

Trumpeter's "Chinese New Fighter": A Preview

By Mark J. Soppet



Roll the clock back to the 1980's for a moment. Israeli Aircraft Industries is feverishly working on the Lavi, a delta-winged indigenous fighter that will preserve Israel's air superiority in the middle eastern skies. Suddenly, the U.S. Congress, which has funded much of the Lavi's development, pulls the plug and tells the Israelis to buy more F-16's instead. What are the Lavi engineers to do? If you said, "Jump ship and help the Chinese Communists," you'd be right.

The Shenyang J-10 represents the pinnacle of China's indigenous aviation industry. Having made its first flight sometime around 1995, it is a highly-maneuverable fighter in the same class as the F-16, and it will soon be operational with the People's Liberation Army Air Force. While it's not a direct copy of the Lavi, the J-10 draws heavily on the knowledge gained in the development of Israel's stillborn fighter.

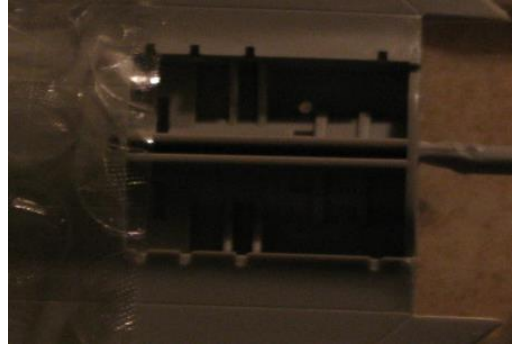
It should come as no surprise that Trumpeter was the first model kit company to produce a kit of China's new fighter. Apparently the marketing people were never clued in to the fighter's name, as the box and instructions simply say "Chinese New Fighter."



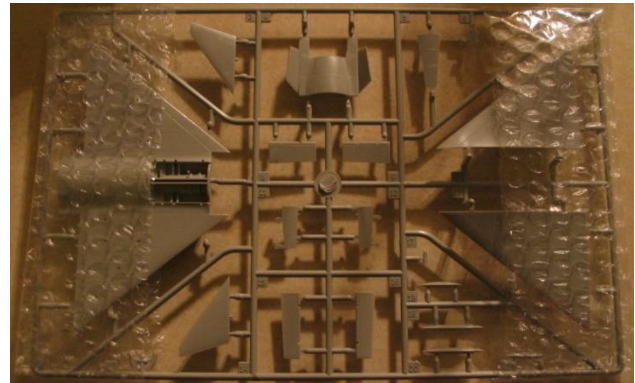
All kidding about the name aside, the new Trumpeter kit is a welcome addition to the hobby store shelves. Trumpeter gives you four light gray sprues and a small clear parts tree in a box that's a bit too big for a kit this size. The edges of the wings tree are protected in bubble wrap, which is becoming the norm for Trumpeter these days. Overall, the detailing is quite good. The panel lines are finely recessed and most of the parts look sufficiently "busy." The wheel wells have plenty of

structural details molded in place, but the hydraulic and electrical lines that are expected in a modern fighter are strangely missing.

The cockpit is a vast improvement over Trumpeter's earlier 1/72 scale efforts like the F-107. An attempt was made to depict some of the side console detail with engraved panel lines, although most builders will opt to use the provided cockpit details over the side consoles and instrument panel. The instrument panel itself is the traditional opaque piece of plastic with a decal applied over the top (contrast this with the Vigilante kit, where an acetate sheet is placed behind a clear instrument panel.) The seat looks good, but many builders will probably opt for a resin replacement (perhaps a Russian K36 is the proper seat, as the Russians provided the J-10's engine and most of the avionics.) Overall, the cockpit is good, but master modelers will definitely want to go aftermarket to spruce it up.



Trumpeter provides the wing flaps and ailerons as separate pieces, but the wing hinges oddly prevent you from attaching these surfaces in a drooped position. Modifying the hinges should not be too hard, but it's small touches like this that prevent this kit from being truly outstanding. Although pictures of the J-10 are tough to find, I would presume that the flaps and ailerons are drooped on the ground, to the tune of 45 degrees from horizontal.



Plenty of armament is at your disposal when assembling the kit. Three drop tanks, two PLA-8 missiles (copies of the Israeli Python III) and two PLA-10 missiles (looking awfully like AIM-7 Sparrows) are provided. Interestingly, Trumpeter has split the PLA-10's into forward and aft sections. This allowed Trumpeter to put some remarkable rocket motor detail into the aft end of the PLA-10's.

Decals are provided for two different aircraft with distinctive camouflage patterns. The decal sheet is fairly small, but provides a sufficient amount of markings. Trumpeter has started including Gunze paint numbers in the instructions, but does not put down the names or general descriptions of the colors used on the real aircraft. Again, this is a minor but irritating inconvenience that detracts from the building experience.



One last complaint, not directly related to the kit, is the price. I think that \$20.00 or more is too much to ask for this kit. It seems unreasonable, especially when a quality F-16 kit in the same scale from Revell Germany or Hasegawa can be found for \$13.00. Trumpeter will probably retort by saying that the analogy is not valid, and they are the only game in town for a J-10. True enough, but I still expect Trumpeter to be cheaper than the other manufacturers. Their kits aren't quite up to the level of quality being shown by Hasegawa, Revell, or even Italeri; they're also using cheap Chinese labor, which should theoretically mean a cheaper kit. Alas, the consumers aren't seeing the savings, and they never will if they continue gobbling the Trumpeter kits up at the current rates.

Overall, Trumpeter's "Chinese New Fighter" looks to be a simple and straightforward kit of an eye-catching airplane. It should present no major difficulties, and will be quite the conversation-piece when it's finished. It's too early to say if this kit will sell well in the U.S., or if Trumpeter will follow up with more J-10 kits (like a 1/48 scale version, or a two-seat J-10B in 1/72 scale.) Still, hats off to Trumpeter (again) for boldly making a kit of an airplane that no other manufacturer would touch.

The views presented by the author do not represent the views of the United States Air Force and should not be construed as such.