

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

DEHAVILLAND SEA VENOM FAW.53

(December 2000)

The deHavilland Company used a deHavilland Vampire fitted with a Ghost engine to set a new world air speed record in May 1947. Previously the British government had not been very interested in an up-rated Vampire fighter but the new record got their attention, work started on developing the Venom as a ground attack fighter and they began entering RAF service in August 1952.

The main changes between the Vampire and the Venom was the engine that was 50 per cent more powerful and a new, bigger and thinner wing.

In 1948 deHavilland also began planning a naval version of the Venom, based on an all-weather radar equipped version and the first Sea Venom flew in April 1951. The main version to see service with the Royal Navy was the Sea Venom FAW.21 of which 167 were built and the Sea Venom FAW.22 with slightly improved engine and radar of which 39 were built. The French also made a version of the Sea Venom, the Sud Est Aquilon.

The Australian government decided to buy Sea Venoms for the Royal Australian Navy in July 1951 and all 39 Australian Sea Venoms came out from Britain on the *HMAS Melbourne* when it sailed to Australia for the first time in 1956.



The Australian version of the Sea Venom, the FAW.53, was basically similar to the British FAW.21 with a different radar set. Australia's Sea Venoms served with 808, 805, 816 and 724 Squadrons of the RAN, the first three squadrons serving on the *Melbourne* and 724 serving as a training and conversion squadron and doing all kinds of odd jobs at *HMAS Albatross* at Nowra.

The Sea Venoms remained in service on the *Melbourne* until August 1967 when they were replaced by Douglas A-4Gs and the last Sea Venoms remained in service with 724 Squadron as target tugs until June 1973. They gave long and faithful service without doing anything too dramatic.

There's nothing wrong with being hopeful, is there? I saw this kit in its flash new box, it was cheap enough and perhaps it might have been a good new moulding of this elegant little aeroplane. Of course, when I opened it up there were the good old Frog mouldings looking just the way they had the last time I looked in the Frog kit I happen to have. Oh well, I shrugged, at least the decal sheet looks pretty good, so I decided to give it a go.

I'm still a fan of Frog kits after all these years, though sometimes I wonder why. They gave you a good honest basis on which to make a good model, nothing fancy but generally accurate enough. Their decal sheets were like the kits themselves, good for their time. The forward fuselage shape is not quite right, a little too rounded for my taste but it would take a fair bit of work to make it right. It would also be nice if the kit supplied the vanes that go in the air intakes too.

In terms of construction there's nothing that needs comment on, it goes together easily though you have to spend a bit of time tidying up seams and bits where the parts don't meet with Tamiya-like precision. There's nothing in the cockpit to speak of, I was tempted to lash out with a couple of old white metal Martin Baker Mk.4 ejector seats I'd been saving up but in the end I was too frugal and used the ones from the kit painted black with brass seat handles I'd picked up somewhere. The other thing I had to change was the cockpit canopy, the one supplied in the kit is so thick that it won't fit with the ejector seats in place, so I had to fish out an old Falcon set of vac-formed canopies that had one for the Sea Venom FAW.21 and use that. It came up looking nicely.

Everything else that went wrong with this model I blame on the cat. I came home one day to find that 'Charlie the Wonder Kat' (it's a wonder he's still alive) had decided to fiddle about with the half completed Sea Venom kit which involved scrabbling around in the open box with his paws, throwing all the bits onto the floor, shredding the instruction sheet and putting some memorable claw marks through the decal sheet as well. After that getting everything together in the right place was



a bit of a raffle so if you put my Sea Venom alongside a real one you could have one of those competitions where you have to spot the differences.

Let me help you with just a few. First, the pitot tube on the kit is flimsy and I replaced it with a bit of craft wire (you learn things from watching 'Better Homes and Gardens'), it's supposed to go on the port fin but I got it wrong and mine's on the starboard fin. Second, the top side grey camouflage on the pylons is the wrong shape. Third, the nose undercarriage door is on the wrong side. There are more, but I'd prefer not to have to give you all the details here. (There's a lesson here, check all your references before rather than after you do something...).

Then we come to the lovely decal sheet which really looks good but may not be what it seems. The least wrecked bit was the RAN markings so I decided to use them. The registration for the model is WZ906 which, according the Stewart Wilson, carried different side numbers to the ones supplied for the kit, 209. He doesn't say anything about any Sea Venom having that number. The decal sheet says the aeroplane flew with 724 Squadron and yet the 'M' on the tail suggest it flew with one of the squadrons on the *Melbourne*. It's a bit of mystery, who does their research, that's what I want to know? Still, I've made worse models...



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