

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

BOEING B-50A IN 1/144 CONVERTED FROM MINICRAFT KITS

(June 2016))

The first question you have to ask yourself before starting on a project like this is; do you really need a model of the B-50? I can't recall now if I actually asked myself this question or, if I did, what the reasoning behind this project might have been. The fact of the matter is that the B-50 was an easy-to-forget aeroplane which might just have easily been called the B-29D had not somebody in the USAF decided that giving the bomber a new number would convince the powers-that-be in Washington that they were paying for something brand new, rather than a slightly improved version of what they already had. The ruse worked and the American government paid for a lot of these improved B-29s which soldiered on with SAC until B-47s started coming in to service.

Perhaps I made this model simply because I could. I had a spare Fujimi 1/144 B-29 and a spare Minicraft 1/144 Boeing 377, and it is a well known fact that the Boeing 377 was a civil version of the C-97 which was a cargo version of the B-50. So, what would happen if I took parts of these two kits and put them together? Why, a B-50 of course!



This strange reasoning was probably helped along by a decal set I had for a B-50A which I had bought some years earlier to go with the Minicraft 1/72 B-50 kit. One of the options was for *Lucky Lady II* which was the first aeroplane to fly around the world without landing, using an early form of air-to-air refuelling. However, as it turned out, the kit was a B-50D which has some noticeable differences from a B-50A and, anyhow, I'd decided that I was going to make models of the really big aeroplanes in 1/144 rather than 1/72. So, if I scanned the decal sheet and shrunk it down to 1/144 size... What could go wrong?

Not much really, as it turned out.

The main visual differences between a B-29 and a B-50 are the engines, wings and vertical tail. There is also the four gun front upper turret which was also flown on some of the later B-29s. I later discovered that some B-50s flew with the earlier two gun front upper turret and some flew without any turrets at all, but the model I wanted to make, *Lucky Lady II*, had the four gun turret, but I put off that little problem as long as possible.

The taller tail was easy enough. Just cut the tails off the B-29 and Boeing 377 and swap them over. The fit was pretty good although the B-50 had a tail gunner's position so I had to cut away some of the rudder on the taller tail to accommodate it. The work of but a moment.

The wings were a different challenge. Fortunately the wings from the Boeing 377 fitted right onto the B-29 fuselage with very little tinkering. However, the wing cross section of the 377 kit wings is quite different from that of the B-29 kit with a serious hollowing of the upper wing profile behind the spars so that, if they had appeared on the full scale aeroplane, drag and lack of lift would probably have meant it could not fly. I know there are some in our little club who would have attacked this problem and given the wings a more realistic cross section, but I have these 707 models I want to get on with. And anyhow, would you have noticed had I not mentioned it here?

So, after a fair bit of filling and sanding to merge the parts from the two kits, I ended up with something that looks more like a B-50 than a B-29.

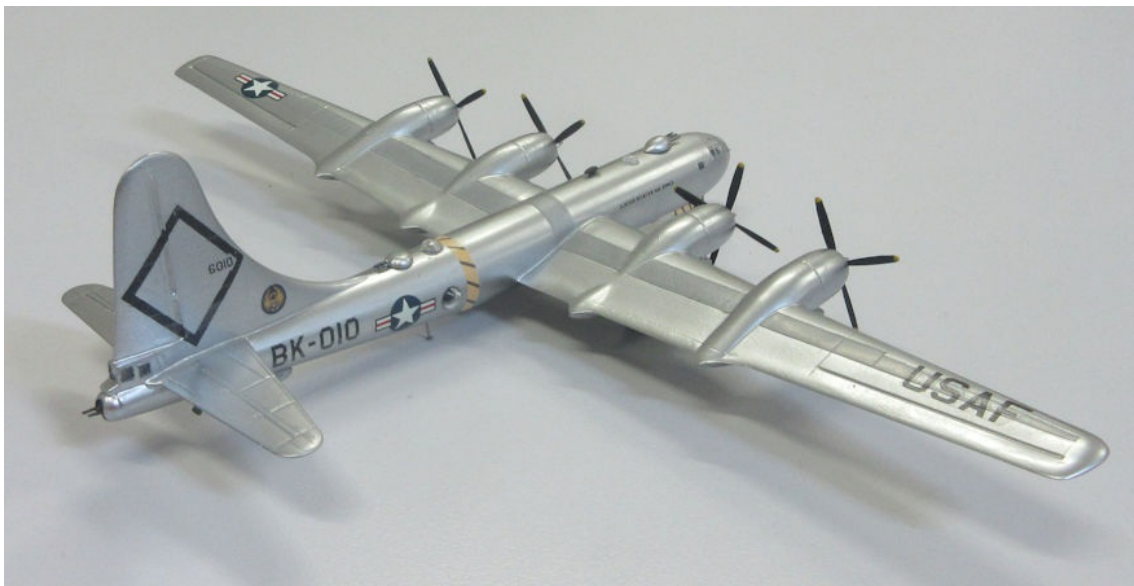
Painting was simple enough. Some primer, a couple of coats of Tamiya TS-17 Gloss Aluminium that I polished up and then a couple of coats of Tamiya TS-83 Metallic Silver over the top, again polished up to a nice bright finish. If I'd been making this model in 1/72 I'd probably have gone to the trouble of varying the shade of some of the panels on the model to make it look a



bit more realistic (using a technique explained to me by Master Wayne on our display day), but in 1/144 this would have been a real pain and hardly noticeable anyhow. The only variation I did allow myself was the wing spar box and centre section that I painted using Alclad II White Aluminium. It doesn't look too bad.

Eventually I had to face up to the problem of the front upper turret. I overcame it using a drop tank that I found in my spares box, carved and sanded without mercy until it ended up looking something like the real thing. The guns themselves were the most difficult part and are a bit over scale but they are the same diameter as the guns on the other turrets so I needed to keep to the same size for sake of uniformity. Anyhow, I don't know that I could have handled anything thinner and I still could also have used some of those beta-blockers that snooker players use to steady my hand while getting them into place. In the end the turret was finished, accompanied with the application of much harsh language.

Two problems remained. One was the decals that I resized from the 1/72 sheet that I had. This worked fairly well except that the sheet did not include one vital item, the 'United States Air Force' title that goes on the fuselage sides just before the wings. In some photos of B-50s this is missing but on photos of *Lucky Lady II* around the time of its record breaking flight they were there so I had to make them. I could find nothing useful in all my spare decals so I concocted those titles as one might put together a ransom demand using letter cut out of newspaper headings; finding letters in the right font, resizing them and then lining them using a piece of computer software. This took an entire evening to accomplish, and you wouldn't know if I hadn't bothered. Such dedication to verisimilitude should not go unrewarded!



This dedication to realism was not continued when it came to the propellers. (Perhaps I had used up all the verisimilitude in my bloodstream by this point.) The propellers of the Boeing 377 kit look more like large planks of wood attached to a round central hub than anything to do with aeroplane propellers and the B-29 propellers are a little less terrible, for while the blades aren't too bad they are attached to a central square box which no aeronautical engineer could have imagined in his worst nightmare. I did contemplate some remedial action which would have made the gun turret seem like a Sunday school picnic, but chickened out in the end. Anyhow, the conical spinners

from the Boeing 377 kit fitted nicely over the B-29 propellers, hiding most of the awfulness.
Apart from all that, this was a perfectly easy model to make.

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