

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

BOEING 377 STRATOCRUISER IN 1/144 BY MINICRAFT

(October 2000)

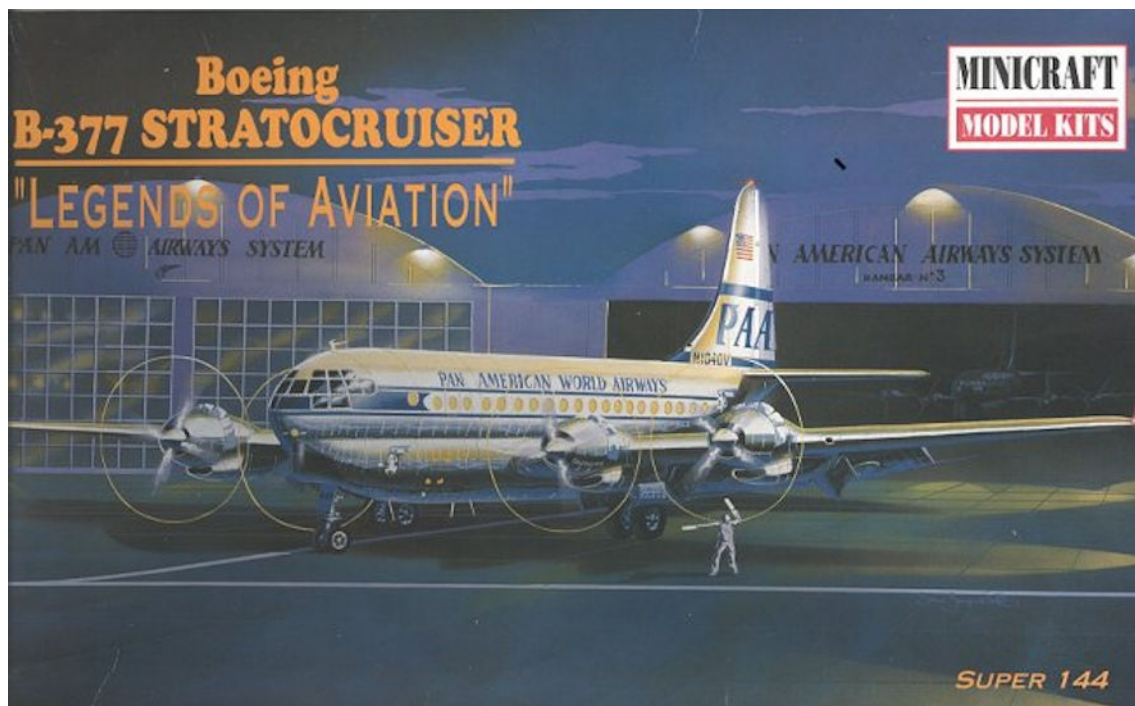
Along with the Lockheed Constellation and Super Constellation and Douglas DC-6 and DC-7 the Boeing Stratocruiser represented the peak of piston engine airliners. They dominated the world's airways during the 1950s until the arrival of the first jet airliners and exuded an aura of romanticism and luxuriousness that 707s and 747 simply don't have.

The Stratocruiser was a commercial development of Boeing's C-97 which, in turn, owed a lot to the B-50 which was developed from the B-29. With such a lineage the Stratocruiser was an effective airliner, its double-bubble fuselage cross section made it a two storey airliner with a luxury lounge or cocktail bar on the lower level.

Only 55 Stratocruisers were made, Pan American operating 27 of them at one time and BOAC had 17 in its fleet. Ten of Pan American's airliners were fitted with additional fuel capacity to give them trans-Atlantic range and were known as 'Super Stratocruisers'. The arrival of pure jet airliners at the end of the 1950s saw the Stratocruiser quickly disappear from service.

I wasn't really very impressed and I didn't enjoy making this kit, but the problems weren't all with the kit, I helped. But let's start with the kit.

On the plus side, this is definitely the best kit of a Boeing Stratocruiser that you are likely to find in 1/144 scale. But that's not saying much since I doubt there's another kit in that scale on the market. In terms of scale and look this is actually a good kit and it does look like a Stratocruiser.



My real complaint is that for a kit in this scale you'd expect a lot more finesse, but what you get is some very robust mouldings that would still be considered coarse in 1/48 scale. The trailing edges, for example, oh dear! It took a lot of effort to get them thinned down to something that looked suitable for this scale. The propellers, they look more like planks of 6x4 timber than blades. The line engraving wouldn't be out of place on a 1/32 kit. The only parts of the kit that really have the finesse you'd expect are the undercarriage legs and they are the last bits you want to break when you look at them. I'd much have preferred delicate propellers and robust undercarriage legs. Am I sounding crabby yet?

Then there is the problem of some details. The Stratocruiser had lovely big spinners but the kit supplies little cones that go on front of the propellers and look a bit sad. The actual aeroplane has all kinds of little antennas on it but none of them are offered in the kits. The superchargers on the engine nacelles are barely better than blobs, etc, etc.

In terms of construction I had a lot of trouble, I couldn't get the wing halves to line up properly, I couldn't get the engines to sit on the nacelles very well and I couldn't see how the rear stabilisers attached to the fuselage without leaving massive gaps that needed acres of filler. Talking of filler, be prepared to use lots.

Well, with a lot of whittling away and filling and sanding and filling and sanding, plus a few months when this thing sat in its box while I got up the nerve to have another go at it, I got it to the stage where I had a tolerable model ready for painting. Then I wondered what had possessed me to make this kit at all - silver and white, the two most difficult colours in the whole of modelling.

At about this time I read a review of the Minicraft 1/72 Stratocruiser which mentioned a metallic finish called *Alclad II* which the reviewer really liked. I thought I'd try it since I'm not really happy with all the problems that come with Metalizer and after a few weeks the bottles arrived in the mail. Fine, except this is a laquer finish that dissolved plastic and has to have a protective barrier coat... Let's pass over what happened next, suffice it to say that a week later, with my bed in the mental home all but booked and a model that looks about as thick as it did before I thinned



things down (there are something like eight or nine coats of paint on it), I ended up getting a coat of *Alclad II* on the thing. This *Alclad II* stuff isn't bad, it still doesn't really look like bare metal but it's as good as anything I've seen and it'll do me until something better comes along.

Then it was time for the masking and the white topside. You can't mask Metalizer so this was a very useful change. The white, I'm using ordinary house paint, semi-gloss which comes up looking good in a scale like 1/144 where full gloss looks far too shiny. It turned out that the white went on nicely over the *Alclad II* and I only needed two coats. After that it was a quick dash to the finishing line. By this stage I was completely sick of the sight of the thing and it was either finished if off of toss it in the bin. If you don't peer at the model too hard it does look a bit like a Stratocruiser. I'm just glad the nightmare is behind me.



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