

The Little Aviation Museum

Workbench notes

Messerschmitt Bf109C-1 in 1/72 by Heller

It's still something of a mystery to me why I ended up making a model of a Bf109. Lots of modellers do it all the time, Bf109s must be in the top five modelling subjects of all time, but I don't think I've made one since the 1970s. It may be a historically significant aircraft but I don't think it's particularly attractive, all angles and square bits in comparison to, say, a Spitfire or a Zero.

Part of the motivation might have been that I felt like building a Heller kit. These days they are usually looked down upon by the modelling experts as being old and primitive, but there was a time when they were at the cutting edge of what a good model kit should be. True, these kits do have raised panel detail, which is a cardinal sin these days, but apart from that they build up into excellent little models.



Take this Heller Bf109B/C kit for example, the parts fit is excellent with minimal need for any filler. The detailing is crisp and clear and there is enough detailing to keep most modellers, me anyhow, happy. There is, for example, some cockpit detail moulded into the inner sides of the fuselage halves that needs as little dry brushing to bring out the detail. There are probably modern day kits in which the large trimming wheel is an additional part, but is it necessary in such a small and cramped cockpit. The only thing I did was to add some seatbelts to give the model that little touch of verisimilitude, but you can barely notice them after all that effort.

In addition to the kit I had an old sheet of Microscale decals for some pre-war Bf109s in German and Spanish markings. I also had a set of old Falcon vacform canopies for German aircraft including early model Bf109s. For guidance also I had the old Squadron 'In Action' book on early model Bf109s which included all the detailed photos and drawings I needed, To make the project

even better it included a beautiful side view painting of a Bf109C that was also on the decal sheet, and it had a sharks mouth too. Sometimes the pieces of a project just fall into place, don't they?

What I did need was some early war German camouflage colours. I had some AK 'RealColors' for late war Luftwaffe aircraft but the only one that was accurate for pre war aircraft was RLM02, which I used to paint the cockpit. The rest I ordered from the SMS lacquer range which were, as usual, a delight to use.

I'll skip over writing about the construction phase because it went like a dream. This is what you expect from Heller kits of this period. Some of the joint were a bit sloppy by modern day standards and I think the undercarriage legs are a little bit more splayed than they should be - although I took my guidance on this from the Squadron book. The only complaint I had about the entire kit was that the little parts, like the oleos and under wing balance weights, are so fragile and tiny that the carpet monster ate a couple of them.

The Microscale decals were also excellent and went on beautifully. I had trouble with the sharks mouth on the port side which started to disintegrate as I tried to get it into position, so when it came to the starboard decal I cut it in half so there was less stress on it as I positioned it, and that worked well. The only kit decals I used was the little octane marking which isn't on the Microscale sheet.



Deciding on the camouflage pattern was a little challenge. The kit instructions, the decal sheet and the book all had slightly different ideas about what it should be but I decided to use the kit instructions because they at least showed both sides of the fuselage rather than leaving the starboard side to my imagination. The only thing that went wrong with the painting was that I neglected to shake the bottle of SMS flat clear and ended up with a nice glossy finish. As a result I had to apply a second coat with the bottle shaken severely, and the result was much more attractive.

I enjoyed making this model. The only real problems came in cutting out and attaching the vacform canopy and attaching the shark mouth decals. The only other Bf109 kit I have is the Heller Bf109K kit and I'm giving it some serious consideration.



Leigh Edmonds
May 2023

The Little Aviation Museum

W094