

Hasegawa 1/48 F-104C Starfighter



By Mike Hanlon

During the Korean War, the USAF was rudely awakened by the Mig-15. The Soviet fighter's performance was clearly superior to the F-80 and F-84 and in many areas exceeded the F-86. One area in which the Mig was unmatched was its climbing characteristics. It could easily out climb any fighter in the US inventory.

Enter the F-104, designed as a point interceptor, the 104's mission was to climb faster than any other aircraft, intercept Soviet bombers and return. It had limited range and no provisions for any other weapons except its internal 20 mm cannon. The design maximized climb and speed with virtually no provision for extending the 104's range or mission. As such the 104 saw extremely limited service in the rapidly changing world of the late 50's and early 60's. Lockheed extensively redesigned the original design to produce the F-104G, which went on to serve with the majority of NATO forces through the 60's and 70's. Mitsubishi in Japan and Canadair in Canada produced licensed built versions of the 104 as well.

First released in early 2000, Hasegawa's F-104 series easily supplants the earlier Monogram 104C and G produced some twenty years earlier. As is the custom today, Hasegawa has designed the molds to produce the maximum number of variants possible. To date they have released the F-104C, G, and J models. Review of the

molds indicates that a twin seat TF-104C/G will also be released at sometime in the future.

While an exceptional kit, the Hasegawa release does have several peculiarities. Although the scribed panel lines are very nicely done, the kit also has countersunk rivet detail that is overdone, at least to my eyes. There are also several areas of the kit in which Hasegawa seems to have tried to maximize the number of parts used in each subassembly. For instance, each wing is comprised of five pieces. The wingtip tanks each have nine pieces including four separate filler caps per tank. The most annoying feature of the kit is the presence of large pin marks on the exterior surfaces of the lower wings and rudder. Attempts to fill and sand these pin marks obliterates the countersunk rivet detail that Hasegawa has expended so much effort to provide. On the plus side, the details are very nicely done and the exterior detail of the burner can is exceptional.



Construction begins with the cockpit. The kit includes an eleven piece Lockheed C-2 ejection seat which I chose to replace with a one piece Cutting Edge resin seat. Please note that Cutting Edge failed to provide the between-the-legs ejection ring, so I modified the kit part and used it. The remaining six interior pieces were painted Dark Gull Gray and assembled at this time. Hasegawa provides decals for the side consoles and instrument panel. These parts also have raised detail that may be painted if you wish. I used the decals and they look very nice. The kit instructions tell you to leave the instrument panel out until after the fuselage halves have been assembled. Don't do it! While I did manage to work the panel into place, it would have been much simpler to add it before the fuselage was assembled.

Once the interior was done, I completed the exhaust manifold assembly; this area was painted with Model Master Burnt Iron while the flame holder was painted Steel. Next comes the main gear assembly, otherwise known as the wheel well. This area is painted natural metal; I used Floquil Old Silver. Once these assemblies had set, I glued them and the cockpit into one of the fuselage halves and taped the fuselage halves together. This insures a proper fit and lets me make any necessary adjustments before the fuselage is glued together. The fit of all of the assemblies is very good and gluing the fuselage halves together and adding the remaining three fuselage inserts went off without a hitch.

At this point, I sprayed the interior of the engine intakes, the shock cones and the area on the fuselage covered by the intakes with Old Silver. Once dried, the shock cones and intakes were installed. Only light sanding was needed to deal with the seams. The nose cone is molded in two pieces has a seam that required filler to clean up. Not a big deal, but the only area on the kit that required substantial filling.



As stated earlier, each wing consists of five pieces; the leading edge slats, ailerons and flaps that can be set in a drooped position. In reality, the moving surfaces on the wings of the F-104 return to a neutral position once the aircraft has landed so all those separate pieces are unnecessary. There are prominent pin marks on the underside of the wings, ailerons and flaps. Attempts to fill them resulted in a loss of detail on each part. Once the wings had set, I sprayed the upper surface of the wing with Tamiya Gloss White and the underside with Gunze Sangyo Gloss Aircraft Gray. The wings

were not attached until after the fuselage had been painted. The fit of the wings to the fuselage is very good. The wingtip tanks were assembled next and set aside, they were painted before they were attached to the wings.

The fuselage on my 104 was natural metal with a red tail. I first painted the fuselage with Floquil Old Silver, I then masked off the fuselage areas around the engine and sprayed them with Alclad II Burnt Metal. Once this had dried, I masked off the fuselage and pre-painted the tail in white before spraying with Gunze Sangyo Gloss Red. I painted the fuselage in this order because any red over-spray on the natural metal can easily be removed with Isopropyl Alcohol. Getting silver lacquer off the red would not have been as easy. The horizontal stabilizer was left off the model and painted in the same sequence since the top of the vertical fin is molded with this part and also needs to be painted red. The nose cone was masked off and sprayed with Gunze Gloss Aircraft Gray and once this had dried, the nose was masked and the flat black anti-glare panel was sprayed, again an acrylic was used.



Once everything had dried I added the landing gear. Hasegawa uses those little rubber grommets into which you push the landing gear strut. I found that applying some soapy water on the pins allows the struts to be pushed into place more easily. The forward landing gear strut was also added at this time. I left the wheels and landing gear doors off until later. The kit supplies the fuselage airbrakes as separate pieces; unfortunately, the airbrakes also close as soon as the aircraft lands. My aircraft's airbrakes were painted red with a white X, so I painted them at the same time as the vertical tail and left them off until after the X's had been added with decals.

The aircraft I chose to depict was Colonel George Laven's commander's aircraft from the 479th Tactical Fighter Wing. This aircraft is one of the choices provided by Hasegawa, but I chose to use Albatros Decals "F-104 Worldwide Exotic Stars" sheet. This proved to be a

mixed blessing, as you will see. Produced in Mexico the quality of the Albatros decals is easily on a par with the sheets that MicroScale produces for SuperScale, Cutting Edge and Aeromaster. The sheet offers an extraordinary selection of eighteen schemes including; two USAF 104's, two Jordanian 104A's, one in Natural metal and the other in desert camouflage, Spanish, Pakistani and Taiwanese 104s in four different camouflage schemes. The downside of all these options is a very cramped and sometimes confusing set of instructions.

The markings for Laven's aircraft are superior to the kit decals with a few notable exceptions. The numbers called out in the instructions are reversed for the prominent white X's on the tail. I found this out after applying the first and discovering that it didn't line up properly. Of course I figured out why it didn't fit after the decal had set. Fortunately, Norris had a spare set. The national insignias are too small and were replaced with insignia from an Eagle Strike sheet. The white circle decals used to replicate the whitewall tires on the main wheels were oversized and so I had to mask the tires and spray the whitewalls. Thank you EZ Mask for your circle masks! The smaller multi-colored stripe sections that go around the nose and inlet cones were oversized and replaced with the kit decals. The colors aren't a dead on match, but it really wasn't that noticeable.



Once decaling was complete you have a very colorful bird! The Albatross sheet was a bit of a disappointment, but the marking for Taiwanese 104G's and J's in Light and Dark Ghost gray keep calling to me.

As you can see from the pictures, the completed model is an attention getter. The pin marks on the wing and rudder are a disappointment, but can be overcome with care. If you wish to do Laven's aircraft, I would wait and see if another manufacturer releases it. The Albatross sheet and the kit decals really don't do this aircraft justice. The 104 is a welcome addition from Hasegawa and sure to be around for a long time to come.

