

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

AIRBUS A.300 IN 1/144 BY AIRFIX

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By the 1960s it seemed that European aviation manufacturers had lost out to the competition of the United States airliner manufacturers; Boeing, Douglas and Lockheed all had significant airliners in production.

Early planning of a European constructed wide body airliner to suit European conditions began in the mid 1960s in Britain, France and Germany and similar design concepts gradually led to the development of a consensus of what was required in Europe where the density of air traffic created the need for a fuel efficient, quiet and high capacity airliner capable of serving short and medium range routes with equal effectiveness.

In May 1969 France and West Germany decided to proceed with the development of the European Airbus but an initial lack of interest from many airlines meant that the British government did not become a member of the consortium at the beginning, although it joined later as did the Netherlands and Spain. Airbus Industrie was established in December 1970 to manage the development, manufacture, marketing and support of the A.300

The design and manufacture was broken into components manufactured by such companies as Hawker Siddeley, Fokker, CASA and Aerospatiale with final assembly taking place in Toulouse. Construction of the first A.300 began in September 1969 and it made its first flight on 28 October 1972. The first production A.300 flew on 28 June 1973 and certification was completed in France and Germany in March 1974.

The first Airbus entered service with Air France on 30 May 1974 on the company's Paris-London route, quickly becoming popular with passengers, crew and people living around the airports because of its relatively quiet engines. The A.300 was an economical and reliable airliner but it wasn't until about 1979 that airlines began ordering them in any numbers. Since then the design has been modified in many significant ways with shorter fuselages, with new wings and new narrow



body fuselages, creating a range of airliners that competes successfully with the best airliners produced in the United States.

The A.300 has an interesting place in Australian aviation history. From the beginning of the 1960s for two decades the government forced TAA and Ansett to match capacity by introducing the same airliners to service at the same time. In December 1979 TAA, wanting to introduce much larger airliners, ordered four A.300s to enter service between June 1981 and November 1982 and later a fifth. A little later Ansett ordered Boeing 767s. It was the first time since the 1940s that Ansett ordered the right airliners and TAA the wrong ones.

Not that the A.300 wasn't a good airliner, it just happened to have about 50 more seats than the demand of the time needed. The result was that TAA sold one and leased another, keeping three in operation on the most popular routes between Melbourne-Sydney and Sydney-Brisbane. They remained in service, having served with Australian Airlines and Qantas, until they were withdrawn from service in 1998.

This classic Airfix 'Skykings' kit was released in 1976. Like the Airfix kits of the time it is fairly simple with the exception of every door included as a separate items which certainly pushes up the number of parts but only means trouble with having to fit them all and then smooth them into the rest of the fuselage. Unlike earlier kits with turbofan engines that have flat panels at the back of engines instead of the bypass fan exhaust, the A.300 engines are excellent and look really good. In fact the entire kit goes together fairly easily with not too much filler required.

As is usual with these 1/144 airliners, the construction is only the basic shape on which airline colours are placed. The version of the kit I had was the second release from May 1977 with fairly plain ordinary Lufthansa colours which were old, brittle, yellowing and uninteresting by the time I got around to putting this kit together. I was keen to make this model in TAA, Australian or Qantas colours but a thorough hunt through on-line shops turned up very little in the way of any markings for the A.300 and I eventually found some interesting looking colours for Air Afrique, a north African airline that has just gone bankrupt. At the most recent model expo I also found a sheet



of upper wing decals with walk lines and the like that promised to look good, so I cruised the web looking for information on Air Afrique colours and painted the model fuselage overall white with grey and silver wings, all set for the decals.

Then, entirely by accident, I happened across a site that listed pages of decals for Australian aeroplanes, including Australian airliners and the TAA A.300. After a bit of messing around the decal sheet finally arrived in the mail and, goshwowboy, was I ever impressed. Unfortunately the colours were slightly different from the ones I'd prepared for the Air Afrique version so it was out with the airbrush again. The main thing to note is that the rear windows of the kit slant up a little (apparently so containers fit in the under cabin hold) while the decals don't, so a little nipping and tucking is necessary.

The decals are available through Snowy Mountain Models, under either the Hawkeye or Model Alliance brand, and I haven't seen this kind of decals before. The entire sheet is decal so the markings have to be carefully cut out, they float off very quickly and easily, they are easy to move around to get into place properly and they are tough and easily handle rough treatment. Even better, they take Microscale Solvaset very well.

The only problem with them is that they are fairly transparent so they have to be laid down over a white base, which is no problem for airliner models. The instruction sheet is a little vague about where the markings on the wings go so I will have wait until I can find some decent photos of TAA A.300 wings before I can use the last of the decals. Even so, I really enjoyed making a model of this elegant European airliner in its unusual Australian markings and I think it looks very nice, even if it is still a bit of a work in progress.



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