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Workbench notes

LOCKHEED MARTIN X-35A IN 1/72 BY ITALERI

(February 2008)

For some reason that evades me and many other people the Australian Government has decided that the RAAF is going to be equipped with the Lockheed Martin F-35 when it finally enters service. If the government were to ask me - which seems unlikely - I'd tell them that the F-35 has been designed by a committee and suffers from all the weaknesses and few of the strengths that come from that process. It does not take much imagination to recall aeroplanes that have originated from the desire to sell aeroplanes designed to fill a multitude of roles, but excelled at none of them; the Bf110, Potez 63 series, Bristol Blenheim, the Wirraway, and more. I'm sure you can compile your own list. If studies of air power show one thing, it is that if you don't control airspace everything else is in trouble, and the F-35 doesn't seem to be designed to provide air superiority. Let's hope the government's decision is never put to the test the way that Wirraways were left to defend Rabaul in the early days of the Pacific War.

Anyway...* In a moment of weakness I bought the Italerie kit of the Boeing X-32 that was their entry in the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) competition. What a strange looking aeroplane, it probably didn't win because it didn't look like a real warplane. The other entry in the JSF competition was the Lockheed X-35 which looks a bit more like a real aeroplane designed to blow things up. Having put together the X-32 I thought it might be interesting to assemble the X-35 to make up the duo in the JSF competition.

Like the X-32, the X-35 kit is very nicely moulded, crisply detailed in good quality plastic. It would be easy to assemble and paint so long as one did not make the mistake of deciding to cruise



the www to find photographs of the real thing. Sadly, I made that mistake. It turns out that both the X-32 and X-35 were made in two versions, the -A version with a conventional engine and the -B version equipped for vertical or short take off and landing. The difference between them is not so evident in the X-32 but more so in the X-35 and the Italeri kit represents the X-35B version, more or less. It has doors on the top and bottom of the fuselage for the lifting engine in the forward fuselage and the vectored thrust main engine with the nozzle pointed down so you end up with a X35B ready to take off vertically, although in some other ways the kit is more like the X-35A.

In any event, I wanted to make the model with things closed so I decided to convert the kit back to a X-35A. This didn't take too much effort in fixing what could be fixed, including closing the engines for the forward door and sawing off the nozzle of the main engine and sticking it back to represent a conventional engine pointing to the rear. A real modeller might have done all the other things that would be needed to make a really accurate X35A but all that work didn't really appeal to me so the end result is something of a compromise, not that anyone will notice and I've already forgotten the details.

The kit instructions suggest that the X-35 should be all-over light aircraft grey but photographs show that the upper fuselage rear of the cockpit is a darker grey. This causes some problems with the decals, but a bit of fancy cutting and changing takes care of most, but not all, of the problems.

The completed model looks more like the X-35 than anything else but it appears sort-of squashed in comparison to the real thing. It looks more like an effective aeroplane should look than the X-32 but it also looks more like a dump truck with wings than a modern aeroplane, capable of defending Australia for decades to come. Perhaps I'm biased because Australia didn't choose the Rafale instead.



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