

Fig. 1:
In the cartoon below, you can see that I've used shades of blue-green to color the tires. I've given the girl blonde hair to both offset the blue and draw the eye to that portion of the cartoon.



Fig. 2:
One of the few cartoons of mine where black is the predominant color. But I've tried to make up for it by keeping the rest of the cartoon light and airy.



Cartoons are generally colorful for lots of reasons. Most often it's because they are directed at children (note the bright packaging designs of candies that will catch a child's eye at the checkout counter) and color means fun, or just because bright colors match the mood of the artwork.

Almost immediately after I created my first small website and began displaying some of my cartoons, I was surprised at the number of emails commenting on my choice of colors. When I start out to create a cartoon and mentally visualize it, I generally have a good idea of what the final color scheme will be. As much of my work is displayed and used on the web, I try to confine myself to a web palette, leaning toward the primary colors (red, yellow and blue) as much as possible. Even within these three colors, I will tend to use the brighter shades when I have a choice. With those self-imposed guidelines, I'm practically guaranteed a cartoon that looks cheery, fun, and childlike.

In addition to my primary color choices, I take great pains to avoid using black and grays, except of course in the lineart portion of the cartoon. Because black can be so overpowering and kill the life of the cartoon, I avoid using it if at all possible and substitute a dark red or dark green instead. For example, usually my cartoon tires are shades of dark blue-green. (Fig 1) It works because it's close enough in value to black and people will easily accept oddball coloring in cartoons.

Keeping with any one color range can be useful in certain situations, but if you're not careful it can make the cartoon visually tiring. Unless I'm after a particular look and feel, if I find

myself adding too much of one color, say red, I'll look for ways to add yellow to offset it and give the eye a place to 'rest'. Along that line of thinking, you should avoid using colors in ways that create 'vibration'. For example, red surrounded by blue of a similar value can cause eyestrain and fatigue.

"Because black can be so overpowering and kill the life of the cartoon, I avoid using it if at all possible..."

As I begin to color, I start by first adding any colors that are specifically required such as skin tones, or clothes that need to match previous drawings, or colors that a client may have asked for. Once those colors are laid down, I have a basis for a relationship with the optional colors, so I can move on and make choices about the rest.

When coloring any object, whether it's a person's head or a transparent balloon, keep in mind that in addition to the base color, there is always a highlight and a shadow shade because they are three dimensional. A method I will often use for adding highlights and shadows is to create them on a separate layer with the blending mode set to screen or overlay. This allows me to see them as they will appear in the final version without making them immediately permanent, and with the added benefit of easily making adjustments before melding with the color layer below. ■