



Paint is applied to an E-Series vehicle using a multicoat process at the Ford Ohio Assembly Plant.



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COLOR CREATIVES

Ford takes a clever approach to constructing new shades.

By Kathy Sena

When you tell a friend you bought a new car, the first question is always *What kind?* The second, *What color?* “It makes or breaks a vehicle,” says Barb Whalen, color and materials design manager at Ford. “We want people to look at a new model and say ‘I saw that color and I fell in love.’” When it comes to color creation, playing matchmaker takes more than a bucket and a brush. Here’s how the Exterior Paint Strategy Team at Ford makes the process work.

FINDING INSPIRATION

Paint ideas can come from nature, travel—even a memorable bowl of New Mexico red chili. “Maybe one of us will see a beach with energizing blue water, visit the red rocks in Sedona or have a perfect cup of espresso, and it will inspire a new paint color,” says Whalen. The team also does upfront trend research, analyzing patterns in product design, architecture and interior design to ensure their intuition is in keeping with consumers’

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paint colors such as Blue Jeans and Kodiak Brown, the Fiesta boasts mouthwatering choices such as Blue Candy and Lime Squeeze.

ART MEETS TECHNOLOGY

Ever look at a particular vehicle and notice that the color takes on slightly different intensities as you move around the car? In that case, the color has “traveled,” says Allen Brown, advanced development and global mastering manager at Ford. “Color-shifting technology enhances the lines on the body,” he explains. It looks different when you look at it “flat” versus at a 45-degree angle. White paint wouldn’t have a lot of “travel,” Brown says, but Ford’s Ruby Red paint (on the 2013 Focus Titanium, for instance) “has amazing depth, which highlights the lines of the vehicle.”

Most paints on vehicles are produced with a two-coat system, Brown explains. A base coat (containing color pigments) and a clear coat (for high gloss and sun protection for the base coat) are applied after the primer to achieve the desired color.

For more dramatic colors, such as Tangerine Scream Metallic Tri-Coat, additional coats of paint are added between the base coat and the clear coat. These “mid-coats” increase the intensity of the color (known as the “chromatic” effect), increase the “travel” effect and can add a metallic look as well.

BRIGHT FUTURE

Choosing and implementing new paint colors is a time-consuming process. “We approved the 2015 color palette late last year,” says Whalen. “There is still final testing and mastering to be completed roughly eight months before launch.”

Whether those future colors are inspired by the world’s best hot fudge sundae, tomorrow’s fashion trends or a sexy new green eye shadow, we’ll all just have to wait for that “Oh, I want that car” moment in the showroom, adds Whalen. “We don’t want to spoil the surprise.”

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