

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

DOUGLAS DC-10-30 IN 1/144 BY ACCURATE AIRLINERS, AND MCDONNELL DOUGLAS MD-11 IN 1/144 BY MIKRO MIR

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Douglas had been the world's leading manufacturer of commercial airliners since the 1930s but had lost that lead to Boeing with its 707s, 727s, 737s and 747s. There was a gap in the potential airliner market for something between the long range 707 and the new 747 Jumbo Jet, that could carry over 300 passengers for intercontinental ranges. To fill this gap Douglas began design of a three engine wide-body airliner which would be the successor to its successful (but not as successful as the Boeing 707) DC-8 four engine narrow body long-range airliner. Design work began in 1966. The prototype made its first flight on 29 August 1970, 386 were manufactured (with an additional 60 KC-10s for the US Air Force) and production ended in 1988.

Unfortunately, Lockheed had the same idea and developed its L1011 to similar specifications. They both went into production and the competition between them meant that neither was successful. The Lockheed was more technically advanced but delays in production meant the DC-10 was first into service and therefore a bit more successful. On the other hand, the DC-10 suffered from a bad safety reputation due to several fatal crashes caused by poor design, particularly around the rear cargo door.

While the DC-10 was being designed, but before construction commenced, Douglas merged with McDonnell to form McDonnell Douglas, but the 'DC' numbering was retained. A few DC-10s remain flying, converted to freighters with modernized cockpits and flight systems under the Boeing designation of MD-10.

The most commonly produced model was the DC-10-30 which was also the first long-range model. A total of 163 were built from 1972 to 1988, 163 were delivered to 38 different customers, beginning with KLM and Swissair in September 1972. Air New Zealand acquired seven DC-10s to replace its DC-8s on its long inter-continental services and the airline flew them until around the end of 1982.

McDonnell Douglas began planning for an improved version of the DC-10 in 1976 but it was not until 1986 that the replacement was launched under the name of MD-11. Despite all kinds of plans for greater improvements, a shortage of funds in the company limited development of this new version to a few improvements including a stretched fuselage, improved wings, engines and flight systems. At the same time other companies such as Airbus and Boeing were developing entirely new airliners in the same category and the introduction of new and more efficient engines meant there was no longer the need for three engines on long distance services, all limiting the attractiveness of the MD-11. After McDonnell Douglas merged with Boeing in 1997 that company decided to continue MD-11 production, though only for the freighter variant, but in 1998 the company announced it would end production after filling all existing orders. As a result only 200 were manufactured between 1988 and 2000. Although they have disappeared from passenger services

there are still many MD-11s in service as freighters with companies such as FedEx, UPS and Lufthansa Cargo.

I have a particular fondness for the DC-10 and the MD-11 since it was an Air New Zealand DC-10 that we flew in in 1974 from Auckland to Los Angeles and a Swissair MD-11 that we flew in from Singapore to Zurich in 1993. I was also keen to make these models as part of my project to make all the Douglas airliners, beginning with the DC-1 and concluding with what became known as the Boeing 717. There are a few gaps to be filled, such as an ANA DC-6b, but otherwise, making the DC-10 and MD-11 fills the major gaps with only a couple of the MD-90 series to go.

There are really only five useful kits of the DC-10 in 1/144 scale, the most common are the Revell and Airfix kits which have been reboxed more times than you've had hot breakfasts, a Welsh Models vacformed kit, a newly released Eastern Express kit in a multiplicity of livery options, and the Accurate Airliners resin kit. I started off with the Airfix kit but it was so badly molded and warped that it ended up in the bin. I couldn't lay my hands on the Revell kit and the Eastern Express kit had not yet been released - though given the quality of some of their recent kits I wonder if that might not have ended up in the bin as well.

Eventually I gave in and bought the Accurate Airliners resin kit, an expensive undertaking but a very nice kit indeed and almost certainly the most accurate and pleasing to work with. The main thing to say about it is that it is heavy because the fuselage is molded in one piece. While working on this I was constantly afraid that I'd pick the model up by the wing and it would snap off due to that weight, and I'm still amazed that the weight doesn't crush the resin undercarriage. The decals were a nuisance. I hunted down some Air New Zealand decals on the interweb and, while they were pretty good, they had obviously been designed for another kit because they were about 5mm shorter than the Accurate Airliners kit. I tried a couple of tricks to fill the gap but none of them looked good enough so I ended up having to buy another sheet from overseas to fill that tiny gap. The end result is not one of my better models but, given the cost of making another one. I'll stick with this one.



Kits of the MD-11 are less common and there are only one or two options. In injection molding there are the Micro Mir and Eastern Express kits (which might actually be the same kit, but I'm not prepared to spend the money to find out) and the Welsh Models kit. I bought the Welsh Models kit some time ago which has the advantage of offering Swissair and Swissair Asia decals., but it was one of their earlier mostly vacformed kits and I did not fancy things like trying to make decent engine pods out of the bits of plastic in the molded plastic sheets in the box. So when the Micro Mir kit was released I bought that. It looked to be the easy option as against the vacformed kit but it had the wrong engines for the Swissair variant. Fortunately Welsh Models also offered a conversion kit for the right kind of engines in resin and white metal so I bought that too. This gave me a second set of Swissair decals which, as it turned out, was a good thing.

Construction of the Micro-Mir kit was not difficult but it was not a pleasure to put together. Like many kits these days it seemed unnecessarily fussy with, for example, a detailed nose undercarriage which is all hidden inside the doors and realistically thin but also very fragile smaller bits. The end result of this fragility was that, even though I handled the model with as much care as possible, the nose undercarriage broke very quickly and could not be resurrected in any way. The only solution was to turn to the white metal parts offered by the Welsh Models kit so that if you had x-ray vision you'd see that, in addition to the replacement engines, the Micro Mir kit also has the nose undercarriage and winglets of the Welsh Models kit. (The big and uninviting sheets of vacformed plastic went into a bin, putting a smile on my dial.)

Painting and decaling was a challenge. The grey is my own concoction which is about as close to the grey that Douglas used on its airliners as I can get. The corogard panels are also my own concoction of metallic shades, which is a story in itself that I shan't recount here. The underside colour gave me a lot of stress; it looks black but it isn't and sources variously describe it as a very dark blue or purple. In the end I gave up trying to find a reliable source of information and just used the darkest of dark blues, which doesn't look too bad really.

When it came to the decals it was just as well that I had two sets to work with. For one thing, they were very fragile and even though I gave them a good coating of clear varnish as insurance against them falling to bits when used, some of the longer window decals did begin to explode as



I put them in place. The other reason for my good fortune was that the window decals might fit nicely on the Welsh Models kit but they are too short for the Micro Mir MD-11 kit so I had to raid the second sheet to find enough window decals to fill the spaces left by the Welsh Models decals.

In the end I felt the same way about the Micro Mir MD-11 as I felt about the Accurate Airliners DC-10. Neither was an enjoyable project, and I wouldn't recommend them to others, but they do fill a gap in the lineup of models that I wanted to get made and they don't look too bad.



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