Kit Review (December, 2004)

Hasegawa AH-64A kit. number 00436 D6, 1/72 scale

The Kit:

There are a total of 102 parts, 100 medium grey pieces spread over 5 trees plus 2 clear parts on 1 tree. The plastic is neither too brittle nor to soft, with restrained recessed detail throughout. Flash and seams on the parts are minimal to non-existent.

The decal sheet has one option for a machine from the 3rd battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, US Army, date and location unspecified, though a web search seems to indicate that the machine was based in Germany, circa 1991. I do like the fact that the sheet also includes decals for the instruments. A nice touch is the inclusion of 12 rows of small black US numerals (0 through 9) suitable for use in changing the BuNo if desired.

Construction:

There are 10 parts that are not to be used, so they were removed right from the start to avoid any possible confusion later. Some of these unneeded parts are duplicates of other parts. First, for the tail rotor, there is a set of twin blades molded together as one unit (part D1, to be discarded), and there is a set of two separately molded blades (parts F12 & F13). There are two sets of weapon pylons - one set of four (parts D20 & D21) which are discarded. Parts F2 & F3 are their replacements. And for the exhaust outlets, there is a set of solid units (parts C18 & C19, to be discarded), along with a nice set of hollow two part moldings (2 each of parts F7 & F8).

Model was built basically straight out of the box, with some changes coming in the form of various parts from an incomplete ERTL AH-64A that I picked up cheap for just a couple of dollars.

For the most part, the kit went together with a minimum of fuss. Overall the fit is excellent. All the parts went together nicely with nary a major fit problem.

Whomever designed the kit, obviously put some thought into making it easier for the builder. Most of the ejector pin marks are in placed in spots that are hidden when the kit is put together. The exhaust housings have different sized mounting tabs that makes it impossible to accidentally reverse them on the kit. So do the wing weapons pylons which also have differently spaced mounting holes so they can't be reversed. I really liked the fact that I could build the exhaust outlets separate from their housings, and then add them after the fuselage was painted. It would have been most difficult to mask and paint them if it was required to have them added to the model before painting.

There were only a few sink marks that needed filling. One was located on the left exhaust housing (part C23) and on the rear portion of the vertical stabilizer (part B1).

The kit was built in three major sub-assemblies - the fuselage, the main rotor and hub, and the tail rotor. Many of the small parts, such as the ordinance and wheels, were also kept separate, to be added after painting.

Starting point was the cockpit. The excellent fit of the parts resulted in no problems when inserting the cockpit tub between the fuselage halves. Two thin pieces of plastic were added to the sides of the tub to cover over the small gap that showed above the side wall of the fuselage. At this point I made my first deviation from an out of the box build,

adding the seats from the ERTL AH-64A. The ERTL seats possessed some molded on seat cushions and the armoured side shields which the Hasegawa seats lack. The cockpit interior was painted Testors green drab and not black as suggested by the instructions. The instrument decals were applied and set down very well with an application of Microsol. Seat belts were fashioned from strip styrene and super glued to the seats.

I was surprised that there were a few trouble spots regarding seams along the fuselage spine and belly, with the worst spots located near the blade antennae making seam removal fairly difficult. What I really should have done was remove the antennae to ease the job, and then use the ESCI antennae as replacements for the Hasegawa ones. The sanding and scraping partially obliterated a few of the panel lines but they were easily re-scribed with an Xacto knife using Dymo tape as a guide.

The remainder of the build for the most part used the Hasegawa parts, though I did dip into the pieces taken from the ERTL kit.

The first parts to be liberated from the ERTL kit were the rotor head and blades. When I compared the Hasegawa offering versus the ERTL offering, it was obvious that the ERTL rotor parts were much more detailed. For the main rotor I took the ERTL head and blades, along with the swash plate pieces, and put them together. But even though the ERTL parts were better, they still required a lot of work to remove the prominent seam lines, and curiously one of the lobes on the rotor head was hollow underneath - which required filling. I then added a small amount of droop to the blades.

On the Hasegawa kit, the rotor shaft just sits in a big circular depression totally devoid of any detail, so here I also went to the ERTL kit, and cut out the top portion of what I suspect is part of a frame member from the ERTL kit, sanded and trimmed it for size and height, and mounted it in the empty void on the Hasegawa fuselage. To ensure that the rotor did not sit up to high above the fuselage deck I had to cut off the molded on shaft from the ERTL head, trimmed the Hasegawa shaft (part C2) to the proper length and then glued it to the top of the ERTL piece. The extra parts for the rotor assembly (parts D9 & D10) on the Hasegawa kits were relegated to the parts box.

The gun was the next area I looked at improving. Here I was in two minds - the Hasegawa gun looked much better, but the ERTL gun mount was much more detailed. After some debate, I settled on the complete gun unit from the ERTL kit minus the barrel, which I cut from the Hasegawa gun and glued onto the ERTL gun, after which I drilled out the end of the barrel. The nice thing about the ERTL gun and mount is that it completely covers the slotted hole on the Hasegawa kit. For some reason I don't think a real AH-64 would have slots showing in the bottom of the fuselage where the gun mounts.

The final use of ERTL parts was for the fuselage grab handles. On the Hasegawa kit, they are represented by small tabs molded onto the sides of the fuselage. I removed the Hasegawa handles, sanded the area smooth, and then glued on the ERTL handles. They really make a difference in the final look of the model.

The tail rotor was detailed by adding control rods and plate. This small modification makes such a difference in the look of the unit, giving it that spindly appearance.

For the IR jammer on the top deck, I tried a trick from Keith Goodman (www.kgwings.com). I took a narrow strip of a gold sequin and scored it with an Xacto

knife. This was then bent into a loop, trimmed for length, and placed over the kit's molded on IR jammer. I think that it turned out well, and the effect is quite convincing. I think I'll try this little trick again. For an added measure of fun, all of the Hellfires had small openings drilled in their rears for the rocket outlets.

The canopy was masked, and the kit was painted overall with Testors US Army Helo Drab, while the rotor blades and exhausts were painted black. Prior to applying the exterior decals, a coat of Testors gloss was sprayed.

The majority of the decals went on with little fuss. I applied multiple coats of Microsol to get the decals to set down. Be careful - the decals are very thin and the Microsol basically melts the images, so make sure you don't touch them with anything until they are thoroughly dry. Even with the Microsol, there were a couple of spots where some silvering occurred - almost exclusively on the larger decals. I must admit that placing the sixteen tiny US ARMY markings onto the sides of the eight Hellfire missiles was quite stressful - those little suckers kept trying to fold over onto themselves.

Following the decaling, some of the remaining parts were added - the wheels, the exhaust outlets, the ordinance, and the seats. This was followed with a coat of Aeromaster acrylic flat.

Next to be put on was the canopy. This fit quite tightly during trial fits, but it proved to be a bit more troublesome when it actually came time to glue it on. After some effort I was able to get the canopy on, but I'm not 100% happy with the final result. Next was the addition of the optics on the nose and the gun.

The final steps consisted of the painting the navigation lights, and the last items to be added were the main and tail rotors.

Conclusion:

Thank goodness for Hasegawa! This kit provided immense relief from the tedious builds of lesser manufacturers that I have worked on in the past. It was so nice to build something that fit together well. Even with the modifications I incorporated from the ESCI kit, it still went together quickly and easily.

Post Script: A comparison of the ERTL and Hasegawa AH-64A kits

With having the ESCI AH-64A available while I built the Hasegawa kit, it was inevitable that I would experiment with the ESCI kit to see how it faired in comparison with the Hasegawa offering. Some partial construction was done on the ESCI kit, to get an idea of how it would have fared if I had had a complete kit to build.

Cockpit:
Both kits come with decent cockpits with decals for the instrument panels. The ESCI kit has the edge in that it comes with the amoured glass separator between the pilot and gunner, and has the side shields on the seats. Verdict: slight edge to the ESCI kit.

Fuselage, wings and sensors:
The fuselage on both kits match up almost identically for size. The Hasegawa kit has little molded on tabs for the grab handles, while the ESCI kit has separate handles, but the handles on the chin fairings are incorrectly placed. The Hasegawa has much better

exhaust parts and diffusers. Sensors on the nose are about equal. Verdict: About equal for both kits.

Main and tail rotors:
The ESCI kit beats the Hasegawa kit hands down for its better detail on the main rotor head and blades. Both kits are about equal regarding the tail rotors. Verdict: Big edge to the ESCI kit.

Armament:
ESCI kit has a better gun mount, the Hasegawa kit the better gun. On both, the Hellfire rockets are a bit suspect, though those of the Hasegawa kit are slightly better. Verdict: about even.

Decals:
The ESCI decals are not as flexible and don't settle down as well or respond as well to setting solutions (Microsol) as do the Hasegawa decals. The Hasegawa decals are more densely printed and stand out from the camouflage better, whereas the ESCI decals are thin on the ink and the black markings tend to fade into the camouflage when applied over the dark green colour. Verdict: Big edge to the Hasegawa kit.

Fit, flash and seams:
Fit is excellent on the Hasegawa kit, with practically no flash or seams. ESCI kit has fit problems in a variety of places, most notably when inserting the cockpit into the fuselage, and with the area of the lower portion of the fuselage beneath the cockpit. Both kits employ a separate panel for this area. The ESCI part produces major gaps, that would require extensive filling, and probably significant loss of detail when sanding. The corresponding Hasegawa piece practically snaps into place, and just a little bit of pressure while the glue sets is all that is needed to ensure a nice final fit. On the ESCI kit, most of the pieces need to be sanded for fit, or to deal with flash or the many seams and sink marks. In addition, the plastic is soft and easily gouged or over sanded. Verdict: Big edge to Hasegawa.

Overall:
I personally think that in comparison with the Hasegawa AH-64A, the ESCI kit is better in overall detail, but fails in the fit and ease of construction. If you can do as I did, and merge the two kits together, then you will have the best of both kits, and an excellent model as a result.