

# THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

## *Workbench notes*

### CONVAIR B-36D IN 1/144 BY HOBBYCRAFT

(March 2004)

The B-36 'Peacemaker' has one serious claim to fame; it was seriously big. This huge bomber, the largest ever made, became one of the United States most potent symbols of world wide military power because it could go anywhere and drop an astonishing weight of bombs including, or course, atomic and hydrogen bombs.

It's development was a response to the events of the first year and a half of World War II which saw the Axis powers in charge of virtually all of Europe except for Britain. Although one of the United States' most important strengths was that its enemies had to cross large oceans to reach it, the opposite was also the case. The origin of the B-36 dated from April 1941 when the USAAC issued specifications for a very heavy long range strategic bomber which could fly intercontinental distances to drop its payload and return safely to bases on the continental US.

The B-36 design was selected out of four contenders for development and everything was on a huge scale including its development time with the first one only ready to be rolled out in September 1945, just after the end of World War II. The XB-36 flew for the first time on 8 August 1946.

One hundred B-36s had been ordered in July 1943 but reaching production capacity did not occur until August 1947 when the first B-36A was delivered. The B-36 remained in production for seven years in a number of versions the last one was retired from service in February 1959. It's service life was relatively short due mainly to the revolution that jet engines brought to military aviation and it was unable to keep up with developments leading to the B-52 but the threat it posed,



of being able to deliver destruction to any point of the globe, did what was required of it and is one of the reasons it was called the Peacemaker.

In all, only 384 were constructed but the only people that were killed or wounded by them was their crews, which was ample demonstration of the Strategic Air Command's motto that Peace was their Profession.

The first service version of the B-36 was the B-36B which was criticized for its relative slowness and very long take-off run. Convair solved the problem by attaching four jet engines in two pods under each wing outboard of the piston engines. B-36s could fly well on four piston engines in cruise so the jets engines were used mainly for take-off and to give the bomber speed and height over enemy airspace.

The first production B-36D flew on 26 March 1946, they entered service in August 1950 and the last was accepted in August 1951. Twenty-two B-36Ds were built and sixty-four were converted from B-36Bs. They established their reputation with some very long range flights, in August and September 1953 when B-36s of the 92nd Heavy Bombardment Wing completed the first mass flight to the Far East. The last B-36D was taken out of service in 1957, they were replaced in front line service by later B-36 models.

After having struggled with the Monogram B-52 and several very large kits in the past few years I was aware of but not very keen on the idea of having to make the Monogram B-36. If the B-36 was the world's biggest bomber that would have meant the 1:72 kit would have to be very close to the largest 1/72 kit in existence. I wasn't keen on having to find the space for such a monster and I was not looking forward to having to deal with such vast areas of bare metal.

So what a relief it was to see that there was a 1:144 kit, even if it was from Hobbycraft which doesn't have a reputation for making the world's best kits. Still, since I did want to add a B-36 to my collection and it seemed unlikely to me that anybody else was going to make a kit of one after Hobbycraft's had entered the market, it was a matter of buying one (which didn't quite involve a bank loan) and then making the best of what was in the box. What a pleasant surprise to find that Hobbycraft have really done themselves proud with this kit and it is probably one of the nicest 1:144 kits you are likely to come across. The moulding is nice and crisp, the engraving might be a touch on the heavy side for a 1:144 kit (but it does break up the vast expanses of bare plastic), the fit is lovely and the decals sheet is excellent.



There are/were three versions on market, all basically the same but with bits for each version. The B-36B and the B-36D are basically the same, except for the jet engines, you can also get the version that has the F-84 dangling underneath and that might be interesting but I preferred to make one of the monsters that actually cruised around the stratosphere looking majestic and not doing much else. I imagine that somebody who was really keen could convert this into just about any model of the B-36 with a little bit of research but getting decent decals for them would be a different exercise.

The whole thing goes together with no fuss. There may have been a bit of filler here and there but nothing very serious. The only little discrepancy is the radome for the radar for the tail guns which is for a later version and needs smallizing, which is not very difficult because the parts are separate and it can be done before they are assembled.

The only difficult part is the transparencies, the manufacturer suggests that the observation blisters for the gunners should just be stuck on the fuselage but I went to the trouble of drilling holes in the fuselage for them and I think they look better. The moulded framing on the cockpit and nose parts seemed to me to be far too bulky for such a tiny scale so I sanded it all off, polished up the plastic with brasso and made up the framing using some clear decal sprayed with metalizer to match the finish of the rest of the model.

The decals were fine apart from some of the walklines on the upper wing that fell into pieces when I was trying to apply them. In reality this is a very simple kit to make but it does look big and impressive, even in such a tiny scale.



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