

# Hasegawa 1/48 scale Messerschmitt bf-109E3

Condor Legion

By Mike Hanlon



Best remembered for its role in the Battle of Britain, the Me-109E series first saw action during the final year of the Spanish Civil War succeeding the B, C and D series. A world-class fighter from its inception, the 109 established the Luftwaffe as the premier air force in the 30's and early 40's. Many of the future aces of the Luftwaffe were introduced to combat during the Spanish Civil War flying the 109. The 109E or Emil was the first 109 powered by the Daimler Benz db601 engine. The succeeding 109F was also powered by the db601 engine, but was a substantially different aircraft and the progenitor of the G series, which was produced in greater numbers than any other fighter in WWII.

First released in 1987 at the then outrageous price of \$23, the Hasegawa Me109E-3 began the renaissance in WW II aircraft models that continues to this day. At the time of its release, the only other 1/48 Me-109 kits on the market were the Monogram 109E dating from the early 60's, the Otaki Me-109G6 from 1974 and the Airfix Me-109F from 1979. The Hasegawa kit contains 50 plus parts and includes photo-etched detail parts, a first for a mainstream production kit. The molds were revised in 1994 to correct minor errors in the nose profile. Since its original release, Hasegawa has re-boxed the kit

numerous times, including the 109E-4/7, the rare Me-109T designed for carrier use and the just released Me-109E-1.

I was asked to build a Condor Legion Me-109E-3. Up until that time I had been under the assumption that the E-3 was supplied to the Spanish Republican air force after the close of the Spanish Civil War, but in fact they saw combat in the closing months of the war. The kit that I was given came with Condor Legion markings; unfortunately the decals were stuck to the "protective" wax paper sheet and tore as I was trying to separate them. Fortunately, Aeromaster has released several Condor Legion sheets, 48-458 Spanish Civil War part 1, includes the aircraft I was asked to build.

Assembly begins with the interior, Hasegawa chose to mold seat belts onto the seat but these are not very well depicted. I drilled two holes into the seat back and reamed them out to form a slot through which photo-etched seat belts could be threaded. I then painted the interior parts RLM 02, the instrument panel was painted in Scale Black (RLM 66) and gauges were then filled in with Flat Black. The dials were picked out with Prismacolor white and silver pencils. Each gauge was then given a drop of Future to simulate the glass. Yellow and red pencils were used to highlight switches on the instrument panel and sidewalls. Assembly of the interior parts is straight forward, although the detail minded may wish to use a resin replacement interior. The cockpit assembly is trapped between the fuselage halves; a photo-etched oil cooler and plastic splitter are also installed while joining the fuselage halves.

The wings are assembled next. Photo-etched radiator grills are slipped into place and held with plastic fasteners. I chose to leave the leading edge slats and flaps off until after painting and decaling. The wing assembly was then glued to the fuselage. The fit is good and no filling was necessary.

In the next step, the kit instructions would have you attach the landing gear, tail planes and aileron mass balances. I skipped this step and attached engine cover. You may wish to make blanking plates from sheet styrene as the cooling holes in the engine cover allow you to see through to the underside. I didn't notice this until after the model was finished and it really isn't a big deal. The engine cover requires a minor amount of trimming and sanding to fit flush.

At this point, the model was ready for painting. The rudder and wing tips were sprayed with Tamiya Flat White. Once dry they were masked off, and the undersides were painted with Gunze Sangyo's RLM 65. The remainder of the aircraft was painted RLM 62 Dunkelgrun. Tamiya's XF-26 Deep Green is a good match for this color. A note on Spanish Civil War 109s, the majority of 109s were painted RLM 63 Hellgrau. This color is very close to RLM 02 and one school of thought claims that they are actually the same color. The Aeromaster instructions also call for RLM 63 and describe this aircraft as being an E-1. The Classic Colours book on the Spanish Civil War has pictures of this aircraft and it is clearly darker in color as well as having the under wing bulges for the 20mm cannon indicative of the 109E-3. After the paint had set, I sprayed a fine mist of Gunze Sangyo Smoke along the panel lines.

Now the fun part, the area forward of, around and behind the exhausts is painted black starting forward of the exhausts in a semi-circle and fanning out rearward terminating at the demarcation line between the upper and lower colors three frames past the cockpit. To get a semi-circle, I took an E-Z mask sheet with a variety of circle masks and found one that was the right size. I used the excess material surrounding the circle, cut it in half, and attached it forward of the exhausts. I then ran Tamiya masking tape straight back to the appropriate points, masked off the rest of the fuselage and sprayed the area with Tamiya Flat Black. I had to touch up a couple of areas but it turned out well.



Once the paint had cured, I sealed it with Future and let it dry. I painted the landing gear struts RLM 02 and the tires Scale Black (RLM 66) with Gloss Black wheels. I then installed the landing gear. The locating pins for the landing gear struts are a tight fit. I managed to break both of them. I drilled a hole in each strut and a corresponding hole in the mounting hole now filled with the struts mounting pins. I then epoxied a piece of brass wire into each hole. It worked, but if you are building the kit, sand the mounting pins carefully. Both of mine were broken while I was test fitting the struts. Once the landing gear had set I painted the tail wheel in Scale Black with the strut and wheel and strut in RLM 02.

It was now time to decal the model, as previously mentioned, the kit decals became hopelessly attached to the wax protective paper and actually tore when I tried to separate them. The Aeromaster decals worked well. The only tricky part was the black stripes forming an X across the white rudder. Aeromaster provides black striping which you must cut to size and fit. Not especially challenging but you have to be careful to get the angle right on both sides.

After the decals had set, I resealed the model with Future. I then attached the tail planes and tail struts. The aileron mass balances and pitot tube were also attached at

this time. The propeller was painted Black Green (RLM 70) with an Aluminum center hub. The spinner was painted with Gunze Sangyo Gloss Yellow. The canopy was masked and painted with RLM 02 and then RLM 62. One feature of the Hasegawa kit is a photo-etched armor plate that requires two 45-degree bends before being glued to the canopy. This feature has always intimidated me. Fortunately, Spanish Civil War era aircraft did not have this armor plate. A final coat of PollyScale Flat Finish completed the model. All in all, a simple build with an interesting paint scheme, one that I wouldn't normally have chosen, but I wouldn't mind trying another Spanish 109 sometime.

This is the paragraph where I usually say it's a nice kit go and get one. This time I want to compare the Hasegawa 109E to the Tamiya 109E which was released in 1996, some 9 years after the original Hasegawa release. If the Hasegawa kit kicked off the renaissance of WW II modeling, the Tamiya kit came out a time when the bar was continually being raised in terms of engineering and detail. I previously built and reviewed the kit, it is typical Tamiya, brilliant engineering, crummy decals and unusual in a Tamiya kit, sink marks.

Starting with the fuselage, Tamiya provides a better and more detailed cockpit. The forward fuselage has an engine block molded into the fuselage halves, there is no detail as such, but the block provides structural stability in the nose of the fuselage and blocks light coming through the engine cooling holes. It also allowed Tamiya to mold the lower panel surrounding the oil cooler as a separate piece. Unlike the Hasegawa kit, the exhausts are molded separately, which means they can be painted and added after the model has been painted.

Both Tamiya and Hasegawa kits feature dropped flaps and leading edge slats. Here, the Hasegawa kit comes out ahead, Tamiya's wings have shallow sink marks in the upper wings by the flaps. While it is a simple matter to fill them with superglue, they shouldn't be there in the first place. Tamiya also chose to mold the mounting tabs for the leading edge slats as solid pieces that mount through a slot in the upper wing. This mounting slot is visible when the slat is in the lowered position. Hasegawa chose to use a pin that is glued into the leading edge of the wing, leaving no seam line behind the slat. Hasegawa's use of photo-etched parts for the radiators offers no significant advantage over the plastic parts offered by Tamiya.

There are only two other significant differences between the Hasegawa and Tamiya kits. Tamiya offers separate wheels, which simplifies painting the tires. The tail wheel is also molded as a separate piece; Hasegawa molded theirs to one of the fuselage halves. Second, as previously mentioned the Hasegawa kit includes a photo-etched armor plate that requires some intricate bending to fit. Tamiya does it simpler and easier with plastic.

In terms of accuracy, both Tamiya and Hasegawa were faulted for have inaccurate nose profiles, Hasegawa corrected this in 1994. Tamiya corrected their kit with the release of the 109E-4 variant.

So which kit should you buy? Either will give you a very nice 109E, the fit of the Tamiya kit is snap-tight, but the Hasegawa kit wasn't far behind and offered no significant problems. Retail prices are within a couple of dollars with the Tamiya kit going for \$26 and the Hasegawa running from \$22 to \$24. If it weren't for the goof in the leading edge slats, I'd say go with the Tamiya kit, but as it is it really is a toss up. Personally, (and no surprise) I'd go with the Tamiya kit. But I also have a couple of Hasegawa kits in stock and I don't plan on getting rid of them anytime soon.

So there you have it, two very nice kits just waiting for you to build them. What a nice dilemma!

