way through. Then I can then start sculpting with this new colour in order to help define the design. *Continued*....

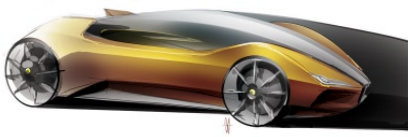
One technique I sometimes like to use is to have a background colour that reflects only in the far side of the vehicle, and a foreground colour that reflects only in the near side. This gives depth and drama to the environment without having to render it.

Choice of Colour

What do you want to communicate and how?

Do you always render cars the same colour or find some colours more difficult to render?

With computerised 2D sketching now the norm, this should no longer be a problem because you can adjust your finished image to almost any colour you want. So with all this freedom more choices can and must be made to your designs' advantage.



Supercars are attention grabbing and supposed to be noticed. Colours that match this character can be used.

The choice of colour should help communicate the design. It's not enough to decide to render a car bright yellow just so it stands out on the wall. Your vehicle's "personality" has to suit bright colours, perhaps a sports car or small, fun car with a youthful market. If you are designing a luxury car then silver or dark colours are probably best because they suggest understatement and anonymity. When I see someone driving a dark blue metallic BMW I don't imagine dark blue must be their favourite colour and that they bought the car for that reason. When however I see a lime green hatchback it could easily be making the statement that the driver loves that colour and wants the world to know about it, and it is one of the things they love about the car.

Here in real life a blue background object creates a hard reflection while the sky overlays a blue shade on top of the bodywork colour.

Your sketches can be viewed in a similair way. Unless there is a good reason to use a bright colour (for example it's unusual to render a Ferrari in anything other than red) then stick to something fairly neutral because it's the design you're proposing, not the colour. This does not mean you can't have a bright and eye catching sketch however. Using the techniques discussed in the "Reflection" article of reflecting your environment in the car or casting a tinted light over it, you can create as much colour interest as you want.

Sometimes there is a strong brand reason for certain colour. This Case tractor concept sketch is red, for example, because all Case tractors have been red since 1989. If not for that fact maybe a more subdued colour would be used for such industrial equipment.

Something to notice about colour is that it can be highly effective when used in a subtle way and that bright colours need only a small application to make a big difference to the overall image. Even a hint of orange will give warmth and focus to an illustration. On a car it is most likely to be a flashing indicator lamp; you only need a tiny amount.

Accent colours should be used sparingly, for example your car's badge on the bonnet, wheels and boot-lid or a background colour that is being reflected by the bodywork. Some brands allow for small effects such as clashing badge and body colours that can add an easy touch of reality because this is exactly what happens in real life but is slightly unexpected on artwork.

Most importantly, have fun and experiment with colour and if you're sketching on computer use it's power to take away the pressure of making a mistake and experiment more.