



nish and gold leaf being removed by a few passes of a sharp scraper.

To make the scraping go a bit easier, wipe the surface being scraped with denatured alcohol. It softens the varnish a bit allowing the scraper to work more quickly.

## REMOVING GOLD LEAF LETTERING (SCRAPING FOR SUCCESS)

BY  
SHERWOOD HEGGEN

**S**o you bought a new boat. You hunted far and wide for the boat of your dreams and you found it. But, oh, there is a problem when everything seemed so right. It has a name on the transom that is really unimaginative and dumb, and you want to change it. Also, the boat was licensed in a different state and you have to change the numbers.

If the letters and numbers were the vinyl stick-on type, it would be no big deal. But you discover that they are done in gold leaf and there is varnish over them. How do you get them off!?

Just sanding them off seems like a reasonable method, but typically there are a number of coats of varnish over them. You will be sanding for a long time. How about using a power sander to make the job go more quickly? That could be a good way to do that, but, because it goes so fast, it is likely that the gold leaf and the varnish will be gone before you realize it. Have you ever experienced the horror of sanding past the varnish to the wood. This leaves a bright spot in the finish and is a time consuming, difficult problem to fix. Having experienced sanding down to bare wood one too many times, I thought I would see what other method would get me through this task.

Short of stripping the finish off the wood, I came up with using a cabinet scraper. The scraper is normally used to smooth the surface of wood when making furniture. It will take off extremely thin shavings of wood when the scraper is properly sharpened. Why wouldn't it work to remove varnish? Well, I am here to tell you that it does.

Scrapers can be purchased at woodworking supply stores. When purchasing your scraper, ask the personnel in the store what tools are required for sharpening and how the sharpening process is done. A dull scraper is worthless, so learning to put a proper edge on the tool is vital.

Take a look at the picture below. It shows the var-

ly. Be careful not to use too much alcohol which makes the varnish too soft causing it to come off too easy.

Then, it is back to where we didn't want to be in the first place – bare wood. Take your time and only take off the outline paint and gold leaf. Once the paint and gold leaf is



scraped off, avoid passing over that spot again. When you think you have all of the lettering scraped off, wipe the area down with alcohol and inspect it closely with good lighting for little specks and spots that have been missed. They will be there and will show up really well under new varnish if they are not removed.

It takes some practice to get the knack, but as you learn, you will see it is an effective way to get the job done.

After the paint and gold leaf is all gone, sand the area with 400 grit paper to smooth the surface to make it ready for the new name and numbers. If you are feeling gutsy, do the gold leaf lettering yourself. The October 2004 Gadgets and Kinks describes the process. For the less brave, The October 2005 Gadgets and Kinks describes applying a vinyl peel-and-stick decal. Sign stores can make any style and size name and numbers with vinyl which makes the job easier.

Good luck with your project. I invite you to let me know what your concerns are with your restoration effort. Getting through the rough spots in a restoration is a lot easier if you can talk them through with someone who has been there before.

**I can be reached at [Heggensj@Centurytel.net](mailto:Heggensj@Centurytel.net)  
or 715-294-2415.**

**And finally, how does that saying go?**

**Oh yeah!**

**“Don't destroy it; restore it!”**

**Now, get out to the shop and get to work!**