

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

AMIOT 354 IN 1/72 BY MACH 2

(November 2004)

Like several other notable aeroplane designs of its time, such as the Bristol Blenheim and Dornier Do17, this Amiot medium bomber first saw the light of day in the guise of a high speed postal aeroplane. However, when the Amiot 341 was displayed at the Paris Salon in 1936 it already had a bomb bay. The prototype Amiot 340 flew for the first time on 6 December 1937 but before it was ordered into production for a military role it underwent several changes including a reduced wingspan, changed tail section with endplate fins replacing the single fin, engine changes and inclusion of a fourth defensive position with a gunner armed with a machine gun fired from a ventral hatch. The new version, designated the Amiot 351, was ready for flight testing that began in January 1939 and was completed successfully.

A number of variants of the basic design were planned but only three were put into production. The most obvious change occurred in the Amiot 354 that reverted to the single fin tail unit but a number of other versions included two with Rolls Royce Merlin engines and another two versions with Hispano-Suiza inline engines. Another version again was used for record breaking flights in the late 1930s.



The two main versions to eventually see production were the 351 and the 354 which were virtually interchangeable apart from different tail units. However, despite the potential of the design the Amiot bomber got caught up in the widespread disruptions caused by the reorganization and partial nationalization of the French aviation industry in the second half of the 1930s. Consequently the first two Amiot 354s were not delivered to an operational unit until 7 April 1940. Even then, deliveries of the 20mm cannon rear defense meant that most 351s and 354s that reached operational units were not fitted with them at first.

Only a total of 62 Amiot 354s had been delivered before the fall of France in June 1940 and they saw very little action. Two units that had begun conversion to them retained their existing equipment for night bombing because there were insufficient new bombers to complete conversion. In less than a month's operations one unit lost nine 351s and 354s but only three in combat, the rest were lost in training accidents or in German attacks on airfields.

After the creation of the Vichy government a number of Amiot 354s were converted for use by Air France, flying services to the government's overseas territories with additional fuel tanks fitted in the bomb bays. When the Germans occupied the whole of France the Luftwaffe took over and used a few and one of them survived the war to be used for liaison flights with the French Air Force.

Okay, I'm a masochist. I admit it. Yet another Mach 2 kit to bang my head against. There's something about them that discourages you right from the beginning. Maybe it's the very simple instruction sheet which is not so much multi-lingual as non-lingual and as vague as a set of instructions can be. Perhaps it is the quality of the moulding which is not too bad for the large pieces but truly awe inspiring for the smaller ones. This kit, for example, had a couple of little pieces that were so misshapen that I could not figure out what they were supposed to be or where they were to go. Perhaps it is the decal sheet which harks back to the early Airfix and Frog kits in its simplicity. But despite all that, Mach 2 makes kits of aeroplanes you won't find anywhere else (for the most part) and so all the discouragements have to be put aside in the expectation of ending up with a relatively good model. I suppose that a really good modeller could turn one of these kits into a competition winner, but that's not me.

The other thing, of course, is that you always have to do your research when making a Mach 2 kit. It's partly because you will probably, like me, have no idea of the history of the model you are about to embark upon so it is useful to know that this is supposed to be a high speed medium bomber



rather than a record setting aeroplane or even the original mail carrier. The kit itself tells you nothing of all this apart from the name of aeroplane you're supposed to be able to make from the bits.

The other reason is because the instructions are so skimpy in key areas that you have to line up as many photos as you can to see the details of what the original thing looked like. In the case of this kit, the extensive framework on the canopy and nose is so gross that they had to be sanded back and the clear pieces polished up again, so some photos and a reasonable drawing were vital to putting the framing back again.

So, well armed it is time to dive into the box and start the struggle. This basically means trimming up each piece until everything fits nice and squarely. And when they don't, despite using every trick in the book, jiggling the pieces around a bit so that everything at least looks square... For example, if you look at the model head on you'll notice that the canopy is a bit lopsided. The solution? Don't look.

So much for the whinging. You get the option of making either the 351 or the 354 with parts and decals for each. I chose the 354 to reduce the stress of constructing the model and because the decals were more interesting. Once all the parts are in place the painting is relatively straightforward with the four tone colour scheme that was in vogue at the beginning of the war. I spent a couple of evenings masking the canopy but decided that masking the nose would be too much effort. To save my sanity I painted up a couple of scraps of decal sheet in the appropriate colours and sliced it up into strips about 1 mm wide and stuck them on to make the framing. It came up so nicely that I went back and did the same thing over the canopy which looked a bit ragged in comparison. The end result is so nice that you hardly notice it.

The decals weren't as bad as I had feared but Micro Sol just bounces off them. Instead I used good old Kleer (or whatever it is called) to hold them down. Then on with good old Dulcote and the effort and grief involved in making the kit was well rewarded, Oooo la la!



THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

W054