

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

CHAR SAINT CHAMOND IN 1/72 BY REVIRESO

(March 2012)

They say that Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was the tank. It took several nations a while to figure out what a successful tank was and how to use it, and at the end of World War I the most successful and the most produced tank was the little Renault FT. (Perhaps too successful because the French Army still had too many of them when the Germans came calling again in 1940.)

Before that, there were several attempts to make a good tank suitable for war on the Western Front. The most successful was the British Mark I to Mark V tanks, mainly because they were designed, as their shape suggests, to traverse the desolate landscape of trench warfare. The three other tanks to enter that landscape were far less capable because they used the smaller (but already existing) Holt tractor system as they basis for their tank designs, better than nothing but not specifically designed to do what the British tanks did. They were the German A7V tank (of which little need be said because they were German and so few were made) and the French Schneider (which I may return to, if I must) and Saint-Chamond tanks. None were successful, but then, they were the first of their kind and it took years of experience for the tank to evolve into effective fighting machines such as the T34, the Leopard and the LeClerc.

The Saint-Chamond was doomed to failure before the first one was made. They began with plans for the *Forges et Aciéries de la Marine et d'Homécourt à Saint-Chamond* to manufacture 400 Schneider tanks. However, a happy relationship did not exist between the company making Schneiders and the Saint-Chamond company so the latter company refused to pay patent rights for the tail fitted to the Schneider tank which therefore could not used on its tanks. To make things worse, Saint-Chamond was not given the blueprints for the Schneider and had to base the tanks it made on a prototype version called Tracteur A, which was longer than the Schneider.

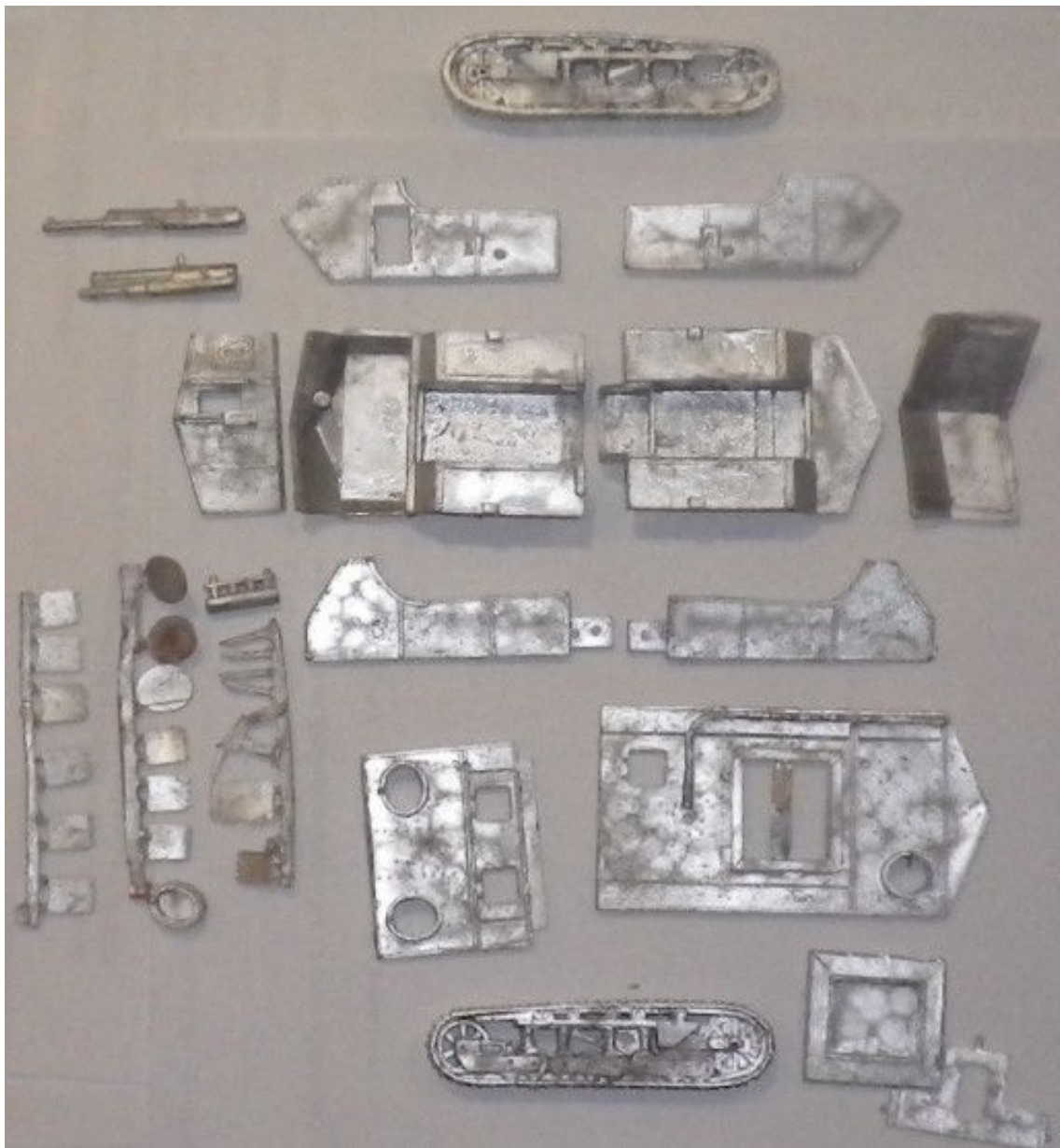
To make matters worse again, one of the technical directors at Saint-Chamond had co-designed a new 75mm gun, the Saint Chamond L12 Canon a Tir Rapide, and received a percentage for every one sold. Wishing to make the most of the situation, he persuaded the French Ministry of War to change the specifications for the tank Saint Chamond was to make to include one of those guns, even though the army did not ask for it. The result of all this was a rather larger and heavier tank than the Schneider, but all mounted on the same track system; a large, heavy (22 tonnes) and top-heavy lightly armoured box trundling along at a maximum speed of 12 km/h with an overhang at the front and rear that was only asking for trouble.

These large and largely vulnerable boxes has a crew of eight or nine and were almost impossible to fight from. The noise was intense, the conditions cramped and the fumes debilitating. Although the armour plating was sufficient to ward off light-arms fire the German's 'K' bullet could penetrate and their slow speed also made them vulnerable to artillery. The result was that being assigned to a unit equipped with Saint Chamonds was considered a death sentence.

After the first 165 had been constructed a revised version was introduced, most easily identified by the sloping roof off which grenades and satchel bombs could slide. There was also an

additional thickness of armour plating, improved crew access and the 75mm gun was also replaced. However these improvements did little to overcome the Saint-Chamond's basic problems.

Four hundred were ordered and they first saw action on 5 May 1917. Their most basic flaw was soon revealed when 15 of the 16 tanks used got firmly stuck when they tried to cross the first line of German trenches and German artillery soon disposed of them. The same thing happened on the next big push. In all, Saint Chamonds took part in 375 separate actions before the end of the war and they proved surprisingly useful in the final weeks when the fighting became more mobile and they were very handy for destroying German gun emplacements. Production finished when the 400 that had been ordered were delivered. Only 72 remained serviceable at the end of the war, 54 were rebuilt as ammunition carriers and the rest were scrapped.



Just because a particular piece of historic equipment was a piece of junk, there is no reason to suppose that a model of it might not possess its own beauty. For, as Pythagoras has taught us, 'the beauty of the model finds expression in its faithfulness to the spirit of the original' (*Model Maker*: 135 p.18).

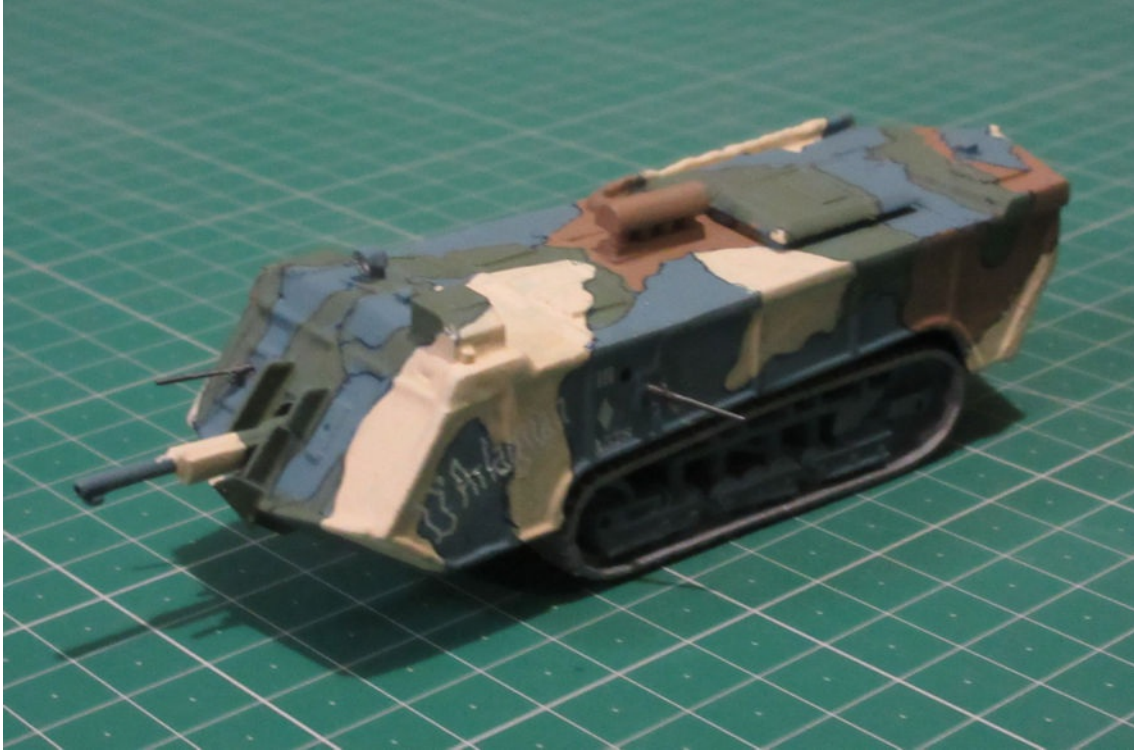
Being thus imbued with a sense of inner peace and righteousness, I trawled the internet to see if there were any models of this particular piece of junk. This proved to be a time consuming process as not all modellers and kit makers share the same sense of enlightenment as we MoBsters. Finally, however, I stumbled across a web site that offered to sell me a kit in 1/72 of a Char Saint-Chamond, made by a mob calling itself Reviresco and available from www.tin-soldier.com. All was not perfect, however, as the kit was in white metal and the picture of the completed model looked as though it had been tossed together and painted by a chimpanzee on speed. Nevertheless, it was the only offering I could find and, courtesy of eBay, I put in an order. Only after I had hit the 'enter' button did I realise that I had accidentally ordered both versions of the Saint-Chamond, and so I waited with a heavy heart for the postman to deliver the kits unto me.

The first thing you notice is that these kits are heavy, in comparison to plastic or resin. The second thing is that the Saint Chamond was not a small vehicle - in fact it seemed so large that I went and measured to check that it was the right scale. There are not too many pieces but the moulding looks quite crude in comparison to even some resin kits. Nevertheless, I embarked upon the construction process, not without trepidation. This was the first time I had worked with white metal and I soon discovered that it is not dissimilar to resin, with the advantage that if a piece is misshapen you can just bent it in to shape rather than struggling with a kettle of boiling hot water.

Being unused to white metal and not being enthused about the quality of the parts, I proceeded with caution. The end result was a largish metal box that did not look too bad. I discovered that super-glue worked well but wet-and-dry sandpaper does not have the same effect on white metal that it does on resin or plastic. This was the first time that I can recall every using filler on a tank model to fill gaps between some of the parts, but the end result was better than I had expected. The instruction sheet - you get the same sheet for both versions even though the drawings



Early Saint Chamond



Late Saint Chamond

are for the second version - says only of the paint job that the basic colours were green and brown, but not what shades. So I used the colours recommended for a Renault FT that I had made earlier.

The end result ... Well I think it looks quite cute with its tiny track system holding up the quaint looking box hull. I'm just glad that I never had to ride in the real thing.

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