

## From Alps to IColor: Full Color White Waterslide Decals



The Modern ALPS Printer Replacement for Decals & Waterslides: Why the iColor 650 Wins!

If you've been printing decals or waterslides for any length of time, you already know how legendary the ALPS MicroDry printers were. They could print **opaque white**, **metallics**, and finely detailed graphics on decal paper – something ordinary inkjet and laser printers simply couldn't do. But ALPS printers are long discontinued, parts are scarce, and ribbons get more expensive every year. At some point, "keeping the old ALPS alive" stops being charming and starts being a liability for your hobby or business.

This is where the **UNINET iColor 650 white toner printer** steps in. It's a modern, supported, high-resolution white toner system that can print directly onto media for **custom decals, waterslide-style transfers, labels, hard surfaces, and apparel** – and it's available today with full support and supplies.

This guide walks through:

- Why ALPS MicroDry printers were so good for decal work
  - What's gone wrong with relying on them in 2026 and beyond
  - What to look for in a **true ALPS printer replacement**
  - How the **iColor 650** matches – and in many ways beats – ALPS for decals and waterslide transfers
  - Exactly what to buy (with links) and a simple workflow to get you printing
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## Why ALPS MicroDry Printers Became the Decal Gold Standard



For years, ALPS MicroDry printers were *the* answer to one critical problem: **how do you print solid white and metallics onto clear decal paper?**

What made ALPS special

- **Wax/resin MicroDry ribbons**  
ALPS used a thermal transfer system with colored wax/resin ribbons, not liquid ink. This lets them lay down opaque colors on a wide variety of media.
- **White & metallic spot colors**  
In addition to CMYK, ALPS offered spot cartridges for **white, metallic silver, metallic gold**, and other special colors – essential for realistic logos, railroads, race cars, guitar headstocks, and more.
- **True white printing on clear film**  
Because most printers assume white media and don't have white ink, they simply can't print white onto clear waterslide or decal film. ALPS could, and decal makers took full advantage.
- **Good adhesion to decal film**  
Hobbyists found ALPS ink less prone to flaking and smearing on decal film compared to early laser printers, which often had granular toner that cracked when the decal was bent.

For a long time, if you wanted **home-made waterslide decals with white**, an ALPS MicroDry printer was the holy grail.

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## The Problem with ALPS Printers Today



As good as ALPS printers were, they're now a dead platform.

Discontinued hardware and consumables

- ALPS stopped supporting MicroDry printers outside Japan in 2007, and the last MicroDry model, the **MD-5500**, ceased sales in **2010** with no successor planned.
- ALPS scheduled an end to MicroDry consumable production in **2015**, meaning any new ribbons on the market are from remaining stock or third-party sources.

Specialist suppliers and hobby stores still offer some cartridges, but you'll see **limited stock and frequent "out of stock" notices**, especially on white and metallics.

Add in aging electronics, obscure drivers, and the need for old operating systems, and it becomes clear: **building your decal workflow on ALPS is a risky bet.**

## Technical limits on decal printing

Even when you *do* keep an ALPS running, there are real constraints when printing on decal paper:

- Even though it technically can print full color. Most professional printers limit images to **10 solid colors** (black, white, any 2 color combo if CMYK, plus metallic gold and silver)
- Because thick decal stock must pass through the printer multiple times, ALPS experts recommend a maximum of **3 colors (or about 2 overlaid layers)** on a sheet to avoid micro-scratching and ink damage.
- Halftones and blends print with a **coarse 60 lpi screen**, which can look grainy on small decals compared to the micro-detail possible on a modern 1200 dpi output (both horizontal and vertical) on the IColor 650.

On top of that, ALPS inks aren't UV-resistant and can fade quickly outdoors unless you add extra clear coats.

So even if your ALPS still works, it doesn't match what a modern white-toner system can do.

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## What a True ALPS Printer Replacement Needs to Do

If you're replacing an ALPS, you're not just buying "another printer." You need a system that can:

1. **Print solid, opaque white** that can block out a dark substrate and allow for vibrant full color decals. (IColor 560 makes for a good light to medium color substrate decal printer, but can't match the opacity of white)
2. **Handle waterslide / decal-style media** for small, detailed graphics
3. **Match or exceed ALPS detail and registration** (think 1200 × 1200 dpi, not 600 dpi)
4. **Offer robust supplies and support** you can count on for years
5. Be able to print on **more than just decals** – apparel, hard surfaces, labels, etc., so the investment pays you back

Modern **white toner printers** are built for exactly this kind of work – full-color + white images transferred to textiles, wood, plastic, candles, glass, and more.

Among them, the **UNINET IColor 650** stands out as the most ALPS-like replacement, with far more flexibility.

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## Meet the IColor 650 White Toner Printer – A Modern ALPS Replacement



The **UNINET IColor 650** is a dedicated **white toner transfer printer** designed for short-run production of garments, hard surfaces, marketing materials – and most importantly for someone coming from an ALPS, **waterslide-style decals**.

Key specs that matter for decal work

- **1200 × 1200 dpi resolution** for crisp, fine detail – significantly higher than many competing white toner systems.
- **White Overprint and White Underprint** modes in one printer, so you can:
  - Print **white behind color** for clear or dark media (underprint)
  - Print **white on top** for specialty effects (overprint)
- **LED + low-temperature fusing**, which handles a wide range of transfer media and reduces the risk of warping or damaging films.
- **A3 / tabloid media support** (up to 11.8" × 52" for apparel and banners). The decal paper we provide is A4 size with a blue backing and A3 size with a white backing.
- **High-yield toners** – standard CMYK and white cartridges rated around **10,000 pages at 5% coverage**, with a 10,000-page fluorescent white included in some kits.

Uninet's own documentation explicitly calls out **waterslide decals** as a target application for the IColor 650, alongside candles, labels, stickers, window clings, and more.

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## How the IColor 650 Replaces – and Beats – ALPS for Decals & Waterslides

### 1. True white, but with modern control.

Like ALPS, the IColor 650 lets you print **solid, opaque white** onto clear film and dark surfaces. The difference is how that white is controlled:

- The **IColor ProRIP** software automatically builds a white underbase, adjusts density, and even limits white only to where it's actually needed, reducing toner usage and making transfers feel thinner and more flexible.
- You can store presets for different jobs and images where you've made custom changes in the RIP making repeat orders consistent.

With ALPS, multi-pass white layering is a juggling act; with the IColor 650, white is just part of the normal workflow.

### 2. Single-pass registration vs. multi-pass risk

ALPS often requires **multiple passes through the printer** to build up colors and overlays, especially when combining white and spot colors, which increases the risk of mis-registration and ink scratching on stiff decal paper.

The IColor 650:

- Prints CMYK and white **in one pass**. Completely eliminating ruined prints due to registration issues caused by misalignments from multiple print passes.
- Maintains tight alignment between color and white layers with a built-in auto-registration calibration.
- Reduces physical handling of the sheet, which is especially important on delicate films and waterslide media

You get **simpler setups, fewer test prints, and more predictable results**.

### 3. Higher resolution and smoother gradients

For very small text and fine detail (legible text on sponsor logos placed onto matchbox cars!), 1200 × 1200 dpi output from the IColor 650 produces smoother edges and gradients than ALPS' coarse screening on multi-color jobs.

If you ever struggled with grainy halftones or “dotty” blends from your ALPS, you'll notice the jump immediately.

### 4. A platform that's still being made and supported

Uninet is actively producing the IColor 650 and its consumables, with:

- Ongoing firmware and software support
- Official papers and media with ICC profiles

- A documented roadmap and training resources like the **White Toner Master Class** and **White Toner Notebook**.

Instead of chasing dated drivers and second-hand parts, you're buying into a **current ecosystem** with real support and a growing community of hobbyists and professionals.

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Pairing the IColor 650 with Blue-Backed Waterslide-Style Media

ALPS users are often used to **blue backed waterslide decal paper** – that blue carrier sheet makes white designs easy to see and trim, and it behaves beautifully for model work.

**IColor AquaClear Decal Paper for Hard Surfaces**, which includes an **A4 8.27" × 11.69" "Blue Backing" variant** is specifically designed to be:

- **Printed with your IColor printer**
- **Trimmed, dipped in water, and slid into place**
- Used on **candles, ceramic, glass, plastic and other hard surfaces** where a heat press isn't practical

**Where to buy the Aquaclear media:**

- **IColor AquaClear Decal Paper for Hard Surfaces**  
<https://www.icolorprint.com/store/products?search=aquaclear>
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The IColor 650 is offered for sale alone, or with different bundle options depending on your needs.

The **Uninet IColor 650 White Toner Printer** which is ideal if you're moving from ALPS and want a complete, supported setup.

All bundles include:

- The **IColor 650 transfer printer**
- CMYW toner and drum cartridges, plus an extra black for full **CMYK** printing
- **IColor ProRIP** and **iColor SmartCUT** software
- The **White Toner Master Class training** and **White Toner Beginners Notebook**
- **Lifetime support** and a **2-year warranty** on the printer

**Where to buy the IColor 650:**

<https://www.icolorprint.com/store/products?search=icp650ws>

Some bundles include a heat press and textile transfer papers for users who wish to use the printer for a variety of other purposes, such as creating textile and hard surface transfers. Optional dye sublimation, fluorescent, security, gold, silver and clear toner cartridge kits are also available

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## A Simple Workflow: From Artwork to Waterslide-Style Decal with the IColor 650

Here's how a typical "ALPS-style" decal job would look once you've switched to the IColor 650 and AquaClear Blue Backing.

### 1. Prepare your artwork

- Create your design in vector or high-resolution bitmap form.
- For the cleanest edges on tiny lettering, work in vector when possible (Illustrator, CorelDRAW, Affinity Designer, etc.) - then export at 300DPI.

### 2. Set up white in the IColor ProRIP software

- Enable **White Underprint** so the RIP automatically lays white behind your color artwork on the clear film.
- Import your art into **IColor ProRIP**.
- Choose a preset for **waterslide / hard surface media** or create one based on AquaClear.

This gives you ALPS-style opaque colors on clear media, but with much finer control.

### 3. Print onto AquaClear (Blue Backing)

- Load **IColor AquaClear Decal Paper for Hard Surfaces – A4 Blue Backing** into the printer.
- Print your sheet at 1200 × 1200 dpi for maximum detail.
- Let the sheet cool and handle it by the edges.

### 4. Trim, soak, and slide

Just like a traditional waterslide:

1. Rough-cut the decal
2. Soak in water until the decal slides on the backing
3. Position the decal on your model, tumbler, candle, glass, or other surface
4. Gently squeegee out excess water and air

Because you've printed a solid white underbase, colors will stay vibrant even on dark or colored substrates.

### 5. Seal (if required)

Depending on the surface and handling expectations:

- For **models and display pieces**, a clearcoat (lacquer, acrylic, or polyurethane compatible with your substrate) can protect the transfer.
- For **hard-use items** (mugs, daily-use tumblers, etc.), consider pairing the IColor 650 with **heat-applied hard surface media** for a more permanent finish, as recommended by Uninet.

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## Why the IColor 650 Is the Best ALPS Printer Alternative Today

If you've been waiting for a **real ALPS printer replacement** – something that prints opaque white on clear film, handles detailed decal work, and is still properly supported – the **IColor 650 checks all the boxes**:

- **True white and specialty colors** (with optional fluorescent, sublimation, and metallic toners)
- **High-resolution 1200 dpi output** that holds tiny text and fine detail beautifully
- **Built-in white overprint/underprint workflows** through ProRIP
- **Proven compatibility with waterslide-style media**, including AquaClear Blue Backing
- **Active manufacturing, firmware, and consumable support**, plus structured training for white toner printing

Instead of nursing along a discontinued ALPS with harder-and-harder-to-find ribbons, you can move to a platform built for where decal and transfer printing are going – not where they used to be.

From there, you can treat the IColor 650 as what it really is: a **modern, powerful, ALPS-class decal printer** that also opens the door to apparel, signage, and many more profit-friendly applications.