

AIRFIX 1/72ND BRISTOL BLENHEIM 1F

A SURVIVOR'S TALE...

It's my own fault - I was warned about this kit when I mentioned that I'd intended to purchase one.



The kit arrived from Hannants, accompanied by an appropriate Xtradecal set - Sheet X72203. I also received a further package from Oulton Broad containing a Yahu Models etched, pre-coloured instrument panel, and a set of Montex vinyl masks to assist with painting the extensive nose/cockpit glazing. On opening the kit, I was struck by the sheer number of parts, carried on seven runners, including a clear runner. The large number of parts is owing to the inclusion of many parts for the kits of the Blenheim bomber and fighter variants in the short-nosed Mark I and longer-nosed Mark IV versions. The parts are cleanly moulded and very crisply detailed, with fine panel lines. Broadly speaking, I followed the construction sequence laid down in the instructions. Everything looked rather promising...

The build started well with the assembly of the rear fuselage halves and the wings; there was a largish gap inside the bomb bay with matching gaps on the outside of the fuselage. It looked nasty, but I filled the fuselage gaps with slivers of ten-thou plasticard and a

little filler and left the bomb bay gap as the fighter Blenheim has a gun pack mounted on the closed bomb bay doors.

I then built the nose/cockpit section... This went well but the starboard glazing was very slightly distorted in my kit, though, after a bit of a fight, I persuaded it to fit. The cockpit interior is not quite as much on show as I'd thought, because of the extensive framing, but I added the Yahu Models instrument panel and seat belts from Tamiya tape. Before I had assembled the nose, I had test fitted the individual halves of the nose to the main fuselage - the fit was good, so it was with considerable over confidence that I now attempted to join the completed nose to the fuselage. It simply refused to fit..! After some "careful" thought, I resorted to the well tried *"Curse, and Apply Brute Force and Ignorance"* technique which did not let me down - that plus a generous amount of Vallejo Acrylic filler!

After this, I had a call from Peter Terry; he asked how the Blenheim was coming along, I told him, adding that I was now past the awkward bit - he then cheerfully told me that I yet had to tackle the engine cowlings!



The engines are little kits in their own right, and build well - as do all the kit's sub-assemblies. The cowlings each come in three sections plus the Townend exhaust collector ring, and after careful thought, and bearing Peter's ominous tones in mind, I assembled the cowlings and Townend ring and exhausts as complete units, and left them overnight to harden. They then slid without difficulty over the assembled engines, though a little light sanding of the tops of the cylinders was done to ease the passage of the cowlings. The engines would not be fitted until painting and decaling had been done.

At this point, I recalled that among our Members' Articles on our website, there was an article on building the Blenheim IVf by Arthur Banyard. All I will say is that I wish I'd remembered to refer to it sooner! Arthur's article brought to my attention that the bulges where the exhaust pipes join the Townend rings are only present on the Canadian licence-built Bolingbroke; I removed these bulges. Airfix had surveyed the sole airworthy Blenheim, at IWM Duxford - this aircraft used a number of donated Bolingbroke parts in its restoration after crashing (twice) after its initial restoration.



The cockpit was masked using the Montex set, and then all the glazed areas were sprayed with Xtracrylix Aircraft Grey Green

(XA1010) to simulate the interior colour of the framing. Next, the underside was sprayed RAF Sky (XA1007), before being masked prior to the application of the upper surface camouflage of RAF Dark Earth (XA1002) and RAF Dark Green (XA1001), the latter colour being painted, using a hairy stick, over the Dark Earth.

A coat of Xtracrylix Satin Varnish was lightly airbrushed over the whole model, and decals from Xtradecal Sheet X72203 were applied. As usual, the Xtradecals went onto the model without problem. The engines, without propellers, were now fitted, and the turret was built, ready to add at the end of the build.

Airfix provides two versions of the dorsal gun turret. One short and the other taller, but apart from giving the modeller the choice of which to use, there is no indication anywhere on the instruction sheet as to why there are two versions. This has caused some confusion for several online reviewers and correspondents in various forums (particularly among Americans). The answer is simple: the Blenheim's dorsal turret is semi-retractable; the lower position was used to reduce drag, and the higher position was used in action, and for servicing, though Blenheims were parked with the turret in either position.

I now added the pre-painted propellers. It ought to have been an easy job, but the propeller bosses have to be added separately, and these tiny parts do not fit. It is a case of a 1mm item being fitted into a 1mm hole; there is no tolerance, being a side effect of CAD. Similarly, the propellers will not fit over the (inadequate) prop-shafts protruding from the crank cases. I had to ream out the holes through the propellers to allow the bosses to fit and the propellers to fit their shafts. A set of jeweller's broaches is something that every modeller should own.

After a few oil streaks were added over the nacelles and a little "soot" sprayed ahead of the gun pack (Blenheim fighters were often

filthy in this area), a final coat of the satin varnish was sprayed over the model. 24 hours later I carefully removed the masking from the cockpit and was happy with the result; only a very tiny amount of retouching of the framing was needed. The landing light was fitted in the port wing. The port/starboard navigation lights were added by painting transparent green and red over a silver base. That was it! Done!



The model represents a Blenheim If of 29 Sqn, at RAF Digby in October 1940. At that time, the Squadron was taking its first deliveries of the new Bristol Beaufighter, though they were not yet fully operational. The aircraft's code letters were NOT painted over the yellow outer ring of the fuselage roundel; on 1st May 1940, Signal X.485 was issued to all RAF Commands ordering that all Type 'A' fuselage roundels become Type 'A1' by adding the yellow ring, and it was easier and quicker for many squadrons to paint the yellow round their code letters when they were positioned close to the original type 'A' roundel, rather than paint out and the repaint the codes in a new position.

The above summarises the build: it was, at times, quite a battle, but I survived it (aided with an occasional celebratory dram of Laphroaig

after each problems at the various key stages had been surmounted). Arthur Banyard, in his Members' Article, queries Airfix's "Skill Level 2" grading for this kit. I do agree; it ought to be a "4", not because of the complexity of the kit, but because of the fact that the kit requires *considerable modelling experience*, rather than simply skill and dexterity, to produce a satisfactory model. However, Airfix deserves much kudos for producing kits for both bomber and fighter versions of the Mark I and Mark IV Blenheims.



Would I build another? **NO!**

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