

Sd.Kfz.2 Kettenkrad Early Production w/ Infanteriekarren

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Dragon Models has re-released their Kettenkrad kit and bundled it with a trailer called an Infanteriekarren (or 'Infantry Vehicle'). Originally produced back in 2001, this new boxing comes with a small sheet of photo-etch in addition to the trailer.

The SdKfz 2, better known as the Kleines Kettenkraftrad HK 101 or Kettenkrad for short (Ketten = chain/tracks, krad = military abbreviation of the German word Kraftrad, the administrative German term for motorcycle), started out as a light tractor for airborne troops. The vehicle was designed to be delivered by Junkers Ju-52 aircraft, though not by parachute. The vehicle had the advantage of being the only gun tractor small enough to fit inside the hold of the Ju-52, and was the lightest mass-produced German military vehicle to use the complex



The contents of this box include:

- 7 sprues in soft, light grey shiny plastic parts, packaged separately.*
- Two runs of DS track (see 'The Track' section below)*
- 1 small photo-etch sheet.*
- 1 6-page blue and white instruction sheet with 12 steps.*

The kit comes with two schemes represented using the ubiquitous Dragon blue-and-white three-view drawings, and a very small (but perfectly registered) sheet of decals from Cartograph of Italy. These include:

- Unidentified Unit, 1941 (Grey) and the same in (White).*

Schachtellaufwerk overlapped and interleaved road wheels used on almost all German military half-track vehicles of World War II.

Steering the Kettenkrad was accomplished by turning the handlebars: Up to a certain point only the front wheel would steer the vehicle.

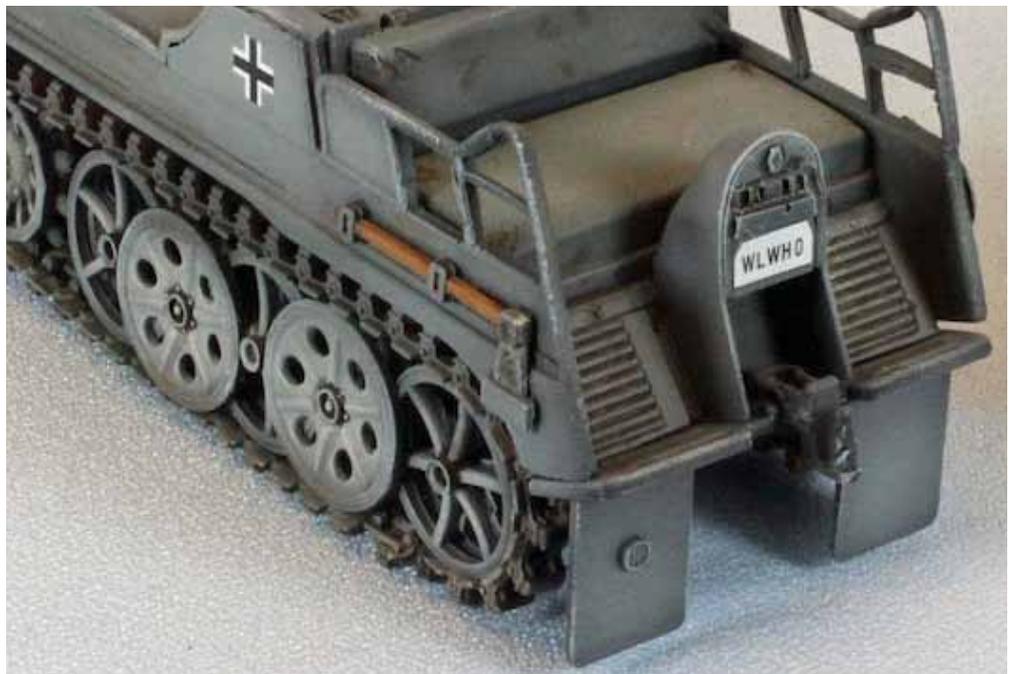
A motion of the handlebars beyond that point would engage the track brakes to help make turns sharper. It was also possible to run the vehicle without the front wheel installed and this was recommended in extreme off-road conditions where speed would be kept low.

Dragon's website states that the kit comes with a number of newly tooled parts, including 'newly produced one-piece DS track'. The track in the kit I received, however, did not take paint or glue, a much different experience than with other Dragon DS track I've worked with.

Furthermore, the website contains an image labeled 'subtle, slide molded hull-sides' that looked nothing like the ones in my sample copy. The website image shows the delicate railings (of the Early Production vehicle) where my copy had solid, 1/16th inch thick plastic sides that had to be carefully carved out to resemble the image. I don't know if I have a bad sample or what, but this review will cover what I received in the box.

Opening the box

The first thing apparent when opening the box is that the plastic for the both the Kettenkrad and the trailer is different from other recent Dragon kits. It is lighter in



color, thicker, shinier and has an almost quasi-translucent aspect to it. There are unused parts (including a decent sitting-driver figure), and Sprue C has an unusually large gap in it, as if something was removed in this release.

The Instructions

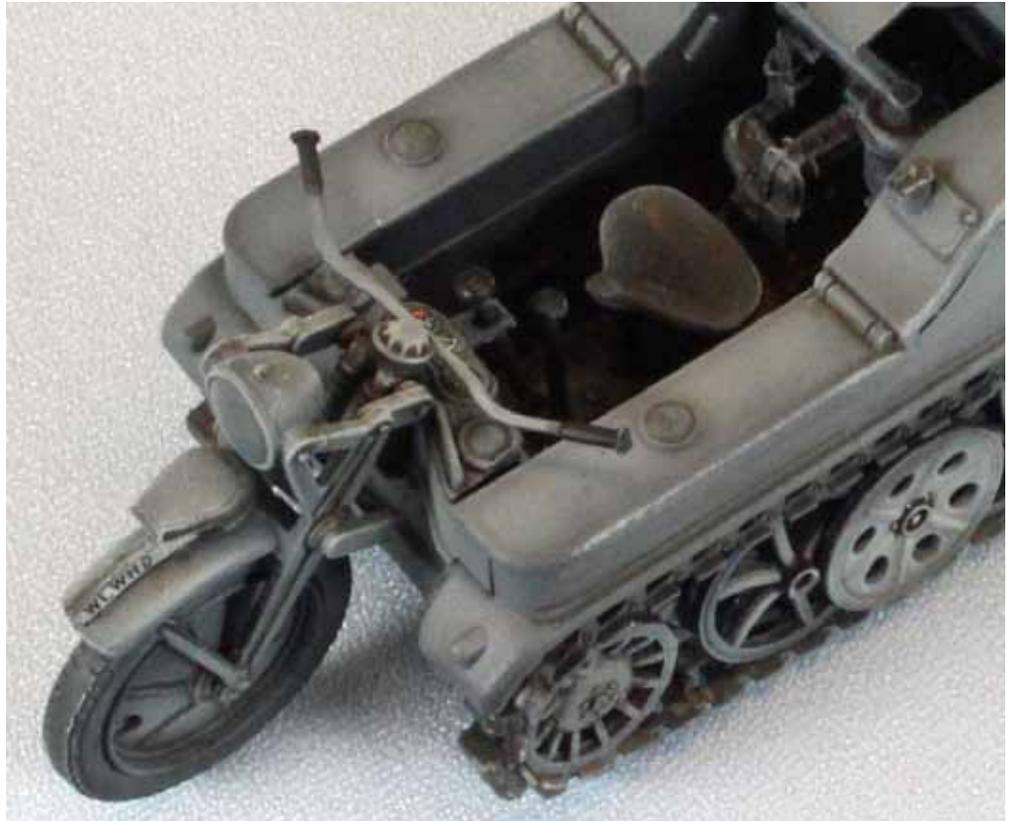
I found nothing significant as far as errors or omissions, but there were several mislabeled parts and other minor inconsistencies. These are pointed out where encountered, below.

Things to consider before starting:

The track and the front wheel assembly are added at the very end, so these can be addressed as separate little projects. The track is slightly elastic and easily stretches over the wheels. The entire front wheel section is a little fiddly with many small parts that wiggle around a bit until dry, but it attaches as one chunk to the main body of the vehicle. **NOTE:** If you attach the front wheel assembly prior to attaching the track, make sure to allow for the considerable thickness of the track, or your wheel will be sitting in mid-air once the track is attached.

The two main sides of the vehicle (Parts A1 and A2) will require you to carve out the solid plastic between the rails if you wish to show the Kettenkrad in its early version. I liked the look of the tubular frame so I went to work at the start of a playoff football game and cleared five of the six openings by the time the game was over three hours later. The plastic is thick and does not lay flat against a surface so the work requires patience and a very sharp knife. If you choose to go this route you will need to do this prior to starting the build.

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 The Running Gear

In Step One, the instructions show a picture of the two parts (B9 and B17) making up each drive sprocket. Part B9 does not look like the part in the picture. Instead, the part in the picture looks a lot more like Part C41, which is shown in the parts diagram as 'unused'. Both fit, however, so you may have to do some research to see which one is correct. I used B9 and I suspect the image in the instructions is wrong.

The axles (parts B5 and B7) are thin and brittle – take care removing them from the sprue and when applying pressure on them when attaching the wheels; they break easily.

Parts B11 in the instructions are actually labeled B12 on the sprue.

While the wheels fit on the frame and axles, they were loose and wobbly. I created a small jig to hold everything in place while drying.

I thought the pioneer tools (axe and shovel) provided in the kit were under-scale and carried next to nothing as far as detail. I replaced these with others from my spares box (also Dragon parts). In fact, the axe is shown as bended photo-etch in the instructions but no such PE exists in the kit.

The Engine, Drivers Compartment and Back Deck

The kit comes with a five-part engine that could be used as a basis for some super-detailing. If you model the vehicle with the hood up, you can see enough of the engine to make it worthwhile. That said; you might want to either replace the hood or thin it out since its thickness is significantly over-scale. Dragon includes two PE screens for the hatch but I was not in a mood to carve through more thick plastic (as instructed) to fit the PE parts in. Besides, I could not see any difference in the detail on the PE from what is molded into the hatch itself.

At the bottom of the engine assembly there are three (male) posts that are supposed to be used to



attach the engine to the floor (Part A20) of the vehicle. If you use these, however, the engine will end up off-center and the axles won't span the floor and connect to both sides. Fortunately all this is hidden once assembled since the actual drive sprockets are

not mounted on the axles but on posts molded into each side of the vehicle. This is easier seen than described.

In Step Six, the gear shift (Part C28) is shown mounted outside of a hole in the dashboard meant to receive it.





Luckily, the glue wasn't dry before I came across the correct placement three images later, when the engine hood is being attached.

The mud flaps (Parts A22 and A15) are waaaaaay over-scale (unless they are supposed to be armored?) and will not fit correctly until the track is attached; the track lifts the whole vehicle up enough for the flaps to hang right.

The Front Wheel and Fork Assembly

In Step 8, Part C7 does not look like the one in the image, which caused me some concern. I was worried because the assembly the part sits in is crucial to the entire front end of the vehicle. Fortunately, the part fit and fulfilled the role it was meant to.



The NOTEK black-out light is not pictured in the instructions but magically appears in the three view drawing, so don't toss out the parts and fill in the hole quite yet.



Putting everything together in this step required an extra hand or two, but in the end, with enough patience and drying time, the front end comes together well and looks nice.

The Trailer

The (new) addition to this kit is the trailer, and although it looks nice when completed, the assembly is a little tricky, starting with the plastic. I believe that this (also) is a retread from a previous kit, exemplified by flash all over it (unusual for Dragon's recent kits), the four huge pour stubs protruding from the visible floor surface of the trailer, and the placement of the various sprue connections which are difficult to clean without damaging the surface detail.

Once cleaned, you really have to put glue on all four sides and the bottom at the same time and juggle the five pieces together at once. This is because there are no firm connection points and everything slides around along beveled edges.

There is no end-view provided in the instructions so the correct angle of Parts A9 (the arms the trailer rests on when not connected to the Kettenkrad) is up to the modeler.

Likewise, there are no exact placement instructions for the two half-axles and no firm connections for the wheels, so you kind of have to eyeball everything until it is dry.

The Track

The box (and website) claim that this kit comes with DS track. If that's the case, then either my sample kit came with something else, or DS track morphs into something quite different when produced at the very small scale required for the Kettenkrad.

First off, the track itself is spongy and slightly elastic, not firm and hard like all the other DS track I've used from Dragon. It would not accept Tamiya liquid cement or even Testors (black bottle) liquid cement. The adhesive didn't harm the track (thankfully) but just flaked off or evaporated when it dried. Since even a small staple would have been impossible to hide on the Kettenkrad, I ended up using black thread; I tied two knots, one on each side of the very small and narrow track to hold the ends together.

Finally, the track would not allow lacquer primer or enamel paint to adhere to it, which (for this build) is the only type of paint I tried. Even though I had cleaned the track and primed it with Gunze Mr. Surfacer beforehand, handling the track caused the paint (and primer!) to flake off – I've never had that happen before with DS track. I ended up

removing the track until the end of the build, painting it again, attaching it and touching up the spots where it had flaked off, and then not touching it again. Boo.

Painting and Finish

Normally I use Tamiya paints for everything, but I thought I'd try something new for a German Grey finish. I came across a good article that fit the bill - modeler Glenn L. Bartolotti's 'Step-by-Step Finishing German Armor: Tiger I, s.Pz.-Abt. 503' (Bladerunner8u Production, © 2009 bladerunner8u@netscape.net). Glenn used Model Master paints, I had them in my paint rack – so with this build I was going to 'paddle down a different creek'.

The only item I left off the completed model for painting was the engine hatch. This was painted separately and attached just before weathering. Painting and finishing followed the steps from that article.

(Note: I thin all Model Master paint and 50:50 with Model Master Airbrush Thinner. I use Vallejo's own thinner for all Vallejo paints. I use a Pasche-H Single-Action airbrush, Number #3 tip, at 20 lbs. pressure for everything.)

1. I started by airbrushing a primer coat of Gunze Mr. Surfacer 1200 to give the plastic and PE some grip for the following coats
2. I followed this with an overall pre-shade coat of DunkelBraun RLM 61 mixed 50/50 with Flat Black – this would fill in the dark recesses and provide the shadows near the flat surface edges, adding depth to the camouflage coats to come. Surprisingly, DunkelBraun ('Dark Brown') comes out looking Grey, not brown. Go figure.
3. Next, a base coat of straight DunkelBraun RLM 61 was applied. I sprayed it carefully, allowing a hint of the black to show along the edges and behind the pioneer tools, etc.
4. Next I applied a post-shading coat of DunkelBraun RLM 61 mixed 50/50 with Flat Insignia White. I layered this on lightly, working from the center of each section outward. This gives the surface a little more depth – German grey can be pretty boring if you don't spice it up a little.
5. Once the paint was dry, I airbrushed just the areas that would receive decals with Future to give them a smooth surface to set up on.
6. 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 hand-brushing 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.
7. To give the wooden parts of the tools more depth, I brushed on a little Mig Wash Brown oil paint 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 dry-brushing. 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 latches and metal parts darker than the center of the wooden shafts. I then placed the Kettenkrad on its side and let a little black wash puddle up on the horizontal surfaces of the metal axe and shovel heads. When dry, I think this gives them a convincing look of used steel.
8. I applied the decals using the Red and Blue Micro Sol/ Set system without any problems. While I appreciate Dragon providing the means to 'roll your own' license numbers for the three license plates in the kit, I wish they would also provide pre-made license numbers for those of us too clumsy to work with the fantastically-small scale numerals needed for the Kettenkrad. I managed to get a few letters and numbers down on all three plates before losing my sanity.
9. After I was sure the decals were dry, I airbrushed the whole vehicle with Vallejo Flat Varnish to kill any shiny spots. I cut the varnish 50/50 with Vallejo Airbrush Thinner to improve flow.
10. Next, with the flat coat on the model, I applied several filters and pin washes to enhance the gray. I heavily thin all of my washes and filters with Mona Lisa White Spirit. This odorless paint thinner is very mild and will not react with the enamel paint underneath.

I first brushed each section I was working on with straight Mona Lisa White Spirit and then, while the surface was still wet, applied Mig Oils (Wash Brown, Shadow Brown, Black and Rust) with a small, pointed brush. I applied a filter of Wash Brown to the leather

seats and Black to the tire and track. I then gave the vehicle a pin wash using Mig Dark Wash (aka Raw Umber) straight from the bottle, paying special attention to the buckles, pioneer tools, wheel etc.

11. Next I dry-brushed the vehicle to lighten things up a little, using Mig Abt170 German Grey Highlight oil paint that I let sit for a while on cardboard to leach out as much of the oil as possible before applying it the protruding detail.
12. Finally, I added tiny drops of Future to the instrument faces on the dashboard to simulate the instrument glazing.

Once dry I attached the engine cover and sent this little dude to the photo booth.

Conclusion

The assembly of this model was a challenge. I wanted to review the kit because I thought that Dragon had released a new molding of this cool little tractor, only to find out that it was the same old kit from long ago. The parts fit but wiggled when in place, requiring you to sit and hold each piece while it dried since the vehicle is too small and delicate to use clamps of any sort. I could have used super glue throughout but chose not to. The track was also a disappointment. Dragon's wonderful DS track was not the same stuff found in this kit, regardless of what the literature says. Still – with patience, I was able to produce a nice little representation of the venerable Kettenkrad, and in the end that's all I will remember about this build.

While Dragon makes some really great kits, this is not one of them and, I would recommend it for modelers who have some experience in solving minor problems.

That said; I always look forward to building new armor kits from Dragon.

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.