Dragon 1/35th Scale Marder II Mid-Production – '39–'45 Series: Abridged Review

by Eric Christianson

For the full review please go to the IPMS USA site and Search for 'Marder II Eric'.

Dragon Models has released the Marder II in 1/35th scale, another in an impressive line of German Marder ('Martin') Tank Destroyer kits. Based on the venerable Pz.Kpfw. II chassis, this version of the Marder was phased out in 1943 for the 'Wespe' self-propelled gun. The Marder name lived on, however, being coupled with the excellent Czech 38t chassis in the Marder III which came in several different forms.

The kit is cobbled together using sprues from several previous products; the chassis of the Pz.Kpfw. II, the sprues from the Pak 40 kit (sans the wheeled carriage), and a single new sprue of twelve parts needed to morph the Panzer II into a Marder. Essentially the same design as the Tamiya kit produced in the early eighties, Dragon has improved on the detail quite a bit. The sides of the fighting compartment are extremely thin and delicate; the superstructure is replete with hatches and lids that can be modeled open or closed, allowing for somewhat simpler super-detailing. The three large ammunition lockers along the rear of the main deck can be modeled open or closed, and the main gun can be swiveled to one side to expose a myriad of detail that would otherwise be covered up, with plenty of optional photo-etch to go around.

As is usual with Dragon kits, there are a lot of parts in the box, but this time around more than half of the unused 'blue' parts are very nice personal weapons and handy pioneer tools – 'the good stuff'. You gotta love Dragon.

The individual-link MagicTrack provided is right for this kit, and 'sided' using two different shades of grey to distinguish each side. As always, the track links fit together well enough to make the task of assembling the runs relatively easy. More on that later.

Being somewhat of an older kit, there is not as much slide-molding used as on more recent kits, but what there is, is superb. The front gun shields and delicate fighting compartment sides are well-protected via separate packaging and extended 'boxed' sprue. The sides were a little warped, but they are so thin that they behaved once attached with glue.

The contents of the box include:
Main lower hull, packaged separately.
21 main sprues in soft, light grey plastic, packaged separately.
2 bags of 'sided' MagicTrack track links
3 small photo-etch sheets, including an engine exhaust grille and small front gun shield.
1 Eight-page blue and white instruction sheet with 21 steps

The kit comes with four schemes represented using the ubiquitous Dragon blue-and-white three-view drawings, and a small (but perfectly registered) sheet of decals from Cartograph of Italy. These include:
3./Pz.Jg.Abt. 561, Russia 1943
Unidentified unit, Eastern Front 1944
Unidentified unit, Eastern Front 1943
543 Pz.Jg.Abt 543, 3rd Panzer Division, Eastern Front 1942

There are sprues from several different Dragon kits included in the box. That said, I found nothing significant as far as errors or omissions in the instructions. As with all open-fighting compartment vehicles, assembly sequence varies by modeler and I found that I had to move steps around in order to get everything done, but I consider that a matter of personal choice, not a flaw in the instructions provided by Dragon. I do not own any older versions of this kit so I cannot speak to improvements made to the instructions, but what you get in this box is certainly good enough. The only criticism I have is that many times the exact placement of crucial parts is vague at best, illustrated by a simple arrow pointing 'somewhere in this general area'. As a direct result, I had some significant fit issues later on.

As mentioned above, the open-hull design of the Marder leads to a rather complex assembly sequence. The main weapon can be completely assembled and finished apart from the rest of the kit. The entire

upper and lower chassis can likewise be built and finished separately – making the attachment of the track a snap.

By far the most frustrating part of the build, you will produce two (left and right) baffled casemate armor arrays that are completely hidden on the final model (if you choose to point the main weapon straight ahead), but you won't know that until much later in the build. If I built another one of these kits, I would have left off those sections.

The three large ammunition storage boxes sport a lot of interior detail – if you choose to leave the lids open. If not, the detail can be tossed into the spare parts box, including some very nice shell casings and two kinds of main weapon rounds (AT and HE).

Finally, the build-it-all-and-then-paint-it approach will work (it's what I did) but to do a good job you'll want to approach this like an airplane model; build a little, paint a little, etc. It pays to plan ahead and proceed slowly.

Dragon's German Pak 7.5cm AT gun is a gem and I'm glad they've included it in the kit. The entire assembly is a snap to put together and fits like a glove, which is important because all eyes eventually lock on the intricate weapon in open hull vehicles like the Marder. You are provided with three options for the gun muzzle, and Dragon has thoughtfully added a nub at the end of the barrel that will insure that whichever option you choose lines up right.

Dragon has included MagicTrack with the Marder, a good choice. The runs are sided so the track comes in two baggies, each side molded in a slightly different color grey to distinguish them. In my copy, about two dozen links had significant flash that I had to remove – highly usual for Magic Track. As always, however, there are tiny mold release marks, two per link, and could be removed by sanding if one cares to (I don't). That said, I somehow spent so much time getting the correct run on the correct side that I actually ended up attaching both runs backwards. The runs were dry before I realized my mistake. Oh well – it probably happened once in a while in the field too!

Dragon provides 105 links per side, and instructs you to use 99 per side, leaving the remainder as spares and for the run across the front of the vehicle. I actually used only 87 links per side, so there is plenty of room to create a significant 'sag' in the track – the main benefit of using Magic track.

Open hull AFVs are usually a real challenge to paint. After spending so much time painting the British Sexton II and not realizing any significant benefit to doing so in the final product, I decided to return to my old 'build-first-then-paint' approach. I think the results look fine, and finishing the model in this way saved me a lot of time.

I decided to finish my vehicle using the 3./Pz.Jg.Abt. 561, Russia 1943 scheme because I like that particular style of German crosses, and the open mottled camouflage pattern would look good with a hairspray finish.

After completing the main assemblies (see 'Things to consider before starting', above), painting and finishing followed these steps:

1. I started by airbrushing a primer coat of Gunze Mr. Surfacer 1200 since there were several gaps and other flaws that needed to be exposed and fixed.
2. I followed this with a pre-shade coat Tamiya German Grey (XF-63), both inside and out.
3. I then sprayed the entire vehicle with a generous coat of hairspray. I use TreSemme #4 Extra Hold, but I really don't think it matters. (I like the small black can it comes in).
4. Next came the first camouflage coat consisting of a mixture of Tamiya Desert Yellow (XF-59), Deck Tan (XF-55) and Flat White (XF-2), which results in a color that is close to Tamiya Buff, but a little more yellow than brown. I sprayed it carefully, allowing some of the grey to show in the interior and behind the pioneer tools, etc. - just as though someone had field-sprayed a camouflage coat over the factory grey finish.
5. Before the paint had dried too much, I took a long-bristle red sable brush, dipped it in tap water, and wet the surfaces that would receive chipped paint. I then used a wet, stiff, short horsehair brush to gently rub off the yellow paint along the edges of the metal surfaces and high-wear areas like hatches and clasps. I also rubbed some paint away from flat areas here and there to give the vehicle an overall worn appearance. I would be applying the 'kill rings' decal on the barrel, so I had to make this SPG look like it had seen some combat.
6. Next I applied the second (mottled) camouflage coat using Tamiya NATO Green, lightened with a little Deck Tan.
7. Once the camouflage coats were dry, I hand-painted the areas that would receive decals with Future.
8. While the Future was drying, I painted the wooden portions of the pioneer tools Vallejo Acrylics Old Wood (shovels) and New Wood (pick axe) and all the steel parts Vallejo Oily Steel. For the hand painting I mix a tiny bit of Vallejo Slow Dry and water with each color until it flows smoothly off a 00 Liner Red Sable brush.
9. I painted the MG34 and breech block of the Pak 7.5cm gun Tamiya Gun Metal (X-10). The shine would later get covered by a flat coat.
10. To give the wooden parts of the tools more depth, I brushed on a little Mig Wash Brown Oil straight from the tube and let that set overnight. Don't let this paint leach out its oil beforehand, like you would when you are using oils for detailing. The oil helps it stay workable. In the morning I carefully removed most of the oil paint using a brush dampened with Mona Lisa, leaving the areas near the buckles and metal parts darker than the wooden shafts.
11. I applied the decals for my scheme next using the Red and Blue Micro Sol/Set system without any problems.
12. I followed this by adding several applications of a filter made of Paynes

Gray to the rubber portions of the wheels and the spare track up front. I heavily thin all of my washes and filters with Mona Lisa White Spirit.

13. Once dry, I hand-brushed another coat of Future over the decals to seal them.

14. I then gave the vehicle a pin wash using Mig Dark Wash (aka Raw Umber). There is so much to work with here. The Marder has beautiful metal plate floors and fenders that really show off a good wash, not to mention the 7.5cm Pak itself.

15. I worked a thin slurry of Mig Russian Earth and Mig Thinner into the track. Once dry, I applied a mix of MIG Old Rust and MIG Black Soot pigments to the track. And once THAT was dry, I used a 'Mini' Q-tip to apply Model Master Dark Anodonic Gray Buffing Metalizer to the cleats of the tracks. This smaller, tighter (and cheaper) Q-Tip can be found at any drug store. It is less fluffy and works great at getting into tight spots.

16. While the oil paints were drying, I brought out the detail by carefully dry-brushing all the protruding bits and 'metal' edges with Amblin Sliver Artists Oil.

17. I followed this with a 'road-dusting' coat of Vallejo Model Air Light Brown and then shot the whole vehicle with Vallejo Flat Varnish to kill any remaining shine. I cut each of these 50/50 with Vallejo Airbrush Thinner to improve flow.

18. Finally, I applied a light dusting of various Mig pigments, light earth tones for the body and wheels, dark rust and black for the track. Then I attached the MG34 and antenna up on top.

This kit was a challenge to build, but not more so than any other open hull, self-propelled gun. Many parts fit perfectly, others not so much. I had expected a longer than usual build and Dragon didn't disappoint me in that respect. Still, this is the best Marder II on the market, and most of the kudos for that goes to Dragon's attention to detail and engineering.

I wish I could recommend this kit to everyone but I can't; reserving that for average-to-experienced modelers only. The complexity of the design and the fit problems require a bit of actual modeling to occur. I recommend that you go slow, pay attention to the instructions, and consider the suggestions included above.

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