

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

FOKKER F-27 FRIENDSHIP IN 1/72 BY ESCI

(May 2005)

After World War II the airliner market was flooded with an almost endless supply of extremely cheap Douglas DC-3/C-47s. They made it possible for new airlines to begin flying and established airlines to expand rapidly to fill the growth in air services in the late 1940s and early 1950s. However, as time passed these old airliners began to lose their appeal as operation and maintenance costs rose and passengers began expecting better services. New airliners were needed but if they were going to be successful they had to do what the old DC-3s had done; in particular with the ability to fly short sectors and operate from relatively primitive aerodromes. Although nothing could really replace the old DC-3s several manufacturing companies developed airliners that came close, and perhaps the most popular was the Fokker Friendship.

Fokker began working on the design for a DC-3 replacement in the late 1940s and had a basic design ready by August 1950, for a small turboprop powered, high winged airliner with a capacity of 32 seats. By 1952 the design had grown by eight seats and, with the support of the Dutch government, Fokker began detailed design and construction, and the prototype flew on 24 November 1955. In April 1956 Fokker signed an agreement with Fairchild for licence manufacture of the F-27 in North America. Both production lines began constructing Friendships and the first one flew in Holland on 23 March 1958 and in North America on 14 April.



The first F-27 entered service in North America on 28 September 1958 and in Europe in November 1958. Friendship production continued into the 1980s until it was replaced by an updated version called the Fokker 50. A total of 786 Friendships were manufactured, 580 by Fokker and 206 by Fairchild Hiller. Many remain in service with second and third level airlines and with some military services.

Australia was quick to adopt the Friendship and TAA placed one of the earliest orders, for six on March 1956. By that time the old DC-3s were becoming uneconomic on the rural services that they flew for Ansett-ANA, TAA and the intrastate airlines such as Butler Air Transport, MMA and East West Airlines. When the first Friendships arrived in Australia two went to these airlines from the TAA order with MMA in Western Australia and East-West in New South Wales each getting one. They revolutionized rural air transport with their speed and pressurized cabins and in Western Australia services from the north-west that had previously taken the best part of two days could be flown in one in much greater comfort. People began booking flights on Friendships weeks in advance in preference to having to endure the old DC-3s.

For me one of the best things about flying in Friendships was the windows, huge oval things that gave an unobstructed view of the landscape floating by below. I made several flights from Melbourne to Canberra in them in 1979, which I always took in preference to the much faster DC-9 flights. On one occasion the few passengers on board were used to train a bunch of hostesses and I don't think I've ever had so many doses of tea and biscuits on one flight. Sadly they were replaced by the Fokker 50s within a year of two; not bad aeroplanes but not half as pleasurable to fly in as the old Friendships.

Who would not want a Fokker Friendship in their collection? Nobody, or at least nobody with an ounce of aesthetic sensibilities in their bones. It is a delightful looking aeroplane and one of the most historically important airliners ever to fly. Unfortunately, finding a Friendship kit these days is not easy and one recently sold on eBay for a small to medium house mortgage. Fortunately I picked up this kit from a club members a couple of years ago. I had made the old Airfix Friendship decades ago but much preferred the new Esci one for its much crisper mouldings. A kit review says the old Airfix kit is more accurate and, looking at the Esci kit critically, there is a lot in what the review says. But since I only had the Esci kit I was happy to use it. Fortunately the late lamented



Hawkeye produced a nice sheet of East West livery for the kit, which was also encouragement to get to work.

The kit comes with a fairly detailed cabin with a floor and seats. In most airliners you could just leave them out but with the big Friendship windows it is preferable to put them in. Goodness knows what colours East-West used in their cabins, but I picked colours that were similar to the blue and orange livery with white for the headrest. It is barely noticeable but it does add a touch of verisimilitude. The review of the Esci and Airfix kits suggests a great many things that can be done to make them more accurate but the only improvement I made was to fatten up the nose a little because the kit's nose is far too thin and pointed. I built up the nose with slivers of plasticard and filler and then used the Dremel to bring it down to something approaching the proper shape.

The most difficult part of the entire project was the windows. It is easy enough to mask windows that are square or even round, but oval ones are much more difficult, especially in getting every window the same shape and size. I eventually hit on the idea of cutting masks for each window and found that the labels on milk bottles have sufficient thickness that I could cut them out, using the kit windows as a guide. After much patient effort and many holes in the ends of my fingers I ended up with enough and, although the end result is not perfect, it is better than anything else I've seen or heard of.

Airliner models are a bit tedious to make because of all the masking that is necessary when it comes to painting. The most important part of this exercise was to be fairly exact in masking between the grey and white of the fuselage because Hawkeye decals are fairly translucent. These decals also need very close trimming but they go on nicely. At the end of the project the end result is a very nice looking airliner in a nice Australian livery.



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