

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

BOEING 727-200 IN 1/144 BY AIRFIX

(July 2005)

Even while Boeing was developing its long range 707 airliner in the mid 1950s it saw the need for a shorter range passenger jet to serve the United States domestic market on routes as long as trans-continental New York-Los Angeles flights. Studies led to the development of a three engined jet transport using many components of the new 707 including the fuselage cross section that gave it a six-seat abreast capacity for economy passengers. New features of the 727 included grouping the three engines around the tail and a new and improved wing that incorporated new high lift flaps and leading edge slats and lift dumpers, all to give the new airliner a good short-field performance.

Boeing decided to go ahead with the 727 project in August 1960 and two United States airlines, Eastern and United, placed orders for 40 each in December that year. The first 727 made its maiden flight on 9 February 1963 and by the end of March four 727s were taking part in the flight testing program.

The order book began filling quickly, mainly US operators but also Lufthansa and the Australian airlines, TAA and Ansett-ANA. The first commercial flight was made by Eastern on 1 February 1964 and United started trans continental services with the 727 a week later. The first two 727s arrived in Australia in October 1964 and began Melbourne-Sydney services on 2 November, reducing the flight time between the two cities to 47 minutes.

Although the original 727s sold well there was a need for more capacity so Boeing offered an extended version, the 727-200 with plugs 3.05m (10ft) long inserted before and behind the wing to increase passenger capacity from around 110 to 150 passengers. The first 727-200 flew on 27 July 1967 and they proved extremely popular with airlines, flight crew and passengers.

TAA and Ansett-ANA were given approval to import their first 727-200s in February 1972 and by mid 1975 both airlines had 6 727-200s in their fleets. The 727-200 became the standard 727 version although advanced versions were offered with higher weights. By the time 727 production



ended 1984 a total of 1832 had been manufactured and sold to 101 operators. Boeing introduced the 757 to replace the 727 and after many were retired from passenger service they were converted to freighters. By the end of 2000 around 1300 727s remained in service.

East West Airlines began flying from Tamworth in New South Wales after World War II. It gradually expanded its operations throughout NSW to become one of Australia's major second-level airlines by the beginning of the 1980s. During that decade it sought to break out of the restrictions imposed on it by government regulations and expanded rapidly. For a time it seemed that East West might become Australia's third major domestic airline but the cost of its expansion made it financially vulnerable and it was taken over by TNT/News Corp, which also owned Ansett, in July 1987. Their intention was to use East West as a low cost airline to complement Ansett's operations and three 727-200s were transferred to its fleet, operating mainly on east-coast tourist routes. However, in the turmoil of reorganisation leading up to airline de-regulation and the pilot-strike of 1989 East-West was quietly absorbed in Ansett's main operations.

Airfix released its first version of the 727 kit in the mid 1960s as part of its new Skyking series in 1/144 scale. It was, and remains, a more than adequate kit with everything needed to make a good replica in such a small scale. This kit, along with many Airfix 144 kits from around this time, had all the passenger and freight doors as separate items, but goodness knows what for because there was nothing inside to show through open doors.

Some time later the kit was reissued with the lengthened fuselage of the 727-200 and it has remained on sale almost continuously ever since. The major differences between various issues has been the airline colours the kit came with. At one time there was also a Revell 1/144 727-100 and more recently Minicraft has released a new 727-200. There is also a set of fuselage parts to convert the Airfix 727-200 back to a 727-100. Of everything the Airfix kit is by far the most common and cheapest kit and most after-market decal sets are designed for it.

I already have a few Airfix -100s and -200s stashed away but I came across this kit at such a ridiculous price that I couldn't resist. It comes with Pan Am and Lufthansa decals but I've also accumulated a few sets of Hawkeye TAA and Ansett-ANA 727 decal sets, as well as decals for an East West 727-200, so I decided to make up the kit for the East West airliner.

There's nothing very challenging about putting together 1/144 kits but, in the case of the old Airfix kit, there are a couple of problems to be dealt with. One of them is not having to glue in all the doors because, with this kit, all the doorways have been filled in.



The most difficult is that the fuselage and engine pod halves have such thin edges at the engine intakes that it is impossible to get a realistic looking intake by just sticking the parts together. The best solution is to trim back the leading edges a little, glue on a small bit of plastic tubing to the right size and then sand it back to the right profile. It's a fiddly job but not too difficult.

The other problem is that the windscreen is a bit too small but, since the Hawkeye decal sheet comes with a black windscreen, it is easier to just stick the window in and then paint over it. Since the model is all over gloss white the main thing with construction is to ensure that the surface of the model is perfectly smooth because any scratches stand out on the completed model.

Having done all that, the rest is fairly simple too. An overall coat of good old Humbrol 11 that I masked over for the metallic leading edges. Then a few coats of white until it has a good all-over coverage, and then the small splash of colour in the olive green on the lower fuselage. The masking for that took longer than the rest of the painting process. While the Hawkeye decals are good I'm getting suspicious of the instruction sheets so a good look at available photos is necessary to ensure getting it all right. The end result is a pretty little model.



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