

Adding a Braided Mane & Forelock

This tutorial explains and illustrates the steps to add a braided mane and forelock onto Rio Rondo's "Valor-HP" or other resin sculptures.

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Tools You Will Need

- 320 grit sandpaper
- Rio Rondo's Carbide Scrapers or other seam-removing tool
- Rubbing Alcohol, Cotton Pads and Cotton Swabs, Paper Towels
- Small Shallow container to hold rubbing alcohol. (*An empty tuna can works well.*)
- Small Soft Flat paintbrush (filbert or bright) preferably used or worn (*no need to use a good brand-new brush for this*)
- Sculpting Tools/Modeling Stylus*
- Capoxio or other sculpting-type 2-part epoxy (*do not use standard liquid 2-part epoxy, as it will be too runny for this procedure.*)
- Embroidery Floss (*any color*)
- Super Glue, Duco Cement, Elmer's Glue
- Small scissors, Needlenose Pliers, Hobby Knife and sharp new blade
- Pencil

*A modeling stylus of almost any type will work fine . . . you can craft your own from a wooden craft stick and carve or sand it down to a tapered pointed shape. Or use a wooden dowel, a sharpened pencil tip, a small pointed stylus. Alternatively, try a piece of wire with one end sanded smooth. Just about anything will work for this that tapers down to a fine blunted/rounded point.

Getting Ready to Start

This operation may be performed before or after attaching the tail.

Prep the seams (if they have not been prepped already). Use a scraper to remove any flash or raised material, paying particular attention to the top of the neck and head areas. Follow up with the 320 grit sandpaper to smooth things out nicely.

Wipe the area around the forehead and neck with alcohol on a cotton pad, to remove any residual mold release from the casting process.

Assemble all of your tools and items, including Capoxio (or similar sculpting putty), modeling tools, alcohol, cotton pads, brush etc. and have them ready.

Plan the Braids

Using a pencil, mark out where the first and last braids will be on the crest of the horse's neck. A typical horse's mane hair ends about halfway down the withers. At the opposite end, the first braid should be placed next to where the bridle path ends... or about $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch behind the poll.

Now, make regular evenly-spaced marks between the end marks. Place the marks about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch apart to get an ample number of braids along the crest. Traditionally, it is said there should be 22 braids, however, that can be a bit difficult to achieve depending on the length of the neck and other factors. Any number from about 15 to 22 should look acceptable. Too few braids will look sparse. (The example horse here ended up with 21).

If you don't get the marks even or end up with too many or few, just rub the pencil marks in the middle off with your fingers and try again.



Make the Braids

Now that you know how many braids you will need (plus one, for the forelock) you know about how much braided thread you will need, by figuring 1 to 1¼ inch of braided thread per finished braid.

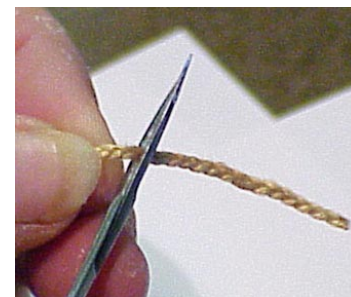
Take 3 pieces of the embroidery floss, each about 20 inches long, and tie them together with a knot at one end. Start doing a 3-plait braid, and braid the floss all the way to the end. Tie a knot at the end to secure it. Make a second braid of similar length. This should give you ample material to make all the braids you need, with some to spare in case you need some extras.



Secure the Braid Sections and Cut Them Apart

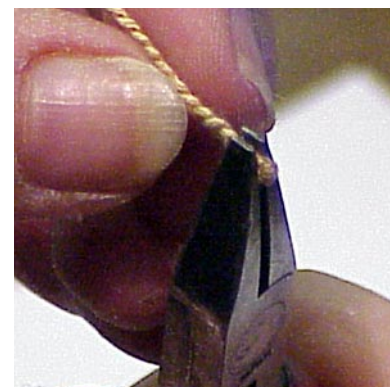
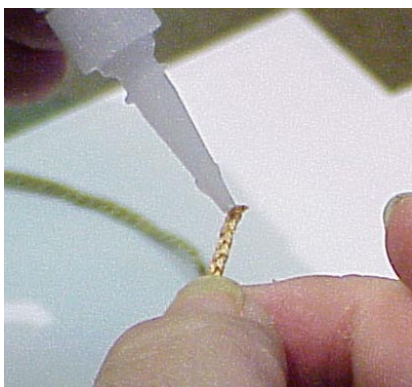
With super glue, put a “dot” of glue about every 1¼ inch. Make sure the dot of glue shows on both sides of the braid. Use as little glue as possible. This will anchor each small braid section to keep it from unravelling as you work. The glue will darken the thread a bit, making it easy to see where the dots were placed.

When the glue is dry, take your scissors and cut the thread apart, cutting right where each dot of glue is. Cut right in the middle of each dot so that there is hardened glue to either side of the cut.



Prepare the Braids

Taking one piece of the cut braid, apply a small dot of glue on one end. Carefully fold over the end and press it back onto the braid. The fold should be ⅛” or less. Do this for all the braided sections that you made. When one end of each braid has been folded under, crimp the glued end of each braid with the flat area of a pair of pliers to help create a less bulky appearance on the ends.



Prepare the Crest of the Neck

This operation is optional, however, it will help to create a more “inlaid” look so the braids do not “stick up” quite so far.

Take a scraper (the CS01 large rounded tip is best) and carefully scrape out a shallow “channel” where each pencil mark is. If you choose not to do this, I still would recommend doing so for the forelock braid at least. Each channel should be ⅛” deep, or a little less. Don't go too deep, or your braids will be sunken into the neck! If the channels are too shallow, it won't make much difference, but it won't hurt anything either.



Attaching the Forelock Braid

This is the easiest braid to attach, and the best one to get started with to learn the basic procedure. The basic steps for this braid are the same for all the rest of the braids.



Apply a little super glue into the lower part of the channel only.



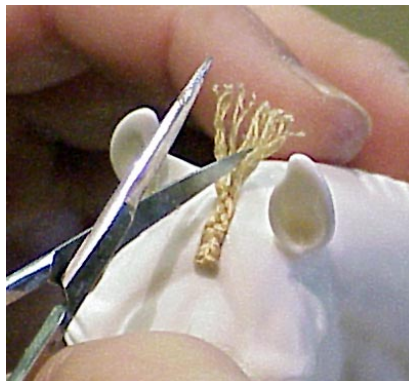
Press the braid into place, with the folded under section away from the poll.



The top end of the braid should not be anchored.



Snip off the glued tip of the braided section.



Separate the threads.



Press the threads down to check for length.



Trim the loose ends so they will rest just at the back end of the poll "knob".



Apply Glue under the loose threads**



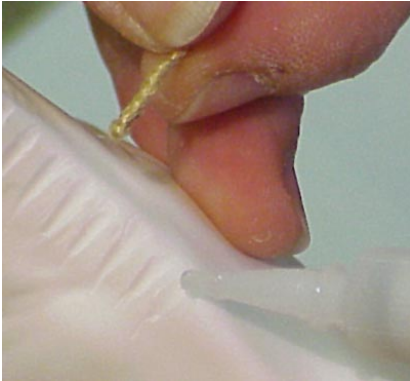
Press the threads down into place neatly.

****NOTE:** Super glue will anchor the braid the best, however it is the most difficult to work with and get things to look nice. If you prefer, you can use Duco Cement (or even Elmer's) to glue down the thread ends. Either glue will give you a little working time to shape and arrange the threads. This may be a more critical point for the mane, than just this forelock though. Also note, that other glues will take a little longer to dry or "set" so you will need to proceed a bit slower and more carefully to avoid "undoing" previous work.

Attaching the Neck Braids

The neck braids are going to be a little trickier for several reasons. One is that you will need to keep the length as well as the spacing of the braids even. Because of differences in width and contour along the crest of the neck, you will probably need to make a decision whether the braids will look best lined up from the horse's side view, or from the top. It will be difficult to impossible to (or maybe just a little lucky!) to get them to be perfectly even from both points of view. In either case, do the best you can and if you find a braid that is out of place, remove it and replace it with a new one.

I like to start at the wither end, however, you may start at the top of the neck if you prefer.



Apply glue to the lower portion of the channel.



Press the braid into place.



Apply glue to the next channel, and place the next braid.

NOTE:

There are two methods you can choose from to proceed here.

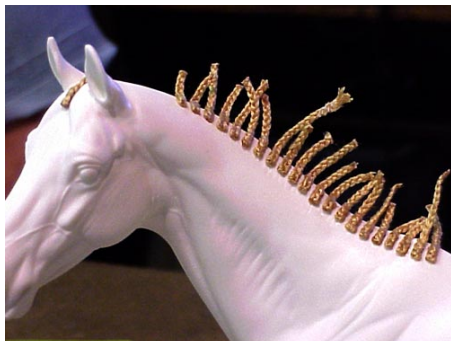
1. Lay down one braid, trim it, separate the threads, then glue them down evenly before adding the next braid.
2. Lay in all the braids, then trim them all, and glue down all the ends at the end.

Method #1 is more time consuming, but if you are using a glue such as Duco Cement or Elmer's to tack down the strings over the crest, you may be able to get the crest area done perfectly without needing additional touchup with Gapoxio later.

This tutorial will cover method #2.

Continue to attach each braid, only anchoring it at the folded end. Be careful to both space each braid as evenly as possible, as well as keeping them aligned along the neck.

Once all the braids have been placed and the glue has dried, snip off the glued tips from the loose ends. Carefully separate all the strings from each braid.



Apply all the braids as evenly as possible.



Snip off the glued ends.



Separate all the strands.



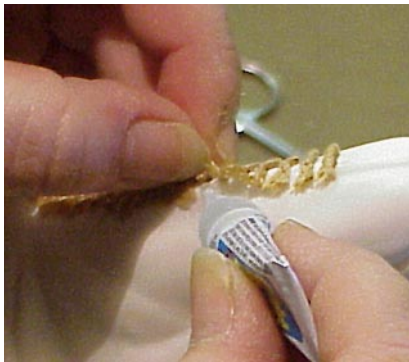
Trim the ends of the thread so they are even, but long enough to still cover across the crest of the neck.



Glue the Loose Strings over the Crest

With your fingers, push the loose strings down over the top of the crest and “eyeball” about where the hairs should actually end along the opposite side of the crest. Use scissors to trim and even up the “hairs”, leaving the strings just a little bit longer than they will need to be to go over the crest.

Apply a small bit of glue under each little “swatch” and press it down into place. Try to “fan out” the strings a bit so you get even coverage of strings across the top of the crest. This, of course, is much easier said than done (judging by the pictures below) so don't sweat it if it doesn't work. This operation may be easier to do with Duco Cement, and will allow you some time to arrange the hairs before the glue sets (unlike super glue). However, it will take longer while waiting for the Duco Cement to set and adhere firmly. Either way, if you are not able to get the strings to evenly cover the crest, the fix for that will be discussed next.



Apply glue under the strings.



Press the strings into place over the crest of the neck.



All the strings shown tacked down.



When the glue has dried, with a hobby knife, very carefully “shave” off any unevenness along the crest line and trim things up neatly. You can then take a bit of fine sandpaper and lightly sand along the edges to help flatten areas that stick up too much.



At this point, the “hairs” along the crest may or may not look particularly neat. If they do happen to look impressively nice, then you can probably consider the job “done” at this point. However, if the crest is uneven and gapped as it is in this example... move onto the next steps.

NOTE:

It is possible to glue braids on using just this method, over a finished paint job. However, I must strongly warn you that it is very easy to mess up (and mess up the paint job), especially if you have not had a lot of practice. If you are going to attempt to add surface braids (as opposed to sealing them under primer and painting them) you will need to know three things:

1. Make **SURE** the string is the color of the hair you plan to use.
2. **DO NOT** use superglue at any stage. Instead, use Duco Cement or Elmer's.
3. If you are using light colored string (white, flaxen, light grey, etc.), only use the Duco Cement to tack the braid down from the underside when initially applying each braid. Duco cement sets up faster and adheres better for this step. Use Elmer's (or other similar white glue) to tack down the separated strands over the crest. Duco will darken and yellow the string where white glue will not. Duco will work acceptably on darker string colors.

Finishing the Top of the Crest

Mix up a small bit of Gapoxio or similar sculpting epoxy putty, and roll it into a rope about 1/8" diameter or so.



Place the rope across the top of the crest, lightly anchoring it with your fingers at either end.



Using a tool, gently push the putty down and away from the braids



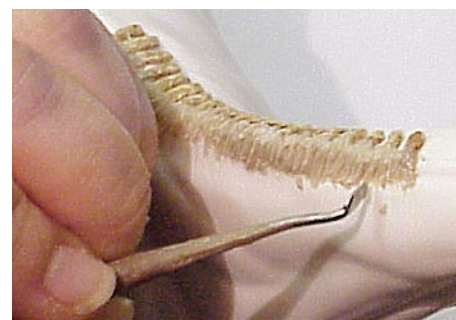
Shape the hairline along the crest, removing excess putty as you go.



The putty over the crest has been roughed out.



Blend the edge of the putty into each braid across the top.



Continue to shape and texture the putty along the hairline.



Dampen a brush in alcohol, lightly blot it then begin to gently smooth the texture along the crest.

Hey look! So real even a fly doesn't know the difference . . .



Finishing Up . . .

When you are satisfied with how things look, set the model aside in a warm area and allow it to cure. Cure time is about 1 hour at 75 degrees F . . . add 1 hour of time for each 5 degrees cooler the temperature is.

Don't forget to clean off your tools and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water!

Once all the putty is completely cured, you should proceed with any additional seam prepping and priming to prepare the horse for painting.



Here's a detail shot of the sculpting a long the crest before it has been completely smoothed. Note how the putty from each braid slightly "fans out" a bit going across the crest.

Adding a Sculpted Bridle Path

This is an optional step you can add if you choose. You can leave the existing bridle path as-is, or add a textured one as shown in the tutorial below. If you prefer, you can sand off the existing "ridge" in that area and smooth it first, although that is optional.

Be certain that all previously applied Gapoxio (or glue) is completely cured or dried.

Mix up a small bit of Gapoxio or similar sculpting epoxy putty, and roll it into a rope about 1/8" diameter or so, and about an inch long. Place this "bead" of putty over the bridle path area, and anchor it into place at each end.



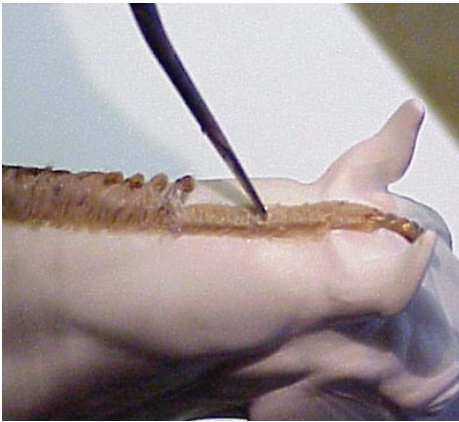
Apply the bead of putty.



Flatten it out across the top. Remove excess putty as needed.



Shape and form the edges to make a neat line on either side.



With the tip of a pointed stylus (or any pointy object, even a pencil-tip) stipple (make light dabbing motions) to put texture in along the top of the bridle path. Lightly add a little "hair texture" to the sides. Blend the ends of the putty into the mane and the forelock.

Lightly smooth the area with a brush dampened in alcohol.



Overhead view of the finished work . . .

Don't forget to clean your tools and fingers with alcohol, and allow the putty to completely cure.



Check Your Work and A Few Additional Tips

Once all the putty is completely cured, check your work. You can go in with scrapers and sandpaper if needed to trim up, smooth out or fix up anything that you feel may need it along the crest.

Once you are satisfied with the mane and forelock, check the sculpture over for any additional prepping that may be needed. When the model is fully prepped, and ready for priming, double check that all the braids are properly arranged and lined up. If possible, gently shift any braids you can or must until all looks right.

At this point, the head and neck area should be coated with primer. Be careful not to get the primer too heavy or thick, and don't let it run or sag! Set the piece aside for a few hours to cure, then primer the area over the braids once more and set it aside to cure. This should "lock" the braids in place.

Be careful when handling the horse around the braids and crest while continuing to prime the rest of the horse. Also be sure when painting to be careful when handling the horse about the neck area.

Don't forget to clean your tools with alcohol, and be sure to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water when you are done!



A Well-Coiffed Hunter or Jumper . . .

