



FAQ/Tech Tip Detail: Tinting Your Taillights, Alternate Procedure

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Answer: TAILLIGHT TINTING

The amber lenses of my taillights recently became etched by some kind of chemical. While I made sure to purchase and set aside a "new" set of lenses from a CCA member parting out a totaled car, the damaged lenses gave me a chance to try something I had been curious about: taillight tinting.

The existing CCA tutorial wasn't detailed enough to make me comfortable enough to try it, so I turned to the Corrado-l list. The following is a summary of what I learned from the many folks who helped me out.

THE GOAL

I decided to try to mimic the tinted-on-top look found the on A3 Jetta GLX. This left the brake and parking lights unchanged. I was nervous about blacking out the lenses entirely because I drive my car in Chicago traffic and didn't want to make the lights too hard to see. Of course, you can make your lenses darker. All it takes is more paint.

MATERIALS

4 cans Model Master 2949 transparent black window tint spray paint (available through hobby shops that sell radio controlled cars)

masking tape

newspaper or brown craft paper for masking

rubbing alcohol

Simple Green

Windex or other glass cleaner

Optional: Clear lacquer spray paint.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE PAINT

I used the Model Master paint instead of the major automotive brands of tint like Folia Tec or Nite

Shades because it cleans up with rubbing alcohol. All these products have a tendency to run and sag because they are so thin. With the Model Master paint, when you screw up (and you will screw up), you can simply remove the paint with the rubbing alcohol (which won't mar plastic) and start again. Plus, it's cheaper than the others. Four cans cost around \$16. I have seen Folia Tec advertised for almost \$30 a can, and the cans aren't much bigger.

REMOVING THE LIGHTS

The lights on each corner are held by three cadmium-plated nuts that are plainly visible through in the trunk. Remove the nuts, unclip the lights and push the lenses out from the inside. The lights on the hatch are also held in place by three nuts. You can reach two of the nuts through the spoiler access panel; the third is behind a rubber bumper on each corner of the hatch. Again, remove the nuts, unclip the lights and push the lenses out.

PREPARATION

Make sure the lenses are free of dirt, grease and wax. Do not use a petroleum-based degreaser as it could break down the plastic. I found straight Simple Green followed by a thorough rinse and then Windex worked great. Carefully mask the lenses to protect the areas you want unpainted, including the backs of the fixtures. Overspray has a way of creeping into everything and could find its way into the fixture. For the Jetta GLX look, I was careful to mask off the black plastic divider between the red and amber lenses. Once you have prepped the lenses to your satisfaction, you are ready to paint. Remember - do not touch any of the areas you degreased. The oils on your skin are enough to cause imperfections in the paint.

TIME TO PAINT

Paint in a very well ventilated area. This stuff reeks! Start by shaking the can vigorously for at least 2 minutes to make sure the dark pigment is thoroughly mixed throughout the can. To diminish the chance of drips, lay the lenses flat. (I used some wood blocks to level the curved corner lenses.) The most important thing to remember is to keep the recommended distance from the surface and keep the can moving using long, even strokes. Not doing so will spell disaster when the paint runs or thin spots occur. Sure, you can cover blemishes up with another layer of paint, but the flaws will shine right through when the taillights are on. My best results came from spraying three wet coats. (Follow the instructions on the can for the proper time between coats.) By a wet coat I mean that I used enough paint so that it was on the verge of running, but didn't run. I found the wet coats self-levelled, producing a glassy-smooth surface where the recommended "mist" coats produced a peculiar form or "orange peel" with the black pigment pooling in the low spots. Again, if this happens to you, wipe the lenses clean and start again. I did.

Note: if you want the lenses completely blacked out, you will need more than three coats.

CLEAR COAT (or, Do I Feel Lucky)

Once you have achieved your desired darkness and finish, you will have to decide whether your lenses need the added protection (especially from ultraviolet light) a clear coat provides. If you live someplace with blistering sunshine like Florida, California or the Southwest, you will probably have to risk your flawless results with a clearcoat. Living in Chicago and garaging my car, I skipped this step. I had achieved three perfect coats and I wasn't sure I had a fourth one in me. And the clearcoat does not clean up with rubbing alcohol. Instead, a month after I reinstalled the lenses

and the paint had dried "hard," I applied a coat of wax with UV protection. Hopefully that will be enough to keep my paint from fading.

FINISHING

Once the paint has dried, it's time to reinstall the lights. Just reverse the steps outlined in "Removing the Lights." Before you tighten the nuts, check the alignment of the lenses on the corners against those on the hatch. Once everything is lined up and looking good, tighten everything and check the lights. With the ignition key in the accessory position and the car in reverse, put the hazard lights on and a brick on the brake pedal. Is everything lit? Is everything bright enough? You don't want anyone rear-ending you. You also don't want Johnny Law writing you any nuisance tickets. If in doubt, find some brighter bulbs.

If you followed the instructions carefully, your lenses should look like something the factory might have made.



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