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Workbench notes

DOUGLAS A2D IN 1/72 BY MACH 2

(June 2021)

The Douglas XA2D looks a lot like the earlier piston engined Douglas AD Skyraider and was supposed to be an attack fighter to fly off the US Navy's escort carriers. These carriers were too small for the new generation of pure jet aircraft so a turboprop engine was ordered instead. It actually comprised two jet turbines that drove the counter-rotating propeller which delivered twice the power of the piston engine of the AD so, while the airframe looks similar, it was different in many ways to use the extra power. As it turned out, the turboprop engines ordered for the A2D was not a success and the US Navy began phasing out its escort carriers, so there was no need for the A2D anyhow and only twelve were made.

I've been putting off making this kit for a long time. The A2D is an interesting looking aeroplane and the dark sea blue livery has a lot to recommend it, but the Mach 2 brand on the box is enough to make a sailor blanch. Nevertheless I had all these bottles of SMS Dark Sea Blue lacquer paint so I needed something to airbrush it on. Besides, the A2D has always been interesting to me because it is one of those late 1940s aeroplanes that was designed when the aeronautical engineers were trying to manage the transition from piston to jet powered aeroplanes. The result is something that looks as though a superhero should be flying it, a lot of modernity mixed in with traditional aeronautical values plus some directions in aeroplane design which did not pay off. In



many ways this is an example of the same design philosophy that led to the Westland Wyvern, except that the British didn't know when it was time to stop and produced lots and put them into service too.

By Mach 2 standards this is not a bad kit - and anyone who has made a Mach 2 kit has some idea of what that might mean. The parts fit together okay, more or less, and the shape is pretty good. By that I mean that I've been going through some old issues of the British magazine *Aviation News* which always had 1/72 scale drawings of an aeroplane as the centerfold. One of the drawings I came across was for the A2D and the kit parts and the drawings match up fairly well. This makes me wonder if Monsieur Mach 2 used the *Aviation News* drawings as his guide, so let's hope that *Aviation News* got it right if that is the case.

Lest this item go on for several thousand words I won't go into all the problems associated with making this kit into a fairly presentable model. The cockpit for example, is rudimentary and I hunted through my spares box to find something that looked at least a little like a seat that would suit this aeroplane. As it turns out, you can see so little of the cockpit that even the minimal amount of time I spent on it was overkill. The undercarriage too is rather rudimentary and I did give some thought to pirating parts from a Douglas AD kit, or at least seeing if it was worth the effort, but it didn't look too bad after a lot of work to find a partly realistic shape in the simple posts the kit offers.

The real challenge is in the propellers which are, after all, the most interesting aspect of this aeroplanes. The kit blades themselves were only the basic shape and, although I thought of discarding them and finding something better, in the end I decided that the twist in the blades would be hard to replicate so battled on with the blades in the kit. Having done that, the next challenge was to fix the blades to the propeller spinners and then stick the propeller onto the front of the aeroplane because none of the joining points in the kit are what you would call 'positive'. Normally for me sticking the propeller onto the front of the aeroplane is about the last stage of construction but as it turned out the spinner was wider than the fuselage sides and so poorly formed that I thought it advisable to fix the spinners to the fuselage, fill it out to the width of the spinner, then fill and rescribe the lines for the counter-rotating parts of the spinner and attach the blades at the end of the construction process. This worked fairly well with only one little problem. The blades have a little manufacturers sticker on the front of each one and I forgot this as I was attaching the blades, so some of them are facing in the wrong direction. Such is life.

Having got to the stage where the airframe was more or less presentable it was time to paint it. In general all US Navy aeroplanes of this period were painted Dark Sea Blue all over so the only challenge is finding somewhere to hold the model while painting it. Because the surface of these aeroplanes was fairly pristine I applied a couple of coats of SMS black surface primer, sanded it back very lightly with micromesh, sprayed on one coat of SMS Dark Sea Blue, sanded it back with the finest micromesh and then applied a final coat of the same lacquer. The model itself might not be perfect but the paint job is as good as I've ever managed.

Being fearful of the quality of the kit decals I used some old Microscale decals for the largest decals but was forced to go to the kit decals for the stencilling. I was surprised by their quality so was happy to apply them, using the kit instructions which was also the best part of the instruction sheet. The Bureau of Aeronautics number off the decal sheet for this A2D-1 is 125482 which suggests that it might have been the first of the pre-production aeroplanes rather than a prototype, but I was not able to find enough information to be sure exactly which of the ten A2Ds this model might represent. Again, such is life. To be honest, this is not one of my greatest modeling moments, but it looks like an A2D so I'm not complaining.



Two after-comments.

While doing battle with this Mach 2 kit I also amused myself by making the Anigrand 1/144 kit of the Convair XP5Y flying boat. As is customary, this kit came with three bonus kits, one of which

was the A2D in 1/144 so I found myself making two models of this aeroplanes, one in 1/144 and the other in 1/72. If I thought the Mach 2 kit was primitive and lacking in detail, the same could be said several times over for the 1/144 Anigrand kit. However, it was a much simpler model to make and in such a small scale most of its failings can be overlooked. And in SMS Dark Sea Blue many of the problems of both models are hidden by the colour of the model.



I have remarked previously on the old modelling adage that if you want the kit making industry to release a new kit of something you really like all you have to do is make the model from the existing poor quality kit. That's how it has turned out with the A2D. After languishing for many years attended only by Rareplanes (a vacformed kit I was never bold enough to even attempt) Anigrand and Mach 2 1/72 kits, I see that kits of the A2D are now being published in 1/48 and 1/72 by Clear Prop. I expect to be hearing a lot about them in the coming few months because a lot of modellers seem to be as interested in this aeroplane, as I am. Had I known this was going to happen I might have been tempted to hold off on doing battle with the Mach 2 kit. However, I see that Clear Prop advised that it's 1/72 A2D kit has 234 parts. This number is enough to make one's hair to go grey, if it was not already so. I cannot imagine what all those 234 parts are going to make since the fairly comprehensive (if challenging) Mach 2 kit is comprised only about 75 parts. Consider me old fashioned, but I'm getting sick of the current trend in kit making that is to include so many tiny pieces when the parts count could be more realistic with a bit more thought given to kit engineering. Consequently I have no intention of acquiring the Clear Prop A2D kit and I will make do with my imperfect but still very nice looking Mach 2 kit.

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