

Kit Review

(November, 2005)

Italeri Bell OH-13S kit number 085, 1/72 scale

The Kit:

This kit comes in the typical Italeri box. Inside you find 79 parts spread over two sprues. There is also a sprue containing the clear parts - a bubble canopy and two doors, all of which are excellently cast, cleanly molded and crystal clear.

Decal sheet contains markings for three aircraft, all in olive drab camouflage, and all appear to be for the 1st Cavalry in Vietnam circa 1965-1966. The options are almost identical save for the serial numbers, from which you can choose machine 1512, 9087 or 5157.

Construction:

This kit was basically built straight from the box. Construction was done in four major sub-assemblies to ease the task of painting:

- Tail boom and landing skids
- Cockpit interior and body shell
- Engine
- Rotors
- Guns and mounting rails

The tail boom assembly was built per instructions, minus the engine. The struts for boom the are a bit thick, but since they all needed to be scraped to remove the very distinct seams, they sized down some and became more acceptable. A problem area is the drive shaft to the tail rotor that runs across the top of the boom.

The engine was also built per instructions, leaving off the exhaust pipes. The pipes had the ends drilled out. The air filter housing comes with no backing, so it was added with some thin plastic sheet.

There are two options for the fuel tanks - a set of large and a set of small tanks. Make sure you put together the correct fuel tank option for the aircraft you are wanting to make.

Many test fits were performed along the way to ensure that I could get the engine into the boom once I started final construction after painting. The trials showed that I would be able to do this, but it was going to be a tight fit requiring some twisting and turning around the pieces of the boom.

The cockpit was assembled. With that long boom at the rear I wanted to make sure the model didn't tail sit, so some lead weight was placed under the seats. Seatbelts were decals from the spares box.

The rotor assembly was also built separately. The rotor blades have some droop molded into them. Unfortunately the blades have been molded to turn in the wrong direction, which also means that the droop is wrong. You will need to reverse the direction of the droop and mount the blades to turn the other way. Not a difficult task, but still annoying.

Once the subassemblies were complete the painting was performed. The boom, landing skids and cockpit shell were sprayed Testors Olive Drab. The interior was painted a pale green, while the seats also received Olive Drab. Following the painting, everything was coated with thinned Testors Glosscoat.

Then the sub-assemblies were joined. This was fairly straight forward. First the engine was inserted into the tail boom. Here I encountered a problem with the drive shaft that runs across the top of the boom to the tail rotor. The shaft was found to be a bit on the long side, and prevented me from placing the engine in its proper location, so I trimmed some length from the end that meets the engine.

The cockpit shell was added to the boom, and then the landing skids added to the bottom.

The decals were applied next. They are in register and dense. The only point against them is that the star-and-bar for underneath the body is too large. The decals proved easy to apply and they sat down well after a few coats of Microsol. A search on the web and through my limited helicopter library turned up no pictures of Vietnam era OH-13S machines with the yellow warning line across the front of the bubble (as shown on the box top artwork), so it is probably best left off, as I did.

Just before being sprayed with a coat of Aeromaster Acryl flat, I added the weapons.

There are two options for the gun mounts located on each side of the cockpit - twin 50-cal machine guns, or single carbines. There is nothing in the instructions regarding which gun option goes with which marking option, so I chose the carbines because they had a bit more character than the twin 50-cals.

The flat coat was applied, and the cockpit glass, the main rotor assembly and the tail rotor were added to complete the build.

Conclusion:

In the end I can say that overall, the fit is good for the majority of parts. There is a bit of work needed to clean up the tail boom, and a few other items need attention - especially the rotor blades. All in all, a very nice kit that with some extra effort can be made into an excellent replica of the military Bell 47.