

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

SUPERMARINE SPITFIRE VB IN 1/72 BY AIRFIX

(December 2007)

The Supermarine Spitfire V was developed to fill the gap in production between the Spitfire Is and IIs that had fought the Battle of Britain and the next generation Spitfire III with a new wing and more powerful Merlin XX engine. Delays in developing the Spitfire III and problems with the Merlin XX engine led to development of the Spitfire V which was basically a Spitfire II with a more powerful Merlin 45 engine. As it turned out, only one prototype Spitfire III was constructed and the interim Spitfire V became one of the most successful Spitfire versions with over 6500 produced between 1941 and 1943. They served on every front during World War II and with air forces other than the RAF including the Soviet, South African, United States, Canadian and Australian air forces. At its height the Spitfire V flew with 140 RAF squadrons but, by 1944, it was in service with only four squadrons.

During the Battle of Britain the Spitfire I and IIs had barely maintained superiority over the Messerschmitt Bf109Es so improving the Spitfire to match German developments took high priority. The first Spitfire to be fitted with a Merlin 45 engine was a Spitfire I that first flew in December 1940. Conversion of 154 early mark Spitfires to Spitfire V standard occurred in 1941 and the first production Spitfire Vs were delivered in June 1941. Production included 94 Spitfire Va with wings fitted with eight machine guns and almost 4000 Spitfire Vb with wings fitted with two 20mm machine guns and four machine guns.

A later development was the Spitfire Vc with a wing that could carry four cannon or two cannon and four machine guns. Other variations included a clipped wing version, Spitfire Vs equipped with a large Vokes filter fitted under the nose for desert and tropical operations and later



production versions that could carry a large fuel tank under the central fuselage or two 250lb bombs under the wings or a heavier bomb under the fuselage.

Despite the success of the Spitfire V it became seriously outclassed by the Focke Wulf Fw190 that they began meeting from August 1941. The solution was another stop-gap version of the Spitfire, the Mk.IX which was a Spitfire Vc fitted with a Merlin 60 series engine. First flights occurred in August 1941 and they began entering service in June 1942.

Thirty years ago Airfix was at the height of its powers and turning out some lovely kits. One of them was their Spitfire Vb which was very delicately moulded by the standards of the time and came with decals for a United States aeroplane. I grabbed the first one I saw, took it home and lavished on it all the skills that I possessed at the time. The wheel wells were filled in, a nice little hand made cockpit seat replaced the thing that came with the kit, the seams were lovingly filled and sanded and this was one of the first models that I used my newly acquired Badger air brush on. It took me weeks to complete and it looked rather good in comparison to most of my earlier efforts. To finish it off I gave it a coat of nice Humbrol matt varnish and sat back to admire my handy work.

Thirty years on that model now shows its age, mainly in the yellowing ('browning' might be a better phrase) of the matt varnish. I thought about scraping off the varnish to make it look a bit better but an easier alternative was simply to pick up another kit and start again. These days the same kit is still available with the same decals, and not terribly expensive, wither. However, in comparison to the standards we've come to expect from models in the 2000s, this Airfix kit appears quite primitive. There is no cockpit interior to speak of and the decals sheet is the same as it was then, but it is still delicately moulded and basically accurate.

I must have got better at sticking together kits in the past thirty years. Instead of lavishing great care on the kit this time, I stuck it straight together out of the box, paying scant attention to the undercarriage and painting the cockpit interior black to hide the lack of detail. What had taken my days in 1977 took me hours in 2007 and the end result was perhaps better than I had achieved the



first time around because one of the things I've learned is that if you spend a little time trying to get the pieces of a kit to fit properly when you assemble it you won't need to mess around with very much filler and the detail on the kit is not damaged too much mucking around. In terms of simple craftsmanship my second attempt is superior to the first in looking crisper and lighter.

On the other hand, in 1977 I had only the kit's decals which proved to be a bit thin so the whites were more like light greys. Since the late 1970s the aftermarket decal business has grown so I found in my box of goodies one sheet for Spitfire Vbs in United States service and another for several Spitfire variants including a reasonably complete set of stencilling. Since the register of the yellow on the US version sheet was off I had to use the other sheet for national insignia, using only the squadron markings from the offending sheet. While I was at it I went wild and use the stencilling as well. This time around I used Testors Dulcote which I discovered a little after I made my first Spitfire Vb. I hope this one survives a lot better than my previous one did.



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