

## Airfix 1/72nd Scale Curtiss Hawk 81A-2

by Robert Allen

Is there any military aviation marking more iconic than the shark mouth used on the Curtiss P-40? Considering its fame, it's surprising that the early P-40B/C and Tomahawk hasn't been better served in 1/72nd scale. There's the old Frog kit, the Academy knock-off of the Frog kit, and a Trumpeter version from about five years ago that I haven't built, but which received mediocre reviews. There's a need for a good kit in this scale, and the new Airfix molding, while not perfect, goes a long way to filling the gap.

The early P-40s were most famous for their use by the American Volunteer Group of the Chinese Air Force (the Flying Tigers), but they were also extensively used by the USAAF and RAF. Airfix has issued this kit in the markings of all three, but as three different kits! The standard kit, marketed as a "Curtiss Hawk 81-A-2" comes in AVG livery. Included with a Mitsubishi A6M2 Zero in the "Dogfight Doubles" series, it's a USAAF P-40B Warhawk flown by George Welch of the 47th PG at Pearl Harbor. And the boxing as a "starter set" with cement, paints, and paint brushes, is of an RAF Tomahawk IIB of No 112 Squadron, the originator of the shark mouth on the P-40. I've only seen the



boxing, but I assume that the plastic in all three variants is the same, with just the decals and instructions different.

The art on the end-opening box is quite stunning, showing AVG P-40s strafing a line of parked Japanese A6M Zeroes. Unfortunately, it also propagates a myth that I thought had long been put to bed – the AVG did not fight against IJNAF Zeroes, but against the Ki-27s and Ki-43s of the IJAAF. The Navy's Zeroes were long gone from the theater before the AVG became operational. Inside the box are 47 parts molded on two gray sprues and one clear one. The panel lines are engraved, and look fine to me. The clear parts are packaged in their own bag to prevent damage. There's a decal sheet for one AVG option, and a four-page, 15-step instruc-

tion sheet. There's a color four-view on the box bottom showing the paint scheme and decal placements.

There's a lot to like about the engineering of this kit. The cockpit is glued to the lower wing, and then inserted into the fuselage when the wing is cemented to the fuselage. That's accurate, because on the actual aircraft, the wing was the cockpit floor. Detail is simple but adequate, seat, stick, and instrument panel (with a decal), and the rudder pedals molded on the cockpit floor. There's nice detail on the cockpit sidewalls. There's a pilot figure, should you choose to use it. The upper engine cowling is a slide molding, which allows for reasonable depth on the intake, and captures the lines of the nose quite well. The most obvious flaw in the kit is the propeller, whose blades seem much too narrow.

The lower rear cowl flaps are included in both open and closed form, which is a nice touch. Separate wheels are given for the lowered and raised undercarriage options – the wheels-down option includes wheels with separate discs, which is good for painting. They are also weighted, and the engineering includes a square peg on the undercarriage leg to ensure that they are at the correct angle. The tail wheel doors, if you build the aircraft with the undercarriage lowered, are one piece which slots into the lower rear fuselage, also (theoretically) ensuring the proper angle of the doors.



Two pitot heads are included, one straight one, and the hooked pitot often seen on RAF Tomahawks.

The single decal option is for aircraft "68" of the 3rd Squadron, AVG, flown by Charles Older. The decals are well-printed, and include a multitude of stencils for this scale, but the blue in the Chinese roundels looks much too light, at least to my eyes.

I really like this kit. It's simple, well-engineered, and seems pretty accurate except for the prop blade. I'd also rather see multiple decal options in one box, rather than spread around three different issues, but that's Airfix's prerogative. It's also ridiculously inexpensive for a kit these days – I picked up mine from Skyway Model Shop for just \$7.25. Now if we could only get a nice 1/72nd Merlin-powered P-40F/Kittyhawk Mk.II...



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point, and with a bit of extra work could be made into accurate representations of mission-specific spacecraft. For those looking for a detailed representative example of the Apollo program, these kits will build up out of the box quite well and will definitely look the part.

Out of all the 1/72 Apollo kits Dragon has released, this one is the most appealing to me as it provides the entire spacecraft stack in one kit, allowing the modeler to display a significant portion of the Saturn V without taking up large amounts of space. My thanks to Dragon USA for the review sample.

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