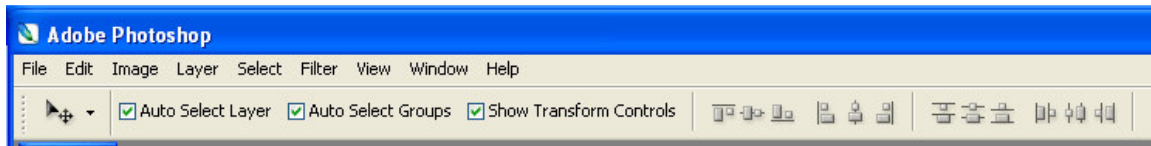# Selection Tools
Part 5 - Move Tool

By Marty Kesselman

June 8, 2009

The move tool is a fundamental tool to Photoshop and is used for many tasks. It is a move tool, a transform tool, and an alignment tool.

1- It can move layers from one image to another.
2- Move images from one to include in another (for example a sky).
3- Move selection contents from one location to another.
4- And much more.

I usually leave all check boxes checked. When you activate the move tool (keyboard shortcut "V"), you get the option bar shown above.
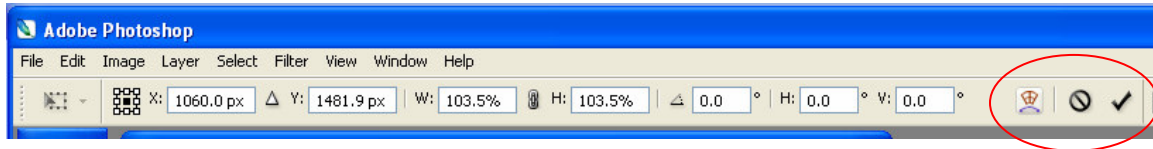
Auto select layer: When checked it will select a layer that the pixels in the image are located on. This is useful when you have placed selected areas of an image and placed them on separate layers to establish a composite or simply to work on them separately. Sometimes keeping this checked will cause an unintended layer that has the pixels you pointed at activated. Under those situations you must un-check this option and activate the layer you want to affect with the move tool.

Auto Select Groups: The move tool can move multiple layers that are grouped or are simply activated together by ctl+clicking each layer of interest. The move tool will then move the contents of all the active/grouped/linked layers. The link that locks a mask to a layer will move with the layer. You can release the link by clicking it if you want to separate the pixel information from the mask. This is not a usual operation and you must be aware of what you are doing when you attempt this type of operation.

Show Transform Controls: With this box checked, the pixel area of an active layer will be outlined by activating the move tool. Move handles will be presented at the corners and center of each side. If you un-check this box, the outline and move handles will be removed.
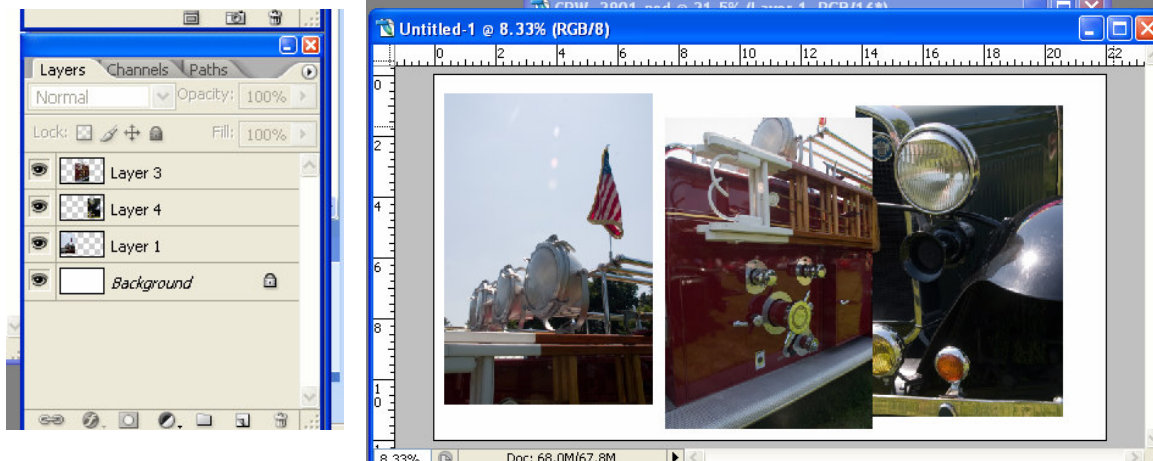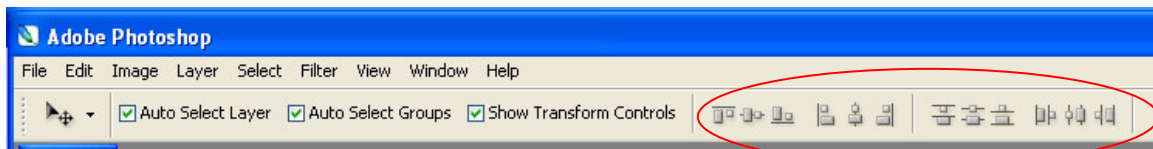
When you "grab" (hold the left mouse key down while over a control handle) you can drag the handle to transform/distort the image. Holding the "shift" key while dragging a corner handle will change the image size and maintain the aspect ratio.

When you start to transform an image (left click on a handle), the "transform" tool bar appears.
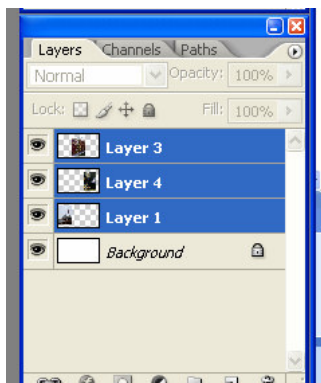

The left icon in the group circled will switch between "free transform" and "warp". The center icon will "cancel" the action, and the check icon will accept the action.

Align and Distribute layers: The move tool is useful to align and distribute layers when you are creating a montage of images.
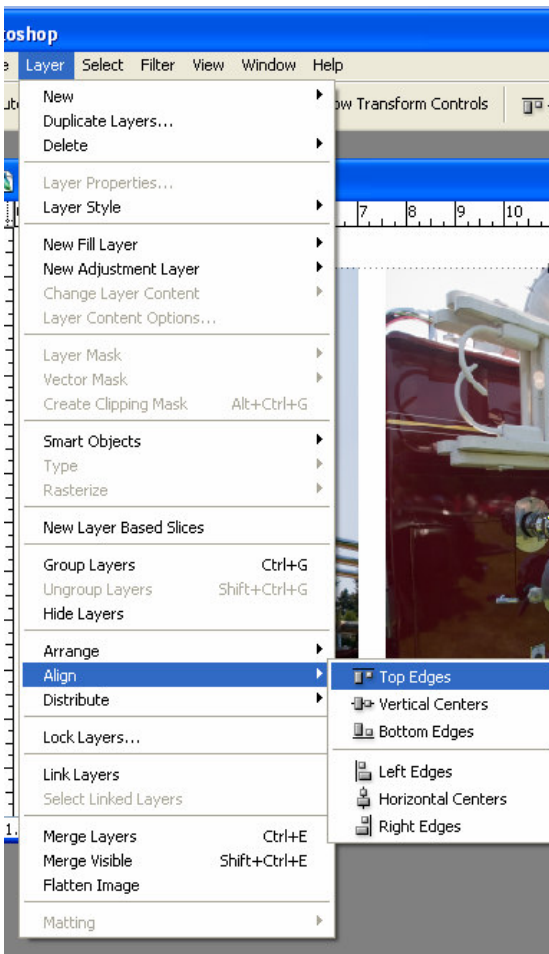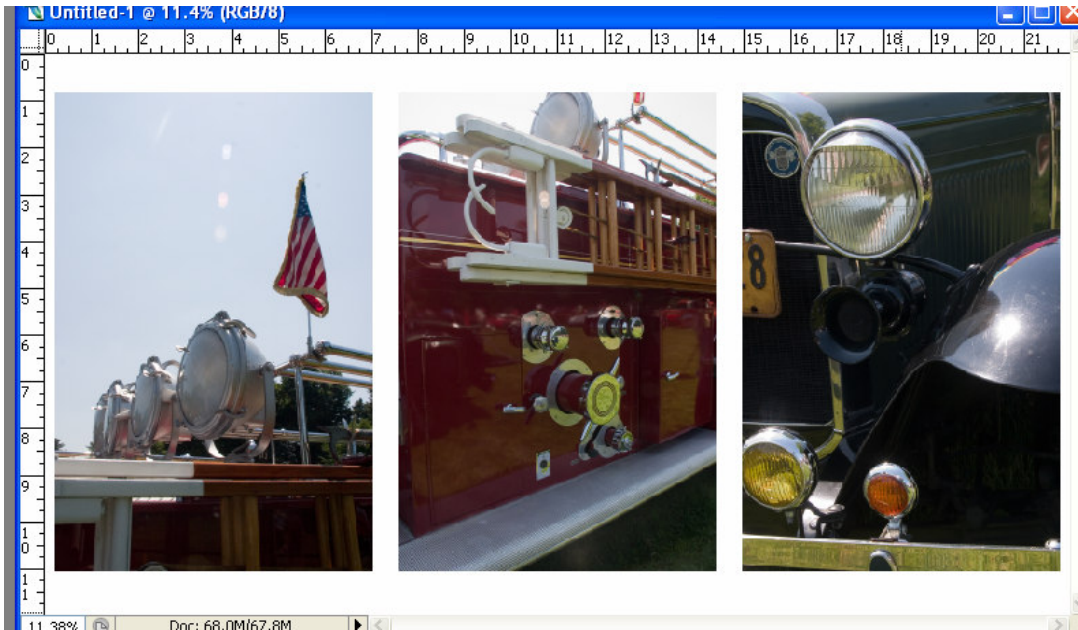

After creating a canvas large enough to accommodate three images, the images were dragged to the canvas using the "move" tool. They were repositioned crudely. To align them.   The alignment buttons are readily used.

By ctl+clicking the three separate image layers, they are all made active.

1- By clicking on a vertical alignment button, you can align the top, center or bottom.
2- By clicking on a Distribute Horizontal button, you can distribute your image layers.
3- The entire group of three images will have a bounding box and you can move the group together to center it.
4- Use the arrow keys for fine motion.

The menu selection of the alignment controls, when you have activated a group of layers with pixels, can also be used (layer>align>top, center, bottom) or (layer>distribute> top, center, bottom).