

Road to Sublimation Success First Look: Epson's 24-inch SureColor F570 Sublimation Printer

By David Gross

For the last 20-plus years, inkjet-style printers have been responsible for producing the vast majority of sublimation transfers. Did you know that for many of those years, digital decorators had to purchase standard, off-the-shelf Epson inkjet printers (or a brand that used Epson's print head technology) and then retrofit them with aftermarket sublimation inks and paper?

Although sometimes a hassle, this was simply what decorators had to do to convert the units from standard office printers to something they weren't intended to be: specialized sublimation printers. As you can imagine, Epson and other printer manufacturers began to notice this popular digital decorating trend and wanted in on the action.

Eliminating the piecemeal approach, Epson introduced its SureColor F-Series family of turnkey wide-format sublimation printers (44- and 64-inch media widths) along with its own specialized sublimation ink and media. Later, Ricoh and Sawgrass began producing their Virtuoso family of turnkey desktop sublimation printers (8 1/2- and 13-inch media widths) along with their own specialized gel sublimation ink. Now, Epson has taken everything it knows about printers, print heads, and ink and built the newest and smallest member of the F-Series family: the SureColor F570. Let's take a quick spin with this new printer.

THE BUMPER-TO-BUMPER TOUR

The SureColor F570 is a four-color inkjet sublimation printer capable of printing on up to 24-inch-wide roll and cut sheet media with speed and quality.



Top: The Epson F570 with nothing installed or open. Bottom: The printer with the removable output stacking tray installed and paper loaded in the auto-sheet feeder.
ALL IMAGES COURTESY DAVID GROSS



David Gross is the president of Condé Systems, Inc. For more than 25 years he has developed and built the Mobile, Alabama based company into the premier source for printers, substrates, and consumables serving the graphic art, photography, prepress, and desktop publishing industries.

The heart of the F570 is a new 1.33-inch PrecisionCore micro-TFP print head with 800 nozzles per color. A “small” wide-format printer, the F570 weighs 67 pounds and has a 38.2-inch-wide-by-22.7-inch-deep footprint.

For countertop use, you’ll need clearance above the printer to load any roll or cut sheet media. For those that lack counter space or need mobility, an optional printer stand is also available.

Instead of traditional cartridges, the F570 uses the Epson EcoTank bulk ink system. Ink is supplied in small bottles and is poured directly into the reservoir (more on that later). The eco tank system has clear windows to allow you to see the actual ink levels for the four colors.

GETTING READY FOR THE ROAD

Printer setup is pretty straightforward. Once you’ve removed the printer from the packing materials, simply fill the ink tanks with Epson UltraChrome DS ink. Designed to prevent you from accidentally putting the wrong ink into the wrong tank, the 140-ml ink bottles also feature Epson’s exclusive auto-stop technology for refills.

Once powered on, the printer has an LCD touch screen front panel that does a good job of guiding you through setup (takes about one hour to complete). After ink loading, Epson recommends you top off the ink tanks with the remainder of ink in the 140-ml bottles.

Next is software installation. You will need to download the drivers and manuals from Epson’s website. Once installed, I recommend going into the driver and checking for updates. The final step before printing is to load paper into the printer.

When it comes to print driver settings, Epson makes printing simple. All you need to do is choose a paper size/source and then select either the rigid or textile setting (the driver also supports using third-party color profiles). When testing, I printed from traditional graphics software programs such as Photoshop, Illustrator, and CorelDRAW and pressed those transfers onto a variety of common substrates such as ChromaLuxe metal, Vapor wearables, and ColorLyte glass using standard transfer techniques. I was pleased with the color and quality.

It is likely that new profiles will optimize color and quality on particular substrates, so stay in touch with companies for future information.



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The printer’s ink levels are visible through windows in high-capacity ink tanks.



EPSON ULTRACHROME DS INKS: THE FUEL OF SUBLIMATION

The F570, like most of the other F-Series printers, is a four-color (CMYK) printer. One of the interesting carry-overs from its large siblings is the bulk ink feature. As mentioned before, Epson supplies ink in 140-ml bottles that is loaded into the ink reservoir via a leak-proof valve. A front view window provides ink level status.

Epson developed this ink specifically for its PrecisionCore TFP print heads, which, according to Epson, significantly increases print head life. The Epson inks are Eco Passport certified by Oeko-Tex (an international standard for assuring textile safety for adults and children) and are also AZO certified to be free of aryl amines.

SUBLIMATION RELEASE PAPER

I suspect that most sublimation release papers will work just fine with the F570. Keep in mind that with roll media, the roll must have a 2-inch core (instead of the more common 3-inch core) and it must not have an overall diameter greater than 4.3 inches for the cover to close (this will limit the length of the roll to about 100 feet of paper). Epson provides both roll and cut

sheet papers for this printer and they work well. With time and experience, we will be able to figure out which papers work best.

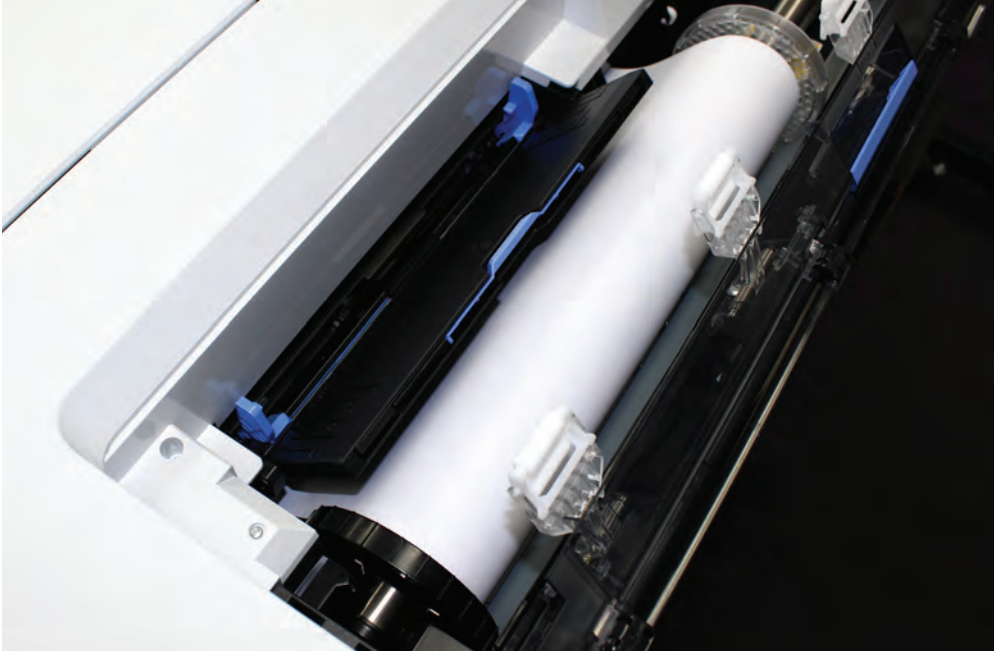
Note: Sublimation paper types generally fall into five categories:

1. Minimal dot gain for hard substrates
2. Superior release for soft substrates
3. Tack paper to reduce ghosting on soft substrates
4. Specially coated hybrid sublimation/transfer papers for cotton
5. Direct-print specialty substrates such as Siser's EasySubli and FOREVER's Subli-Flex heat transfer materials

For high humidity environments, I recommend storing your sublimation papers in an airtight container. Roll paper can actually absorb humidity and swell, causing a nasty and sometimes fatal head strike (head strikes occur when the print head touches the paper while printing).

One of the strongest points of this new printer is its flexible paper handling from three paper sources: roll, auto-sheet feeder, and manual sheet feeder. For roll paper, the printer supports roll widths from 8.3 to 24.4 inches. The auto-sheet feeder holds up to 50 sheets of 8.3-by-11-inch to

An image of roll paper installed in the roll media feeder. Note that the auto-sheet feeder's guide is in the closed position so that you can better see the roll.



The auto-sheet feeder without paper loaded in it. Note that the auto-sheet feeder is located in front of the installed roll of paper.

11.7-by-17-inch cut sheet paper, and (with the roll media removed) up to 24.4-inch-wide custom cut sheets can be fed through the manual sheet feeder.

Like its bigger siblings, the F570 supports roll media with horizontal cutter as its primary paper source. Using smaller 2-inch core roll paper (bigger F-series printers use 3-inch cores), you can load rolls up to a diameter of 4.3 inches. The printer supports narrow widths of rolls, too. Loading a narrower width roll is valuable for decorating smaller substrates since it reduces paper waste and the labor costs associated with trimming individual transfers. The printer can seamlessly switch back and forth from the auto-sheet feeder and roll paper without unloading the roll paper.

CONNECTIVITY, WARRANTY, AND SUPPORT

Epson breaks new ground by making this the first F-series printer to include Wi-Fi. Even so, I recommend sticking with either USB or ethernet since I sometimes see Wi-Fi printers experience frequent pauses during printing that can cause horizontal banding. Ethernet is the choice if you need to share the printer among multiple users.

The F570 has a one-year warranty. An extended preferred plus service plan is available that provides an additional year of coverage.

This printer includes drivers for both Mac and Windows. Epson has simplified the menu options since this is, of course, a sublimation-only printer. Epson provides default hard and soft substrate profiles with the ability for folks like us to add additional profiles to better dial-in substrates. Wasatch, a well-respected RIP manufacturer, also provides support and will likely be the go-to option to optimize print productivity and color management using CMYK profiles.

At first glance, you might assume that a larger heat press is needed to take advantage of the larger print size. With this new printer, however, you can continue to use your existing press for smaller items or upgrade to a larger press to take advantage of its 24-inch capability.

For basic sublimation, I recommend the Geo Knight DK20S (a 16-by-20-inch manual swing-away press) or larger Geo Knight DK25S (a 20-by-25-inch manual swing-away press). Keep in mind that larger heat presses greatly increase the number of larger products you'll be able to decorate.



!! The F570 is a money-making machine. !!



The top images represent various stages of installing ink. The F570, like most of the other F-Series printers, is a four-color (CMYK) printer.



Epson supplies ink in 140-ml bottles that is loaded into the ink reservoir via a leak-proof valve.

Try This! Learn how to sublimate an all-around image to a shot glass using the SubliShrink shrink wrap film sleeve:
<http://aemag.ly/subshot>.

As an additional match for the F570, I suggest the new Geo Knight DK32AP (a 26-by-32-inch air-operated drawer press). This heavy-duty mid-format press enables digital decorators to produce larger substrates such as metal, wood, MDF, floor mats, car mats, neck ties, lanyards, and more.

PRESSING SHIRTS AND SOFT SUBSTRATES

One of the most frustrating aspects of producing shirts is the paper marks left behind after pressing. Caused by the hard edge of the printed transfer being pressed into hot fabric, decorators use a variety of time-consuming production techniques to minimize it.

Using 24-inch paper, you can print a transfer that is larger than the platen of your press, ensuring that none of the transfer paper's edges touch the shirt.

This is how we have been pressing for decades with large printers and heat presses. This is perhaps the most interesting unintended consequence of this new printer.

A DRINKWARE MACHINE

The F570 is a money-making machine. Add SubliShrink shrink wrap film sleeve technology and an inexpensive convection oven and you'll have a drinkware money-making machine. To use, simply insert a blank sublimatable product with attached transfer into a film sleeve, shrink the film sleeve with a heat gun to conform to the product's shape, and then place it into a convection oven for that product's appropriate temperature and time settings. Using SubliShrink makes shot glasses easy to do, and you'll get full, all-around images that will impress you and your customers.

FINAL NOTE

Sublimation decorating has been my passion for the last 29 years. As I teach around the country, I have a few bits of advice for traveling on the road to sublimation success.

First, become an advocate of documentation — it's the best way to master any field. Document your questions, successes, and failures. Second, find an expert partner that offers a broad variety of products and provides superior technical support. Third, push yourself out of your comfort zone by expanding your product offerings and marketing efforts. And be sure to attend THE NBM SHOW and all the classes it features...

I look forward to seeing you there.

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