

SdKfz 143 PzBeobWg III Ausf H

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Scale: 1/35

Company: Dragon

Price: \$35.95

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Website: Dragon Models

Product Web Page: View

Product provided by:

Dragon Models USA

Summary

Orange Box has forged a well-earned reputation for offering innovative 1/35 scale armored vehicle and figure combinations at bargain prices. Dragon Item No. 9136 depicts an Ausf.H variant of an Artillerie Panzerbeobachtungswagen III (Sd.Kfz.143), an artillery observation vehicle.

To give even greater value for money, the tank is fitted with Magic Tracks and four German figures. These represent a tank crew relaxing over a game of cards in a period of downtime. These well-sculpted figures are sourced from Master Box, and they make a nice accompaniment to the Dragon tank.

There are 419 plastic parts in the kit, plus MagicTrack individual track links. There is a small fret of photo-etch sporting two fine-mesh exhaust covers as well as a small sheet of markings for one vehicle.

Orange: the new color of **value**

1:35 **Sd.Kfz.143 Pz.Beob.Wg.III Ausf.H** **BONUS**

9136 **MSRP US\$ 29.95**

GERMAN TANK CREW WWII

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Background

A total of 262 of these vehicles were converted from Panzer III chassis. They featured improved armor protection and the main armament was replaced with a dummy gun that allowed powerful radio equipment to be installed within the tank interior. Manned by a crew of five, these vehicles served widely with Wespe and Hummel artillery batteries.

The Kit

This full-build review follows the in-box review written previously. Please see that earlier piece for photos of the sprues and other materials included with the kit.

The molding is somewhat heavy-handed, and as a consequence a considerable amount of time was spent sanding and whittling the parts before assembly. Many of the sprue attachment points are on exposed surfaces and require a delicate touch. The Magic Track links each have two pour stubs visible on the inside of the links. These will have to be cleaned up in order for a build to place in a contest. Sitting in my display case, however, not so. I left them as is.

Once the parts were ready, however, the build went quickly.

The Build

The main hull of the sample kit provided had significantly bowed-in sides and a slight twist to it. Having built many Dragon kits before, however, I can say this type flaw is a rarity. In order to build the kit I had to do a little 'real' modeling to remedy the problem first. I would fix the bowed-in problem using plastistruct spacers, but the warp had to be un-torqued, so to speak, using hot water.

I started by bringing a pot of water to a boil, removing it from the burner and letting it settle down for a minute or two. I then started dunking the hull in the water, experimenting each time to see how long I had to immerse it to get the results I wanted. After a few minutes and several dunks I was able to remove the warp and bend the hull to a generally squared-off look. I tested the shape by sitting it upside down on the counter to make sure there was no rocking when pressing on one end. Running the hull under cold water sealed the deal.

Next, I started adding 1/16th inch plastistruct spacers where the significant bowed-in areas were, using my right-angle ruler to check my progress. Once satisfied, I let it sit overnight to dry. In the morning I was surprised to



see that the double-thick spacer on one end had bowed under the pressure of the malformed hull. I add two more spacers (1/4 inch in all!) and a thick piece of sprue to manhandle the warp out of picture. This seemed to do the trick. Finally I was ready to build the model.

Step 1 in the instructions brings the main hull and wheels together. The wheels are attached by sliding each pair onto an axle stub, but there is no positive location point letting you know how far in to push the wheel. If you push them in all the way, they do not line up with the sprocket, idler wheel or return rollers. Using a steel ruler as a guide, I found I had to snip off the ends of the main wheel axle stubs to line everything up. I knew from experience that if I did not do this right, the MagicTrack would not have looked right as it shifted back and forth to fit over the spokes and into the various slots it had to.

In Step 2, two sets of parts (B13) and (B14) are reversed. I ignored the part callouts here and just went by the drawings. While the first and last axles are fixed in place, the other four axles on each side rely on a weak detent to line up. I had to eyeball it here and nurse the four free axles on each side in place while the glue dried.



The rear sprocket axle is a little fiddly; you must juggle three pieces together while the glue sets, but with a little patience it comes together fine.

In Step 4, Part A7 was a real chore to clean up. There was so much plastic to cut and sand off I had to check the fit continuously to make sure I didn't take too much off.

The MagicTrack went together without any problem and I ended up with 18 or so extra links per side, allowing for a proper sag over the return rollers. I used Testors (black bottle) liquid cement exclusively to do the job. I first lined up all the links for one side on a piece of non-stick cutting board. Once the links were laid out, I added a

drop of glue between each link, and then let the whole run sit for about 30 minutes to set. All that's left to do then is to pick the whole run as one piece and carefully work it around the wheels and sprockets. There is usually enough residual glue on the inner part of the links to cement them to the wheels where they touch.

Steps 5, 6 and 7 add the supplemental armor to the main deck and hull front. The fit here is perfect and beefs up the entire assembly. Make sure to drill out the various holes and such per the instructions. You will need these later.

Thankfully, due to all the work I did up front straightening out the hull, the top deck slid into position without a hitch. I love this part of the build - when my work starts to resemble a real tank!

In Step 9 the tow stubs (parts A14-A17) must line up in such a way to allow a pin to be pushed through the holes in a later step. I somehow got these wrong - I don't know if the call-outs were reversed or I just didn't pay enough attention. My pins are slightly off the horizontal plane as a result.

The instructions tell you to attach the two photo-etch exhaust covers at this point in time, but I waited until I had pre-shaded the vehicle black

before doing so. That way the area underneath the covers would not remain styrene-grey.

Steps 10-14 add the pioneer tools and other details to the side panels and main hull. Many of these items fit well, some have to be modified in some way, but generally these went on without a hitch.

Steps 15-19 bring the turret together. All the parts in these steps fit perfectly, including the two-part 'dummy' gun barrel. I must say - I've never had such an easy time with a turret before. First - there is no main weapon to deal with inside the turret (that's nice, but unusual). But more importantly, even though the hatches and the machine gun are highly detailed, there are

very few parts involved in their assembly. Some modelers may relish putting 15 or more pieces together for a single hatch, but I don't. Personally, I wish other Dragon kits would follow the example set forth here by this kit.

The very last detail of the build required the most care. The delicate command vehicle antenna requires patience in cleaning and sanding, as well as gluing. It does, however, really make the tank, I think. I stood the top of the antenna upside down on a table top and nursed the post above it for two hours while watching TV to get it to be vertical. Eventually I was rewarded with a proper looking mast. I glued parts C28, G4 and G3 together and let them dry.





Then I drilled hole in the bottom of that and inserted a steel pin and drilled another hole in the main hull where the antenna assembly would be set. This will allow me to remove the antenna for transportation (although it is still very delicate!)

Figures

The kit features four figures playing cards. One of the figures even has a puppy sticking out of his shirt. Three of the four figures are assembled sitting on jerry cans (also included). Three cans are grouped together to form a table of sorts for the cards, the other three are inverted and used as chairs for the sitting figures. The figures are beautifully detailed and went together well, needing only minor clean up and filler.

Painting

I decided to paint the vehicle in the mid-war summer Eastern Front scheme.

I started by airbrushing a primer coat of Gunze Mr. Surfacer 1200 over the entire surface to cover the oils and glue spots and to prepare it for the subsequent finish.

I followed this with a base coat of XF-69 NATO Black over the entire model, including the wheels and track. This coat will give the tank a 'dark' look that (in my opinion) is appropriate for armor. I concentrated on the nooks and crannies – complete coverage. I let everything dry for at least 24 hours. I then attached the two photo-etch exhaust covers.

Next, I then sprayed the tracks with a mixture of Tamiya XF-68 NATO Brown and XF-9 Hull Red, making sure to leave some of the original black color showing through.

I then sprayed a coat of 50/50 ratio Tamiya XF-60 Dark Yellow and Tamiya XF-57 Buff over the superstructure, trying to stay away from the track, bringing the color up slowly from the black base coat. Over that I sprayed a camouflage pattern using GS 122 Mr. Color RLM82 Light Green.

Once these colors were dry I sprayed a liberal coat of Future Floor Polish (an acrylic) over everything to prepare the surfaces for washes and decals. I let this dry for two days.

Finish

After the Future had dried for 48 hours, I applied the decals, which went on without a problem. Is used the Micro-Set/Micro-Sol system. I sealed the decals with a brushed-on coat of Future and let that dry.

Once the second coat of Future was dry, I dry-brushed all the exposed edges with MIG Abt155 Oil Paint (German 3-Tone Fading) yellow and hand-painted the pioneer tools and other assorted paraphernalia attached to the hull and turret.

I then mixed a wash of Mig Abt080 Wash Brown oil paint with Mona Lisa Paint Thinner and gave the entire model a light once-over, concentrating on the wheels and the various hull detail and protrusions.



Next I used a very thin mixture of NATO Black and XF-9 Hull Red to spray random vertical streaks on the hull and turret.

Following this I used a very thin mixture of Vallejo Model Aire 71027 Light Brown, working up from the bottom using a vertical motion to simulate road-dust.

I then gave the entire vehicle a coat of thinned Testor's Dullcoat. This dulled up the surface and prepped it for dry pigments.

I highlighted the tracks with a dry 'loose' mix of MIG PO25 Standard Rust and MIG PO23

Black Smoke pigment powders using an old trashed set of brushes I keep specifically for this kind of work. I didn't combine the colors too much; I wanted black on parts of the track and black-rust on other parts - nothing consistent, like real grime and filth. Once the powder was on and set, I used my finger to apply MIG P231 Gun Metal to all the areas that needed a metallic 'glint', including the surfaces of the tracks that actually touch the ground and the main drive sprockets. Finally I used a silver pencil here and there, along the inside of the tracks and teeth where the wheels have rubbed against the track.

Conclusion

I spent about 20 hours on the kit, eight on assembly and twelve on the finish. Eliminating the sample flaws in the hull was a challenge but this is unusual for Dragon kits – the first I've encountered. I felt the fit of the wheels and return rollers was a little vague and could have been improved, but overall the kit went together nicely.

There was a paucity of decals included with the kit – had I not been writing this article I would have supplemented the few markings provided with some from my spares, but I am not sure what would have been

accurate – there are precious few images available online for this vehicle.

I recommend this kit to anyone who likes to build and finish unusual German vehicles. The command vehicle antenna and unusual placement of the main 'gun' (such as it is) will make this vehicle an interesting addition to any collection.

I would like to thank Dragon for providing this kit for review, and to Internet Modeler for giving me the opportunity to build it.

