

Messerschmitt ME 109s On the Hunt



Fine molds ME-109 G-6

By Bryant Dunbar

Generally speaking I've not been a huge fan of the Messerschmitt Me 109 with regard to my model building. However, when I came up with an idea, it became the perfect subject to build. As a fan of historical military aircraft as so many of us are I asked myself, what is it we never get to see with these aircraft? Then it hit me, how about showing off one of the best features of Me 109s, the spinner. Most Me 109s had a spiral or partial area painted white. We, as model builders' painstakingly struggle to replicate the spinner with decals and hope for success. Why not show off our efforts by having them spin as we would see them in Arial combat?

The first step in the process was to find the best 1/72 Me 109 model available on the market. I wanted to do a late model Me 109 F or G and it turns out Fine Molds makes the best 1/72 Me 109s by far. Through research of aircraft and decals I narrowed my subject down to Me 109-G6s for my project and found a couple of corresponding Fine Molds models.

The Fine Mold Me 109s have a nice added feature, a detailed engine bay for those who wish to pose the model on the ground in a maintenance situation. For me I saw this as a benefit to allow me to mount a small cell phone motor inside the nose of the aircraft to turn the propeller. As it would turn out I ended up doing a fair amount of carving inside each engine half (molded into each fuselage half) to accommodate the width of the cell phone motor.

There are a couple of critical aspects to consider when building a model with a spinning propeller. First it is to determine the interface between the motor and the propeller spinner. Any binding along the drive shaft or back side of the spinner with other surfaces of the model and the propeller won't spin. Secondly, the motor has to be mounted perfectly to ensure perfect alignment. If there is any angle the propeller spinner is again likely to bind on the model's fuselage and not spin freely. Also, even if the spinner does spin freely, the propeller itself can have a horrible wobble that is completely unrealistic when the model is done. It's a tricky process that takes time and patience to accomplish to good effect. Take your time and dry fit things a lot before securing the motor permanently in the fuselage.

Another factor to consider is where to have the wires from the motor lead out of the model. I debated whether to use brass tubing or a clear acrylic tubing knowing that wires would be showing all the way into the display base where the battery packs are. In the end I chose to go with brass as it is much stronger and I have seen a number of successful "in-flight" models in which the modeler use brass rod or tubing to support the model. For some things there is no perfect answer.



Once the engineering of the motor and spinner were worked out I mounted the motor in one fuselage half and dry fitted the other fuselage half to ensure fit was

good. Once that was done I was able to start work on the model as I would any other model.

As I mentioned before, the Fine Mold Me 109s are the best available. With that said the cockpit interior is decent but I chose to use Eduard Color photo etch for the instrument panel and side details. Even though the canopy is closed with a pilot in the seat I still like knowing the detail is still there. Another area I wanted to address on the models was the flight controls. I carefully separated the ailerons from the wings and posed them to be consistent with the posing of the models at the end of the project. Aside from the ailerons I built the rest of the models per the instructions. Fit and finish is very good and very little putty was necessary.



Seated 1/72 scale pilots are hard to come by. Revell of Germany makes a set of figures but the seated pilots are very undersized so I could not use them. PJ Productions on the other hand makes a couple of nice seated figures. They are expensive but are worth the money. I reposed the head on one of the pilots so they were both looking in the same direction. I accomplished this by sawing the head off with a JLC blade and gluing it back on at a new angle. Given the small scale no extra work was necessary. The arms of the pilots are molded separately so I could pose them as needed.

In my research for decals I wanted two aircraft that likely flew together at the same time. I've found this can be very tricky as decal companies like to do multiple aircraft of the same squadron but at different time frames, so a lot of research went into my choice. Also I like Me 109s with a fair amount of "Yellow" accents so Luftwaffe JG 54 became a logical choice. Eagle Cals decals provided the most information as to history and details of the aircraft but in order to build these two aircraft together I had to purchase two separate sheets.



I used Vallejo Air acrylic paint for the first time. People have commented both good and bad results with this paint so I wanted to give it a try. They provide all the RLM colors I needed so that helped as well. I shot RLM 76 first for the lower half of the fuselage and underside of the wings. I thinned it and while it shot nicely in the model I found it lifted when I applied Tamiya Tape over it. I realized I thinned it too much so I did not thin any of the paints for the remainder of the project. The paints performed well but I had to clear the airbrush with a quick full shot of air and paint to clear the needle/nozzle due to tip dry issues. Perhaps adding an inhibitor would've limited that issue. As for masking I still had to be careful so as not to lift paint off of the model. More curing time is required as compared to enamel paints, which slows everything down. However overall the paint performed well and I was able to achieve a satisfactory "mottled" effect by working multiple times with RLM 74, RLM 75 and back to RLM 76 until I achieve the effect I wanted.

I glossed the models up with some floquil Acrylic gloss (I've stashed a fair amount of it) and proceeded to decal and weather the models. The artwork of Eagle Cal decals is exquisite but the decals themselves were brittle and a challenge to work with. I know my sheets are quite old as I bought them through Sprue brothers and they still had Greatmodels.com price tags on them. So how they were stored may have something to do with the issues I had with them.



To bring out the panel lines I used a pastel wash. I would apply the wash and let it dry. Then I took a damp paper towel and wiping "with the air stream" over the aircraft surfaces I removed the excess wash. Once the weathering was completed I shot a satin coat over the models to bring down the gloss some. Me 109s had a semi gloss to their paint and I think the effect is spot on.

Mounting of the models on the base is pretty simple. I like to work with Shadow boxes that are available at Hobby Lobby and Michael's craft stores. I have a piece of clear acrylic cut by the framing guys that will fit in place of the glass that comes with the shadow box so I can drill through it to mount the brass tubing. As for the top surface of the base I went for a minimal effect. I looked on line for an image B-17s in formation from above. I found a few images to pick from and settled on this one. I like that not only is it black and white but also has very minimal detail. I wanted the aircraft to be show cased with them diving on a B-17 formation and for the base to convey that message and not the other way around. The fact that it's black and white makes the models themselves pop that much more.



Using magnet wire I extended the cell phone motor wires down into the base where a AA battery pack and trimmer for each model resides. The wiring is electronics 101 and very simple. The trimmer is used to adjust the propeller speeds to a realistic effect. Overall I'm very happy with the result and look forward to displaying it at up coming model shows. Whether it wins awards or not is not the point but I hope those that get to see it enjoy effect of the spinning propellers as much as I do.