

Dragon 1/35th Scale M4 (105mm) Sherman Howitzer Tank and Bronco Models 1/35th Scale Sherman T51 Workable Track Set

by Andrew Birkbeck

Dragon Models Ltd. has blessed the Allied WW2 armor modeler with yet another version of the Sherman tank. This time around the modeler is presented with the 105mm howitzer version of the M4. This vehicle consisted of a 105mm gun, mounted in the so called “high bustle” turret, atop a “large hatch” (47 degree) M4 hull. The kit consists of 11 sprues of injection molded parts, slightly more than 450 parts, together with a fret of photo etched brass parts, a pair of DS 100 rubber tracks, and a short length of metal cable, and decals for three vehicles. Perhaps 100 parts are “surplus to needs”, and care needs to be taken when figuring out which parts go with which variant.

The injection plastic parts are well molded, though some are better than others. This is because the kit, like all the 1/35th scale Dragon Sherman kits, is not a completely new tooled one. Some of the kit parts have

a direct lineage back to the Italeri M4A1 Sherman kit of 30 years ago, but to be fair to Dragon, they have over the years improved on the Italeri parts still being used. Of the original Dragon parts in the kit, many of these also come from earlier kits, but again to their credit, Dragon have been upgrading these parts as well. Overall, one gets a great set of parts.

The instructions that come with the kit are the usual exploded diagram type familiar to anyone who has built a previous Dragon armor kit. Thus they needed to be checked carefully for little “errors”, a few of which were found (see further ahead). Herewith a short guided trip through the instructions for some key points:

Step 1: Road wheels/bogie parts. The three markings options offered up with this kit had the stamped road wheels, parts V8/V9. However Dragon gives the modeler as an option in the instructions the use of parts D6, spoked wheels. Check your references if you wish to utilize this latter option. And part V6, the track skid atop the bogie units, is missing the prominent retaining bolts. These can be found, however, on the sprue trees of Sprue V. Simply slice them off and install carefully.

Step 3: When assembling the front transmission housing, note that parts R1

and R3 are transposed in the instructions. I also found building up the transmission housing area trouble free, unlike some earlier Dragon Sherman kits where the main parts (in this case R5, R6 and R7) didn't mate up correctly.

Step 4: I found getting the air filter units (built up from parts C4, C14/15, C24/25 and C27/28) very difficult to keep glued to the hull rear plate, C12. In the end I built up a little backing plate and stuck it to the air filters, and then to the hull rear plate. This was done in such a way as to be invisible when the model was completed. And note that the idler wheel, listed as V18, should also have part V32 glued to it as well.

Step 5: Front hull area. Dragon gives the modeler the option of injected molded parts for the headlight and siren guards, or photo etched brass parts. The plastic parts are quite “chunky”, and I opted to use the PE parts. I took the PE fret and turned one of my metal stove top burners to a medium heat. Once nice and hot, I placed the fret of parts onto the burner, and watched it turn color (shades of blue etc), to anneal the parts. Be careful doing this, you don't want to get the parts so hot, they melt! Then put the parts aside, to cool slowly. Annealing them makes the PE brass much easier to form, and I used a wonderful tool produced by The Small Shop, the Photo Etched Bending and Rolling set, to form the guards. These were carefully super-glued in place, but are very fragile, so be careful! I also used the photo etched front mud guards, parts MA15, soldering these for added strength, rather than using super glue. For the rear hull light guards, I chose to use the injection plastic parts, after carefully thinning them down.

Dragon instructs the modeler to carefully measure for the location of the gun support cradle brackets, parts A65. I am not sure why, as they are clearly marked on part G5! And I found the photo etched parts for the front hull ventilator, MA13, 17 and 23 very difficult to bend to shape, so much so that I destroyed them. So if you opt to install these, take every precaution to insure success. For me, I just left them off, as not every vehicle had them installed



from what I could deduce from period photographs.

Finally in Step 5, I replaced the molded-on lump that purports to be a hatch grab handle on parts A24/25, with a spare part R8, suitably trimmed to size, and glued into two holes drilled in the appropriate spots.

Step 7: Installation of the on board tools. The kit supplied tools are “okay”, in my humble opinion. I chose to replace half of the kit parts, with resin examples from a set produced by Formations Models. The Formation parts have lovely cast on retaining straps and buckles, whereas the Dragon parts rely on very tiny photo etched parts for these straps etc., and I just couldn’t make them work. Perhaps you will have better luck with the Dragon parts! On the Dragon parts I did utilize for the On Board Tools, I scratch built some straps and buckles using paper, and some Aber PE buckles.

Step 9: Turret commander’s hatch and gun barrel/mantlet construction. The gun barrel is a lovely piece of slide molding, complete with barrel rifling. Care just needs taking to remove the seam that runs the length of the barrel. Note that Dragon offers the modeler the option of either a Commander’s vision cupola or a later split hatch configuration. However, reading various online postings about M4 (105) tanks, it appears that the instructions are wrong. They indicate that the 4th AD tank depicted on the decal sheet had a commander’s vision cupola, when apparently 4th AD vehicles had the split hatch configuration. I replaced the molded on lump depicting the grab handle of the split hatch, on part B19, with a spare grab handle in the kit, part B30. Over in Step 11, Dragon gives the modeler a nice loader’s hatch, complete with separate grab handle. Why a separate grab handle on the loader’s hatch, but not the commander’s split hatch?

Step 10: Parts B57 through B61 consist of the gun mantlet dust cover mounting strips, as installed on later war M4 (105) Shermans. However, the instructions only



show the installation of one of these parts, B59. So consult reference photos if you intend to install the dust cover parts. But note also another problem in this area: in an earlier kit of the M4A3 (105) Sherman, Dragon got the width of the gun mantlet wrong. It was too narrow by about 2 or 3mm. Dragon fixed this issue on this new M4 (105) Sherman, but apparently didn’t fix the width of the dust cover parts. Thus part B59 is too narrow for the corrected

mantlet parts on this new kit! I cut part B59 at an appropriate point, and slipped in 3mm worth of the appropriate sized plastic rod.

The main turret part, B10, has nicely depicted cast texturing present. However, there are noticeable mold seam lines in the area of the pistol port that need removing, and the area retextured where appropriate. Also note that the turret is missing any depiction of the manufacturer’s casting



marks. These can be sourced via Archer Transfers, as I did.

Step 11: Dragon gives the modeler the choice of two different turret machine gun mounts, as well as a superb M2 machine gun. The latter is a multi-part affair, and really is a lovely little set up, one of the true jewels in this kit.

Step 12: Here we have a couple of issues to deal with. First, the tow cable: this is made from twisted steel strands, and my attempts to anneal it and thus allow it to bend more easily failed. It remained super springy, and thus I couldn't get it to conform to the model as I wished. So my Sherman has no tow cable. I found a solution too late to install on this model: a firm called Kataya in Poland offers superb copper braided tow cables, and these work a treat (I installed one on another Dragon model I am working on), using the Kataya cable, and the Dragon cable end parts (A45 in this kit).

A second issue is the DS100 tracks. The parts depict T48 rubber chevron tracks with the end connectors that helped reduce ground pressure, and the quality of these tracks is beyond doubt, very well molded, with excellent detail. The only problem is that I can't find any photos of the M4 (105) Shermans depicted on the decal sheet with these type end connectors?



As a bonus, when DragonUSA sent IPMS the review sample of the M4 (105), they also sent along a set of workable T51 rubber block Sherman tracks by Bronco Models. And while they weren't a perfect fit for this particular Sherman either (they were a track seen earlier in the war), I just

couldn't wait to give them a try. Each track link in this set consists of five parts: an upper and lower track pad, two end connectors, and one connecting rod unit. If there is an "issue" with this set, it is how long it takes to put it all together! Each link, as mentioned, has five parts, each part has two sprue attachment points that need cleaning up, and there are 83 links to each track, times two. That's one heck of a lot of cleaning up! This said, what you end up with is an absolutely first class set of working tracks, that fit perfectly around the Dragon sprockets, and look amazing on the model, I hope you will agree from the photos.



The key is trying to reduce the construction time, and I found the following the best way to speed things along. Cut out and clean up parts A2, the lower track pad, and then stick about six or seven of this part in a row, held down with a thin piece of double stick tape, on a completely flat surface (see photo). Then take the connection rod parts, A1, and the end connectors, A3, and assemble them and let them dry overnight. When completely dry (so there are no sticky spots that will foul their movement), drop them into position on top of the lower track blocks held in place by the tape, and then take the upper track pad, part Ba1, put a small amount of glue on the two spots shown in the instructions, and carefully drop them into place. I used the thick Testors glue in the black squeeze bottle with the metal tube applicator, and it worked a treat.

The model was painted using Tamiya acrylics, thinned with Mr Color self

leveling thinner (lacquer). Tamiya XF-62 Olive Drab (old formula mix) was lightened with Tamiya XF-60 Dark Yellow. This was airbrushed over a coat of Mr Surfacer 1200 lacquer primer. A second, lightened (more XF-60) application of Olive Drab was then sprayed into the center of the panels, to break up the one color scheme. A couple of thin coats of Tamiya gloss clear (X-22) was airbrushed over the entire model, and when thoroughly dry, the decals were applied. These are produced by Cartograph, of Italy, and are superb. The only issue I had was that rather than giving the modeler specific decals for the vehicle codes etc., you are given a generic sheet of letters, numbers and symbols, and asked to cut and paste them together. Once the decals have dried, a sealing coat of clear gloss was applied, followed by various oil paint/thinner pin washes. The model was then left to sit for a few days, while everything dried nicely, whereupon a coat of Vallejo acrylic matt varnish was applied. Dirt, mud, dust streaks etc., were added via Mig and Tamiya products to suitably "dirty up" the model.

Despite a few niggles (the lack of hatch grab handles, the apparently wrong track configuration, and the few instruction errors), I really enjoyed the overall experience of building this kit. It is well detailed; the parts fit together well, and were thus a pleasure to assemble. To me, it is the "end result" that counts, and I achieved the result you see in the pictures without any great hassles. The model certainly "looks" the part, and I can recommend it highly to anyone, like me, who really enjoys Sherman tanks. The Bronco Model tracks, while time consuming to assemble, posed no major issues, and result in a first rate set of tracks for any Sherman kit requiring T51 rubber block tracks.

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