

Roden 1:48 D.H.4 (Dayton-Wright-Built)

by John Newcome

Scale: 1:48

Company: Roden

Price: \$36.99

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Website: Roden

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Scale Model Kits

The Airco D.H.4 was initially developed in 1916 as a British Bomber. It entered service in 1917 as a Day Bomber and provided for a crew of two consisting of a pilot and observer.

Armament was comprised of one Vickers gun mounted in the nose and a Lewis machine gun mounted on a scarf ring operated by the observer. US-built machines had twin Marlin machine guns in the nose to replace the single Vickers gun on British-built examples.

When the United States entered the war in April 1917, total US air strength consisted of 132 obsolete aircraft. The United States Signal Corps, under the direction of Col. R.C. Bolling, evaluated several Allied aircraft then in service. The D.H.4 was selected for license production due to its relatively simple construction and its perceived adaptability to mass production.



The license-built D.H.4 was the only American-built aircraft to see combat in WW1. After the Armistice, the D.H.4 continued to serve in military and civilian roles until 1932. The American D.H.4s were produced by Dayton-Wright Co. of Dayton Ohio, the Fisher Body Division of General Motors, Standard Aircraft Corporation. Total American production was 4,346 units. Of these, less than 2,000 actually reached combat.

The American D.H.4 version, also known as the "Liberty Plane", differed from the British version in a number of key aspects. First, the fuel tank was relocated forward of the pilot. In the British version, the fuel tank was located between the pilot and observer. Experience

had shown that this created a significant hazard in the event of a crash with the weight of the fuel tank crushing the pilot. Another significant change was the use of the American Liberty engine in place of the British Rolls-Royce.

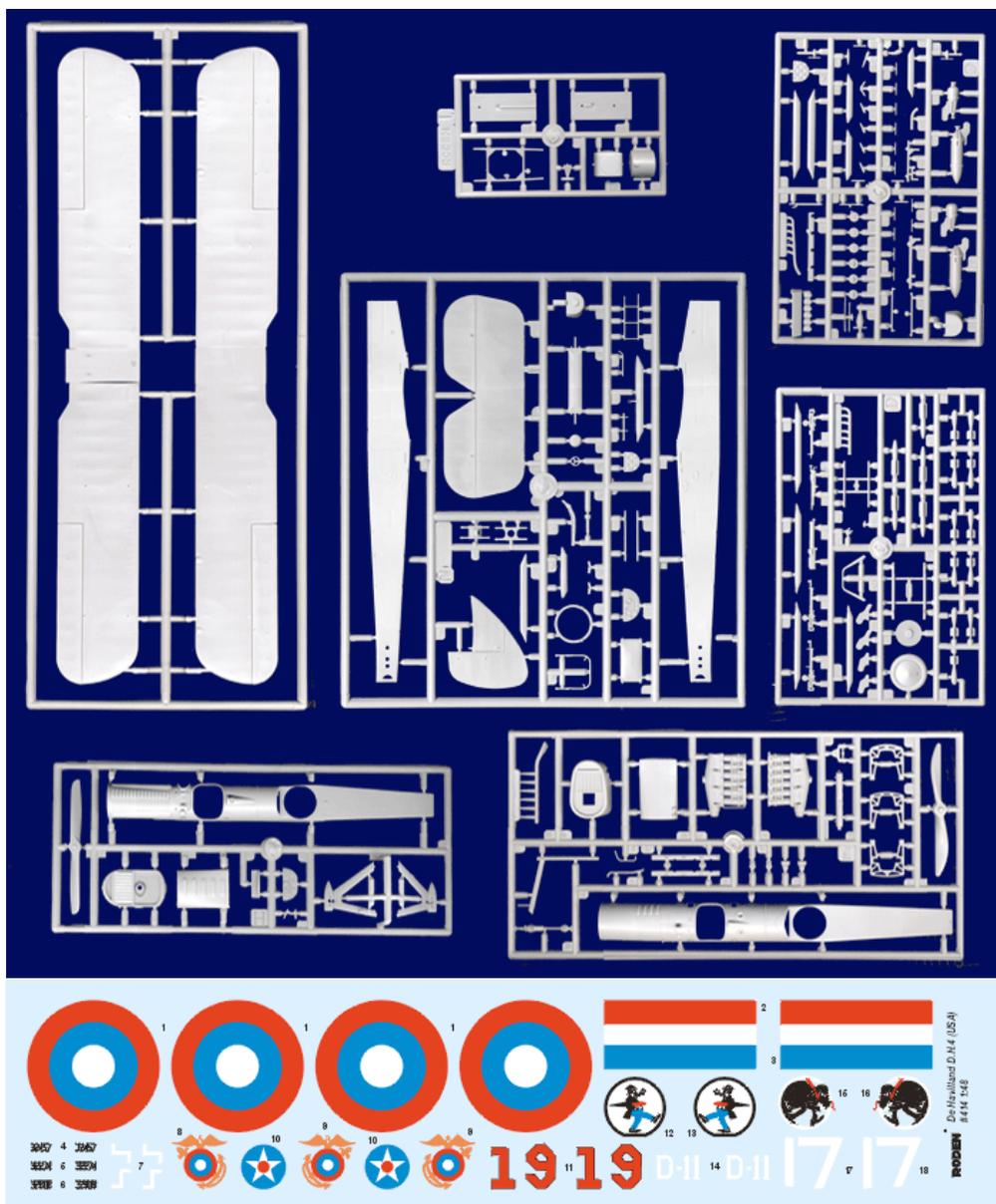
After the war, American D.H.4s served a variety of roles including transport, ambulance and Patrol of the Mexican border. D.H.4s were also extensively utilized by the United States Postal Service as Mail Carriers.

This latest release is a welcome addition to the WW1 modeler or enthusiast. It provides them with the opportunity to build either a military or civilian version of the D.H.4. With

some scratchbuilding and reference research, a modeler should be able to produce a D.H.4M Mail Carrier version as well as the D.H.4 which completed the first flight from New York to Nome, Alaska in 1920.

The kit is molded in light grey styrene on eight sprues with a total of 191 parts. This is not a weekend build by any means. All parts are crisp and well molded. Interior detail of the fuselage framing is fairly represented.

A fastidious modeler, on the other hand, may want to scratch build some of the framing and bracing wires. The cockpits are located in open view behind the upper wing so the additional work would not go unnoticed. The detail on the Liberty engines is somewhat generic and soft. Additional effort is definitely needed here if the model is to be displayed with the cowling removed. I believe Aeroclub used to offer a metal Liberty. These may be difficult to obtain since Aeroclub is no longer in business. The Aeroclub Liberty therefore, may need to be an eBay or swap meet find. At a minimum, the modeler should consider installing a wiring harness and ignition wires. There are a number of good reference photos available on the Internet of the Liberty.



While not the kind of kit suitable for a quick build, construction should be fairly straight forward. As with most biplanes, the major challenge in building this kit will be in attaching the top wing. Using a jig to assure proper alignment of the wings with the fuselage will pay dividends during the rigging stage. The D.H.4 has a plethora of rigging that needs

to be done. Both the flying and landing wires are doubled. At 1/48th scale this can and should be done as it adds considerably to the overall accuracy of the model. Control wires for some of the flying surfaces are also external. Construction and rigging of this model should be within the skill level of an experienced modeler. However,

it would be best if the modeler had already successfully built a couple of biplanes before taking on the D.H.4 kit.

This is a good kit, and well worth the effort it will take to build it. Roden could have made this a GREAT kit by including additional parts to enable the modeler to build the D.H.4M version.

Roden's choice of markings are somewhat mundane. Adding markings for the

trainer version as well as the mail version would have increased and broadened the appeal of this kit. Perhaps these versions will be included in a later release. The additional markings for the later mail and trainer versions would have been nice. However, these are nitpicks. A conversion to these later versions should be well within the skills of any competent modeler with such a desire. I'm planning

to use this kit as a basis for a conversion project to a D.H.4M mail plane. A follow-up build article on this project will be forthcoming within the next millennium. Stay tuned for coming attractions.

Highly Recommended.

Thanks to Scale Model Kits for the review sample.



Photo Credit: National Air Museum

<http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/shared/media/photodb/photos/071105-F-1234S-001.jpg>