

## HobbyCraft/Academy F8F-1/1B Bearcat 1/48<sup>th</sup> Scale



By Norris Graser

This kit was originally manufactured and released by HobbyCraft of Canada. All versions are currently re-boxed and released by Academy.

It is the second HobbyCraft Bearcat I have built. The first was for a kit review several years ago for Combat Aircraft Magazine. I thought I had given these kits high marks in the first review. As an after thought, I went back and reread that review and to my surprise found that the old review mirrors this one!

The model was built for the NAS Glenview Museum and was part of a larger project wherein several McK members built various models of aircraft that were stationed at Glenview over the years.

### **My Two-Year Layoff**

Up front I need to tell you I hadn't built a model in just under than 2 years, and everything that I thought could go wrong, did. There was the hunt for tools, paint and other sundry items that used to be within easy reach. I found that paint was dried up, tools missing. I even had to make space on the bench for working room!! Then I had airbrushing problems cured later by buying a new compressor & airbrush.

Some things were still the same; I did lose pieces in the carpeting. This was not a happy experience as I also found out quickly enough that I was "rusty" at building. I remembered how quickly I used to be able to finish a model and I even expected nice paint jobs, clear coats that would lay down with a minimum of flaws and decals without silvering. I found it was no picnic getting reacquainted with the joy of building. The sole exception was the decals, which surprisingly

enough, went on, stayed down, sunk into panel lines as they should and did NOT silver!

### **On To The Kit**

This kit should have been a straight and easy one to build. Simple enough in design, I still encountered several areas that needed attention. The cockpit needs work. The instrument panel detail is so softly detailed that I could not even dry brush or pencil in the raised instrument panels. Looking at my first build from a few years ago, I found that I solved this problem with an instrument panel decal from a Pro Modeler sheet. Even that looked pretty lame and is not a close contender for the instrument panel decals we are used to in the newer kits that have surfaced over the past few years. Kit instrument panel decals sure have come a long way!!



The heck with the decals, though; McK member Steve Kumamoto introduced me to a new product for my interior- color "Zoom" sets manufactured by Eduard. Boy, these are the greatest! I will never start another model without checking to see if there is one of these sets dedicated to my subject! Eduard takes all the pain out of using metal sets. All of the things that scare the h\*\*l out of you are now taken care of. The attachment points on the metal tree are so thin; all you need is a pair of sharp hobby scissors. Bending and folding the metal is not the difficult job it used to be. Parts are already creased at the fold line. Using tweezers or just your fingers, sharp edged folds are immediate. I have never been happy with painting results on etched metal; not a problem anymore as everything is pre painted- better then I can ever hope to do.

There are no color notes for the cockpit. Checking a web site out, I found recommended colors. Never trust a single reference- and I above all should know that!! An incorrect color was given for the seat and I painted it black. After gluing it into the cockpit, I found a few close up cockpit images, including that of a Glenview Cat and found the seat was metal.



The interior builds up easily, & help from the Eduard color set makes it look great. Patience is required when gluing the cockpit and aft turtle deck into the fuselage halves. Again, soft detail precludes seating the cockpit tub and a not so sharp mating surface for the turtle deck will keep you moving the parts for several minutes. I used slow setting liquid glue for this operation. I would guess I spent all of 45 minutes aligning and realigning.

The next area requiring attention is the vertical tail, which is split horizontally to accommodate two Bearcat variants. Early cats had a shorter tail and less pronounced trim tab. I found using sanding sticks and slow set glue, you can slightly reshape and position the upper piece to achieve a pretty descent fit. A little super glue for filler and some light sanding will get the job done.

Landing gear suffered from soft detail and sloppy tool and die. The struts were not a tight fit and the gear doors, which attach to the legs with "micro" slots, make for a difficult time when positioning these items, let alone trying to get the glue to take hold and keep the pieces in place. I might add that the gear door detail is oversimplified. The pieces supplied are flat but the actual items were contoured and molded giving a "blown" and bulged appearance where they meet the tires. These parts remind me of the day when "L" shaped pieces of plastic passed for ejection seats.

The cowling is the most noticeable problem area. In short, it's too blunt and does not taper correctly to the lip. I have heard that the actual Bearcat that HobbyCraft based the model on was (unknown to them) modified with a custom

cowling for air racing. Later acquired by a museum & repainted back to standard Navy colors, the cowl was not replaced. Result: blunt cowl disease! HobbyCraft Canada will have to quarantine all Bearcats until they find a cure. I understand all existing kits will have to be destroyed.

I was going to use a Cutting Edge replacement cowling but after minor fitting found that I would have to work on mating the new one to the fuselage for a better fit. This would have been okay but I would have lost the already too shallow, too soft, cowl flap detail (located on the kit plastic NOT the resin). To properly use the resin cowl, I believe that the cowl flaps would have to be redone- by using thin brass or plastic card and I wasn't up to that type of work on this particular model!



The fix for the cowling is actually pretty simple, though. Having built this kit before, I already knew that it is not a big deal to just grab a picture of a Bearcat and sand while rotating the cowl back and forth until the side profile looks right. I think it took all of 10 minutes to sand and eyeball to satisfaction.

### **Painting , Decals, odds and ends**

The paints I used were just fine, thank you! However using them wasn't very easy due to the fact that my old airbrush had seen better days. Worse, I have always used my "work" compressor with a line tied in for my airbrush. Several years of use with about a mile of rubber hose, that is now deteriorating, caused minute sized debris to imbed itself in my paint finish. What to do? A new

dedicated modeling compressor and airbrush did the trick. Everyone knows I'm a sucker for gimmicks so I selected the Iwata Smart Jet (a very nice little tool) complete with a solenoid that shuts the compressor down when not airbrushing. I like that!

Finally re-mastering my airbrush technique and getting the paint flow to my satisfaction, I still did not like my final satin finish coat of PollyScale and made it a "passable" finish only after rubbing the model down with bare Metal polish.

It generally doesn't matter if my paint is enamel or acrylic; whatever color works is what I use.



The cockpit is overall Model Master Interior Green. I used Gunze Black for the seat (but it should be metallic.) For the external surfaces I used Dark Sea Blue FS 15042 overall. For the aft fuselage 3 foot wide recognition band, I used Model Master International Orange FS 12197 applied over Gunze Gloss White. I like Gunze Stainless for my radial engines, with a dusting of Model master exhaust. I half ass buff it out and you end up with a well-used engine. I like using anyone's FS 36081 engine gray for scale effect tires and I used a little tan for the exhaust stains down the fuselage sides.

I have had interest in researching and releasing several Bearcat decal sheets for quite some time as the subject has been severely neglected over the years. There were so many good looking schemes for this type and just a few sheets have been produced. This project gave me the excuse I needed to get into that

research. The end result is several dedicated Bearcat decals. Coincidentally, I managed to include two different G-View cats, in the mix. The markings I used were conveniently released a few months before I actually needed them. Thank you SuperScale, in spite of my constant whining over corrections before going to press, I am going to miss you when I lose my research job!

As far as decal application goes, all went on without any problems except that the wing "V" was slightly oversized and had to be cut back a little. Yep, they all sucked down and filled the recessed paneling easily enough; absolutely no silvering was to be found afterwards. What more can you ask for? A lot actually, but that's a different article or review altogether!

I found that Duco 2 part clear epoxy worked great for the circular wing lights found top and bottom of both wings.

### **Final thoughts**

If not for the fact that the model was NOT finessed and blessed with sharp tooling, this could have been a better than average kit to build and a fun experience.

When finished, the HobbyCraft Bearcat does look right and is a step up from the older Testor's kit. I do recommend it with that in mind and plan on building a third one, just not right now.....!

