

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

HANDLEY PAGE VICTOR B.2 IN 1/72 BY MATCHBOX

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The period immediately after World War II saw development of a wide and amazing range of new aeroplane designs intended to make best use of the latest developments in aerodynamics and jet engines. One that captured the mood of those times was the Handley Page HP.80 which had its genesis in design studies for a jet bomber that commenced a month after German's defeat in 1945 and also made some use of German research into high speed flight that became available in the months immediately after the war.

In February 1946 the Handley Page design study was settled around a bomber powered by four jet engines capable of carrying a payload of 10,000 pounds over 5000 miles at 600 miles an hour. An Air Ministry specification was written for a new bomber for the Royal Air Force based, in some measure, around the Handley Page study. Two designs were submitted and officials were unable to decide between them so the Handley Page and Avro designs - the Victor and Vulcan - were both put into production. Design of the Victor evolved over the following couple of years, one of its most important and futuristic features became the crescent shape of its wing leading edge that was shaped to achieve a constant mach number along the whole length of the wing.



The prototype Victor flew on 24 December 1952 but crashed in July 1954 and the second prototype flew in September 1954. The first production Victors were ordered in June 1952 and the first Victor B.1 flew on 1 February 1956. Victors began to enter service November 1957 as part of Britain's nuclear deterrent force, capable of delivering atomic bombs to targets within Russia. The upgraded Victor B.2 with more powerful Conway engines, increased wing span and larger intakes began production after 50 Victor B.1s had been constructed and the first B.2 made its initial flight in February 1959. In all only 86 Victors were made; comprising two prototypes, 50 Victor B.1s and 34 Victor B.2s. The final Victor B.2 entered service in May 1963.

Initially Victors were deployed as high speed, high altitude bombers relying on those capabilities to evade enemy interception. In this role they were painted overall gloss white with faded pale blue and red markings that would protect them from the effects of atomic bomb blasts. Later, when it became clear that advances in Russian interception technology made Victors vulnerable at high altitudes, they were converted to attack at low level with disruptive camouflage schemes. Eventually they lost their nuclear role when Britain's deterrence was transferred to missile armed submarines.

From 1964 Victors were converted from bombers to aerial tankers, filling the role formerly filled by Vickers Valiants. From 1964 Victor B.1s were converted to the new role and the first Victor B.2 to be converted to a Victor K.2 flew in March 1972. Eventually 24 Victor B.2s were converted to the tanker role. They played an important part in Britain's war in the Falklands in 1982, mainly providing long range aerial refuelling, but gradually disappeared from service in the late 1980s.

The Victor has always seemed to me to be one of the most elegant aeroplanes ever made with its magnificent crescent wings and uniquely faired nose. I seem to recall making an old Lincoln kit decades ago but even though the Matchbox kit of the K.2 version has been around since 1983 I hadn't gone out of my way to make it mainly, I think, because the conversions made to turn the B.2 into a tanker, involving bulbous wing tanks, refuelling pods and a lumpy addition to the rear bomb bay, took away much of the elegance of the bomber. Much to my pleasure, while I was doing some research into the Victor I discovered an article explaining how to convert the Matchbox kit into a B.2 and also discovered some decals for the bomber version in an old issue of *Scale Aircraft Modelling* from the days when they experimented with including decals in the occasional issue. Thus armed, I set about the project.

In its time Matchbox made some excellent kits and some fairly dreadful ones, with the Victor they managed to combine excellent and dreadful in the same kit. The decal sheet, for example, is very detailed and includes all kinds of stencilling and markings for the tanker version, the undercarriage is generally good and the overall shape is fairly good.

But, my goodness, it must have taken some stroke of genius to make the air intakes as bad as they did - you couldn't do that kind of thing by accident. If I had realised how bad they were I would have gone to the trouble of cutting them out of the wing leading edges and making them up as individual units before gluing them back in place. As it was, I had glued the wings together before I realised their full awfulness and all I could do was push some filler into the gaping recesses in the hope of making some improvement. The same could be said for the ailerons and rudder which are separate items that are a very poor fit. I filled the gaps with some well glued plastic card and later sanded everything to the right shape.

The conversion to the B.2 was relatively simple and included cutting off the wing tips and including about 17mm of thick plastic card and then sanding them to the correct shape (fortunately

the article included a drawing of how to do this), removing the refuelling housing from the rear bomb bay and filling it with more plastic card and again sanding to shape, and filling the slots under the wings where the tanks and pods fitted. There were a few other little bits that needed fixing up like the nose, which lacked something in the detail, fitting strakes to the wings just inboard of the intakes, and opening the intakes for the pods under the engines. When I finally got the undercarriage in place the model had a decided nose-down sit that I sorted out by shortening the main undercarriage legs a little.

As for painting, a couple of coats of Humbrol 11 silver and three coats of semi-gloss white, bang on the decals, and it's all done. The finished model looks almost as elegant as the real thing too.



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