

15cm Sturmpanzerabwehrkanone 33 – Smart Kit

by Eric Christianson, IPMS # 42218

Scale: 1/35

Price: \$64.95

Product/Stock #: 6749

Company: Dragon Models USA

Provided by: Dragon Models USA

Website:

www.dragonmodelsusa.com/dmlusa/welcome.asp

Dragon Models has released their third incarnation of the German Sturmpanzerabwehrkanone 33 self-propelled heavy infantry gun in 1/35th scale. Based on the venerable Sturmgeschütz III chassis, this version of the sIG 33 mounted the improved 15cm infantry gun, offset to the right side, for which 30 rounds were carried. Fielded in 1942, the sIG 33 saw service on the Eastern front, notably in the breakout attempt at Stalingrad late in that year. Only one survived the war and is on display at the Kubinka NIIBT Research Collection in Russia.

Previously released as Dragon #6042 and Cyberhobby's #9123, this 'Smart Kit' release has been improved upon by the inclusion of two additional photo-etch sheets and their wonderful DS track. The new track replaces the individual, clip-clean-and-glue track found in the earlier kits.

German armor modelers will recognize the compact Stug III chassis, nicely detailed with on-board equipment and two large (optional) storage boxes mounted on the rear deck, along with up to four spare wheels. The highly detailed main weapon is housed within a box-shaped casemate, allowing (at least) some of the detail visible if the hatches are left open.



The contents of the box include:

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- Main lower hull, packaged separately.
- 19 sprues in soft, light grey plastic, packaged separately.
- Two runs of yellow DS track.
- 2 small photo-etch sheets, including an engine exhaust grille and storage box.
- 1 Aluminum barrel.
- 1 6-page blue and white instruction sheet with 16 steps, plus a single addendum sheet replacing portions of Step 10.

The kit comes with two 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:

- Pz.Rgt.201, 23.Pz.Div., Eastern Front 1943, Overall German Yellow, with brown and Green camouflage.
- StuG.Abt. 177, 1942, Overall gray with whitewash.

Opening the box

As is usual with Dragon kits based on other Dragon kits, about half of the (abundant) parts included in the box are not used. Fortunately, many of these unused parts will be useful for other projects - nice personal weapons, handy





pioneer tools, antennas, cables – ‘the good stuff’.

The kit appears to be cobbled together using (sprues) from several previous products;

- (A/U/B/V) – Dragon 6631 or 6474 ‘PzKpfw III’
- (K) – Dragon 6463 ‘PzKpfw III Initial Production’
- (E) – Dragon 6620 ‘Stug III’
- (A/G/B/E) – Dragon 6365 or 6581 ‘Stug III G’
- (B/C) – Original Dragon sIG 33 kit (6042), released 2008
- (W/T) – New sprues for this kit

The Instructions

There are sprues from several different Dragon kits included in the box. That said, I found nothing significant as far as errors or omissions. There are some minor inconsistencies and these are pointed out where needed, below. The only criticism I have is that in many steps 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 fit issues later on, which are detailed below.

Things to consider before starting:

The build sequence is pretty straight forward. The chassis first, then the interior and gun, followed by the main deck, fore and aft, and then the right and left fenders, in that order. Once all this is completely dry, the main casemate is fitted over the top of everything. In the instructions, all this happens in one Step (14) using arrows and little else, so we’ll re-visit that later. If you intend to close the hatches you can relax with the gun assembly, but some of the significant pieces are still visible out the front end either way.

The track is completely exposed so it can go on at the very end. The fit is tight, however, so representing the ‘track-sag’ common to this vehicle will require after-market tracks.

The two large storage boxes can either be attached or left off, and that decision can also wait until the end of the build.

Finally, the build-it-all-and-then-paint-it approach will work (it’s what I did) but it still pays to plan ahead and proceed slowly.

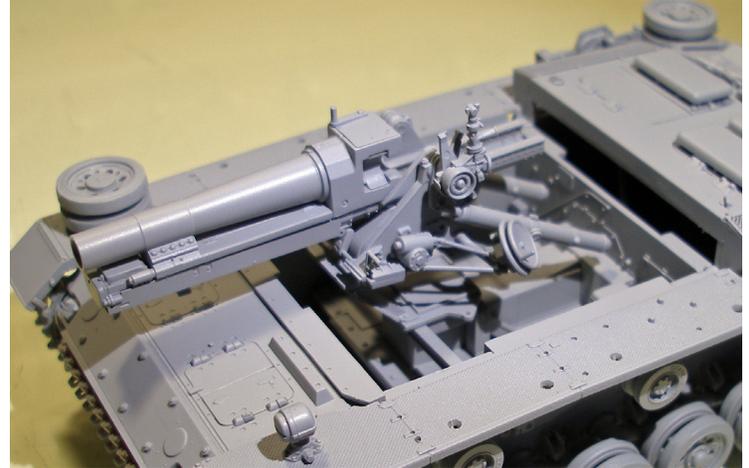
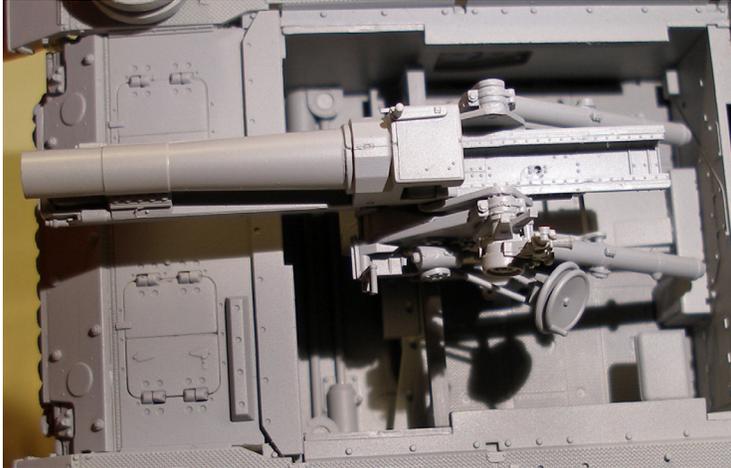
The Build

Lower chassis, main deck and casemate

The assembly of the lower chassis went together relatively well. A lot of interesting engineering and effort is put into the suspension (I assume) to make it movable. That said, I am not sure how successful you’ll be if that is your goal since the parts that need to be glued down are small and ill-fitting. Doing so without getting glue on the parts that are supposed to be free-turning will be difficult, at best. In the end I chose to fix the suspension in place.

In Step 4 the placement of the PE part MA16 is vague – look at the diagram in Step 16 or the rear view in the painting instructions to see where it goes. I had to split mine down the middle with PE shears since it bowed out when I originally attached it. The two halves, when split, slide underneath each other and look fine.

There are no locating holes or pins for the two exhaust filters (B31/B32) – or maybe those are the ones the instructions tell you to shave off (??). By the time I went to attach the filters the pins were, of course, gone.



In Step 7 you will have to hollow out the two holes needed to install the front headlight (Part A32). You are told to use a fire extinguisher that requires a PE baseplate, but no worries if that's not your style – Dragon has included no less than five extinguishers in the kit, take your pick.

The jack assembly is new (again) and this time around there are some fiddly parts that make up the clamps that hold the assembly down. I had to let parts dry thoroughly before continuing here.

I suggest you leave the spare wheel off the starboard fender initially – it gets in the way when fitting the main casemate, and can easily be added at a later time.

In Step 9, if you decide to attach the tow cables on the rear deck, I suggest you shave off the locator pins on the tow cables instead of drilling the holes in the deck to accept them. The holes do not line up well with the pins and show a little when all is done.

In Step 10 make sure to refer to the addendum included in the kit. It will tell you NOT to drill out the four blocks of plastic as described in the original instructions. I forgot to do this, so my sIG 33 has four 'grenade-sized' holes in the side of the main casemate. Oops.

There are four hinges shown in the diagram here that are not called out – they receive the two doors (Parts T17).

15cm sIG 33

Dragon included an aluminum barrel in the kit, a throwback to before slide molding became de rigueur in their kits. Fortunately this barrel fits snug into its receptacle, removing my main complaint with metal barrels.

Step 11 brings the main weapon together. I left off Part B23 but otherwise this assembly went together reasonably well. You'll have to use a little patience as the hardware the main gun travels upon is a little fiddly and should be assembled slowly, allowing the glue to dry before continuing in some places.

Step 12 is where you put the rest of the main weapon together. Thankfully you cannot see much of the result since the instructions are at their most vague here. Studying some of the other diagrams will help.

Step 14 – where it all comes together

I found that the order in which you attach the various subassemblies to the lower chassis in this step is important to get everything to fit correctly.

I suggest you proceed in the following order:

- The rear deck (G).
- The front deck (J) – but not Part T16
- The starboard (right-hand) fender. The fit is not great here - I had to remove the small strip of PE I attached in Step 7 as well as the small tab that points inboard near the front.
- The port (left-hand) fender. Again, I removed the PE strip and the tab.

Part T-16.

The main casemate, carefully guided around the main weapon and other protrusions. I had to clip off the four male posts at the bottom front of the casemate, two to each side, in order for the assembly to seat correctly. Still, without a decent place to put a clamp I had to sit and hold the thing for 20 minutes to make sure I minimized the seams around the base.

In Step 15 you attach a crossbar (Part A66) normally used to hold spare track. I could not figure a way to make it fit, however, over the additional steel plate (Part U3) and still line up right. I decided to perform a little surgery on each end to seat correctly, and snip out a small chunk

in the middle of the bar to shorten it. I then attached a small run of spare PzKpfw III track I had in my spares box and moved on. Only later did I realize that in doing so I covered up the area used for tow hooks (which are mislabeled as coming from the V sprue instead the B sprue where they were actually found). Live and learn. In the end, I found I liked the rugged look of the extra track better anyway.

I could not figure out where to attach Parts T25/T26/MA18 from the instructions (without interfering with the spare wheel and headlight. I ended up leaving them off.

The last step involves some optional storage bins and spare wheels. I have reviewed a dozen pictures of the real sIG33 and each one had a different array of accoutrement. I decided to leave off one wheel and only use the larger storage bin, attached so most of the nice rear-deck detail remained visible.

The Track

The two lengths of DS track in this kit are a welcome addition and a huge improvement over the previous releases of this vehicle, which did not even have Magic track but rather the time-intensive and sanity-sapping sprues of individual links that needed to be cut, cleaned and assembled, one by one. The two runs of tan-yellow track are highly detailed top and bottom and are 'sided' (left and right) – marked by a small tab on each that you remove before attaching.

The DS track responded beautifully to Tamiya (Green Top) liquid cement and all the lacquer paint and weathering products used on them.

Unfortunately, the runs are just long enough to fit over the bogies and return

rollers, not leaving any extra length for 'track sag'. You will have to go to aftermarket products for that.

Painting and Finish

Departing from the two schemes identified in the instructions, I decided to finish my vehicle using a scheme that I saw at a model show recently. I kept the German crosses but discarded the remaining decals. I felt the red numerals in the kit would not do against a yellow and brown background.

The only item I left off the completed model for painting was the antenna. Painting and finishing followed these steps:

(Note: I thin all Tamiya paint and primer products 50:50 with Gunze Mr. Color Leveling Thinner, which has its own retarder for airbrushing. If you haven't tried this thinner with Tamiya paints, you really should. I use a Pasche-H Single-Action airbrush, Number #3 tip, at 20 lbs. pressure for everything. I use the same thinner for thinning Humbrol paints. I use Vallejo's own thinner for all Vallejo paints.)

I started by airbrushing a primer coat of Gunze Mr. Surfacer 1200 to give the plastic and PE some grip for the following coats.

I followed this with an overall pre-shade coat Tamiya NATO Black (XF-69) – this would fill in the dark recesses and provide the shadows near the flat surface edges, adding depth to the camouflage coats to come.

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 black to show along the edges and behind the pioneer tools, etc.

Next I applied the second (mottled) camouflage coat using a 50/50 mixture of Tamiya Flat Black (XF-1) and Tamiya Flat Brown (XF-10). I wanted the color to be darker than the standard German (red) brown.

Once the camouflage coats were dry, I hand-painted the areas that would receive decals with Future.

While the Future was drying, I painted the wooden portions of the pioneer tools Vallejo Acrylics New Wood and all the steel parts Tamiya Metallic Grey (XF-56). For Vallejo paints I mix a tiny bit of Vallejo Slow Dry and water with each color until it flows smoothly off a red sable brush. I painted the hull machine gun Tamiya Gun Metal (X-10) and highlighted it with Gamblin Silver Oil paint.

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. Finally, I let a little Black wash puddle up on the horizontal surfaces of the metal axe head. When dry, this gives it a convincing look of used steel.

I applied the decals using the Red and Blue Micro Sol/Set system without any problems.

Next, while I still had a flat coat on the model, I applied several filters to enhance the colors. I first gave the whole vehicle a filter of MIG Wash Brown. I then gave

the jack and spare track runs a filter of MIG Black. I applied a filter of MIG Dark Rust to the rear exhaust filters. Finally, I used several filter applications of Paynes Gray and Dark Rust on the track sections. I heavily thin all of my washes and filters with Mona Lisa White Spirit.

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

I then gave the vehicle a pin wash using Mig Dark Wash (aka Raw Umber) straight from the bottle, paying special attention to the wheels and various latches.

Once dry, I flipped the hull over and applied a mix of MIG Old Rust and MIG Black Soot pigments to the track.

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 shiny spots still remaining. I cut each of these 50/50 with Vallejo Airbrush Thinner to improve flow.

Finally, I applied a light dusting of various Mig pigments, light earth tones such as European Dust and Dry Mud for the body and wheels, dark rust and black for the track, and then attached the antenna up on top.

Conclusion

I thought this kit would be easier to build than it was. I had some fit problems, and there were some PE parts that did not have any plastic alternatives as usually found in other Dragon kits. I also felt there could have been one or two more pages in the instructions containing images of some of the more complicated areas from different angles.

Still – this is the best sIG 33 kit on the market, and Dragon should again be commended for their attention to detail and engineering. The DS track is excellent; the fit of the aluminum barrel perfect; and the hunkered-down look of the real vehicle is captured well.

That said, I recommend this kit for average-to-experienced modelers – beginners might have issues with the instructions, the photo-etch, and the number of small parts. 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.