

Creating chrome lettering in Photoshop

This look was king back in the '70s—and still looks good

By Chuck Davis

I was playing around with Adobe Photoshop one day and discovered the Bas Relief filter, which allows you to create three-dimensional effects with more freedom than most plug-ins will allow. Since version 5, Photoshop has incorporated automatic settings for beveled edges and the like, but superior effects can be achieved using a combination of these and the Bas Relief filter.

Couple the Bas Relief filter with Photoshop's own Bevel and Emboss filters, and the possibilities are unlimited. Once you understand the technical functions of some of the features, such as Brightness and Contrast and remember the effect they produce, your mind is set free to concentrate on how to creatively combine the tools. It's much like choosing the right brush and colors to paint with.



Step 1: Enter your text Choose a rather bold typeface with thick enough strokes to show the chrome effect. Type your text in white and kern properly. Duplicate this *layer* by using the flyout menu on the Layer palette. You will need this extra layer later.



Step 2: Add airbrush streaks If you look closely, you'll notice this image has gray streaks across it. To do this, create a mask around your lettering by holding the <Ctrl-L> key while selecting one of the layers with the lettering. Select the airbrush tool and change opacity to 10. Using black color and a soft brush slightly larger than the opening of the "R," airbrush light horizontal streaks across the letters. Make sure your strokes are light and even. Here, I have airbrushed at the top, middle, faintly at the bottom and at the bottom of the "K." This step is crucial.

Tip: In versions prior to 6, you can hide the dotted line mask surrounding your text by going to *View / Hide Edges*. In version 6 you would go to *View / Show / Selection Edges*.



Step 4: Add dimension The following step varies depending on which version of Photoshop you are using.

Version 5.5 or earlier: Go to *Layer / Effects / Bevel and Emboss*, select *Outer Bevel* and set *Angle* to 120°. Set *Depth* to 5 and *Blur* to 4. Set *Highlight Mode* to *Screen* and use white at 88% opacity.

Version 6: Go to *Layer / Layer Style / Bevel and Emboss*, select *Outer Bevel* and set angle to 120°. Set *Depth* to 100% and *Size* to 5. Set *Technique* to *Smooth* and *Direction* to *Up*. Use white at 88% opacity for *Highlight Mode* and set at *Screen*.



Step 5: Add the bottom color Click on the *Rectangular Marquee Tool* and draw a box around the bottom portion of the letters starting at approximately the center of the letters. Then go to *Select / Feather* and use 10 pixels. Then go to *Image / Adjust / Hue/Saturation*. Check the *Colorize* box and use the following settings: *Hue*: 34, *Saturation*: 39, *Lightness*: +15. Next, go to *Image / Adjust / Brightness/Contrast* and use the following settings: *Brightness*: +63, *Contrast*: +55. These settings will depend upon how dark or light your image is and may vary slightly.

This chrome effect is reminiscent of the CB era of the late '70s when it was popular, especially on trucks. It brings back memories of Cannonball Run and C.W. McCoy songs. The font used for this example is "Boston Truckstyle" by Ken McTague from Letterhead Fonts [www.letterheadfonts.com].

This tutorial is fairly basic and walks you through each step, but it is assumed that you



Step 3: Add dimension Go to *Select / Deselect* to deselect the text. Choose white as your foreground color and black for your background color. Go to *Filter / Sketch / Bas Relief...* and use the following: For *Detail* use 10, for *Smoothness* use 2. Make sure your *Light Direction* is set for *Bottom*.

Next, go to *Image / Adjust / Brightness/Contrast* and set the *Brightness* at +18 and the *Contrast* at +10. These settings may vary depending upon how dark your image is. Our goal is to sharpen up the image and help to define the dark and light areas better. After you have completed the above, you should have something like this image. If it is darker than this, you should probably go back and redo step 2 using lighter airbrush strokes before continuing.



Step 6: Add the top color Using the *Rectangular Marquee Tool* again, draw a box around the top portion of the letters starting at approximately the center of the letters where the gold color stops. Then go to *Select / Feather* and use 10 pixels. Go to *Image / Adjust / Hue/Saturation*. Check the *Colorize* box and use the following settings: *Hue*: 196, *Saturation*: 37, *Lightness*: +44. I then airbrushed certain portions of the *T* with white to soften the appearance a bit. Notice the blue area below the cross member has been lightened, as well as the ball at the beginning of the cross member at the far left.



Step 7: Create the background The hard part is over—now for the fun stuff. Holding the *Ctrl* key down, select the layer you duplicated in Step 1 containing the original white letters. This will create a mask around your letters. Go to *Select | Modify | Expand* and use 10 pixels. Using the eyedropper tool, select the brick red color from the *Swatch* palette. Go to *Edit | Fill* and choose *Foreground Color*. Delete the mask by going to *Select | Deselect* and then position this red outline behind the chrome letters. Now duplicate this layer for later use. Blur the red outline layer by going to *Filter | Blur | Gaussian Blur* and using 36.0 pixels.



Step 8: Create the black outline Select the red outline layer you duplicated in Step 7. Change it to black by going to *Image | Adjust | Brightness/Contrast* and sliding both values to -100.

Tip: You can also change the color of an object by going to *Image | Adjust | Hue/Saturation* and experimenting with the sliders until you see a color you like. This method is preferable to creating a mask and actually filling the object with different colors, since doing so will result in noticeably jagged edges.



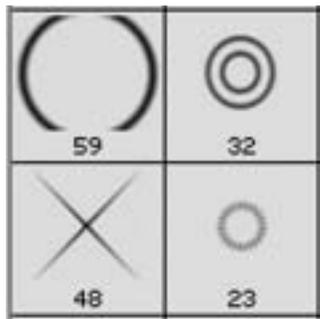
Step 10: Add the “hot spots” Finally, we add the sparkle of light at the lightest point on the lettering. Make a new layer. In your brushes palette, select the brush that looks like a four-pointed star. If you don't see it, you will have to load it. It's within the *Assorted Brushes* set, which is located in the Photoshop folder on your hard drive.

Using the *regular paintbrush* at 100%, click near the place you would like to place it. Don't worry if it's not exact—we put it on its own layer so that we can move it around later if necessary. You may have to click a few times in the same spot.

Now enlarge that by going to *Edit | Free Transform* and holding shift while dragging one of the corners. Enlarging it will blur it, which is what we want. Rotate it if necessary so that you can see the other points. When you are satisfied, double-click in the center—or hit the *Enter* key if it's too small.

Place these starbursts where the light would naturally hit the raised chrome letters. Our shadow is on the right, so our hotspot is naturally on the left at the point where the light would be the brightest. Be careful about putting too many of these things all over—doing so can ruin the effect.

Finally, save this file so you have a file with all these layers. Name it something like *truckstyleLAYERS.psd*. Flatten it, and then sharpen it by going to *Filter | Sharpen | Unsharp Mask*, using about 34%. Save it with a different name such as *truckstyleFLAT.psd*.



Use brush #48 in the Assorted Brushes set to add the hot spots.

There's more on www.signcraft.com

You can download the actual Photoshop images used in this article. Click *Features*, then choose “Download images from **Creating chrome lettering in Photoshop.**”



Step 9: Create the black drop shadow Duplicate the black outline you just created and position it to the right and down—behind the black outline and in front of the red background.

have a rudimentary knowledge of Photoshop and the basic tools. The steps may seem complicated at first, but that's only because I have tried to be very thorough. Don't let the numbers and settings overwhelm you. Once you've worked through all the steps, they will make more sense to you.

Experiment with these steps and try different values with different colors. You could create gold, and various shades of silver chrome as well.

The examples shown here were created using Photoshop 5.5 and 6. Version 4 users may find the menus and values different, but the technique is the same. I don't think you can do this stuff with any version earlier than 4.

Set your image resolution at 300 dpi. This is a good size to work with even if you are creating images that will ultimately be saved at a lower resolution, such as those used for the Web. You can always go down, but you can't go up. I've kicked myself many times for not creating an image at a higher resolution when I had to recreate it for another unforeseen purpose. In this example, you must work at 300 dpi for the values to work properly. •SC



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You can visit Letterhead Fonts at: www.letterheadfonts.com to see more typefaces like the one used in this tutorial. He can be contacted at [chuck@letterhead fonts.com](mailto:chuck@letterheadfonts.com).