

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

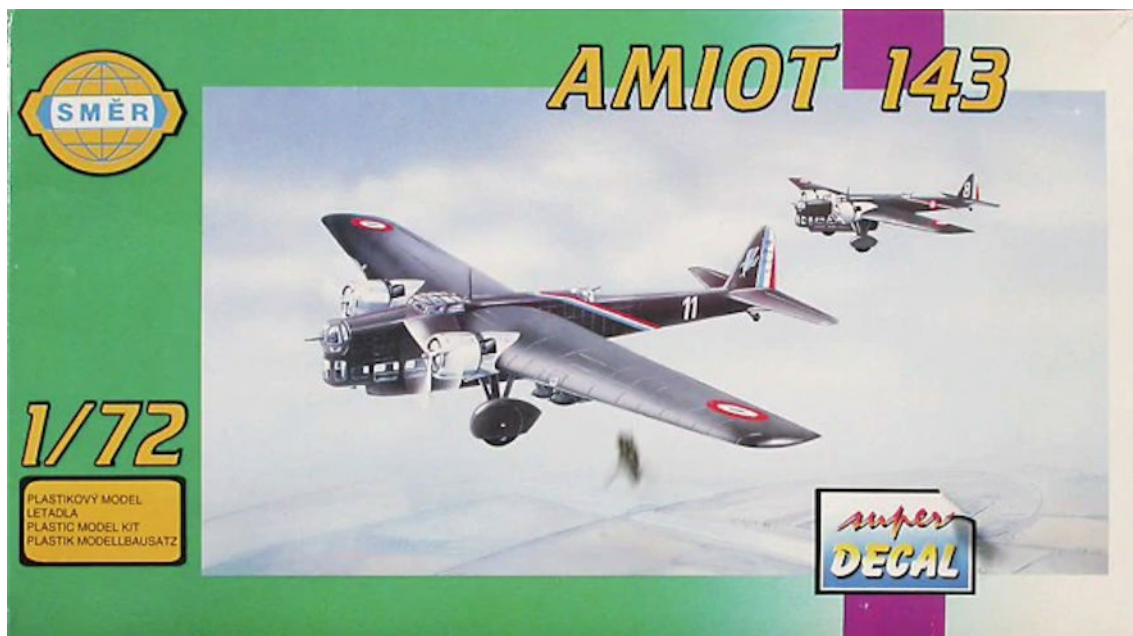
Workbench notes

AMIOT 143 IN 1/72 BY SMER

(June 2000)

Said by many to be one of the ugliest aeroplanes every made, the Amiot 143M was an evolution of the Amiot 140 which was designed for a 1928 French Air Force requirement for a 'Multiplace de combat' (multiplace combat aircraft) to be used as a day/night bomber, long range escort and reconnaissance aeroplane. The first Amiot 140 flew in April 1931 and 40 were ordered by the Armée de l'Air. Amiot refined the design to the 142 with an inline engine and the 143 with radial engines and the 143 was put into production (replacing the Amiot 140 order). The first Amiot 143 flew in August 1934, deliveries to the Armée de l'Air began in July 1935 and it remained in production until 1937 when the 138th and final aeroplane of the type was manufactured.

Sixty of these obsolete aeroplanes remained in service at the beginning of World War II and were used during the 'Phoney War' for night reconnaissance and leaflet dropping. With the beginning of the German invasion in 1940 Amiot 143s were used in night bombing raids on transport infrastructure in Germany, Belgium and France and proved fairly successful with two squadrons dropping between them 338,626 lbs of bombs for only four losses from 197 sorties. They were highly vulnerable in daylight and on their only day sortie against strategically important bridges 11 out of 12 aeroplanes were lost because of their poor performance, light defensive armament and complete lack of armour. After the French defeat some Amiot 143s remained in service as transports in the Vichy forces, the last ones being grounded in February 1944.



The Eastern European company Smer has been doing fans of French aviation a favour by widely re-releasing a lot of older Heller kits. Heller, the French kit manufacturer, had made kits of a great many French aeroplanes during the 60s and 70s, many of them very advanced for the time and usually of a good quality. These days Heller is also re-releasing many of those kits so exactly the same moulds can be had from Smer and Heller. The difference between them is usually found in the decals, if anything the sheets with the Smer kits are better but the colours shades seem less accurate than those of the Heller kits. Having said that, I haven't seen Heller re-releasing their Amiot 143M kit so you'll have to look for the Smer version.

The kit is not terribly complicated so there's not much that can go wrong with it. There are rivets everywhere so they have to be sanded down. There are, however (there's almost always a however) two major challenges with this kit. One is the fact that it's completely empty on the inside, the other is that there is an awful lot of glazing. If you peer in through the glazing there's obviously nothing inside, this isn't a problem for many large aeroplanes where any effort you put into detailing the interior is usually lost so it's not worth going to much trouble, but with the Amiot something has to be done.

I happened to be flicking through an old issue of *Flight* and came across a diagram of the interior of the innards of the Amiot 143 which are quite different from the actual aeroplane in some details but it was a useful guide. Most important is the bomb bay which is located on the port side of the fuselage, a floor between the upper and lower levels and something in the cockpit for the pilot to sit on and use. The spares box got a fair workout and bits of plastic card were shaped up for the bomb bay and the floor.

The French appear to have used a shade of very deep black grey for their interior colour in the late 1930s so a lot of the effort that went into filling out the fuselage disappeared into the darkness. Still, without the additions the model would have looked a lot less realistic than it does with them. There are still large naked areas in the fuselage lower level but photos of the actual aeroplane show the same thing, so that's okay.

If you've got nothing to do for a weekend you might have just enough time to mask all the glazing properly. A lot of it is extremely fiddly and the turrets will test your patience. If you've got a very steady hand it would be easier to hand paint them, but I don't have that attribute. After that it's all easy. Aeromaster produce a good range of acrylics in French colours and the Amiot is overall



chocolate brown. I used some of the decals from the kit, particularly the rudder stripes which have the serial numbers superimposed on them, but for the roundels and fuselage stripe I used the invaluable Model Art decal range which has slightly different shades of blue and red and are probably more accurate. The only break from solid brown is the engine nacels that are bright silver.

The kit comes with odd looking bombs that go on the external underwing racks. I've no idea how accurate they are or what colour they should be so I left them off.

As for ugly, I don't know that I agree. Square, angular, ungainly perhaps, but to my eye the Amiot 143 has a certain stately and uncluttered elegance, the kind of thing that you'd expect from the French. Perhaps the huge spatted wheels dangling down from the wings are unbecoming, but in comparison to a lot of other aeroplanes designed and built around the same time I quite like it.



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