

1/48 Meng P-51D Mustang

By Mike Hanlon



Since released in 1995, the Tamiya P-51D Mustang has been benchmark for 1/48 Mustangs kits. A simple and rewarding kit, it is not without its flaws and before talking about Meng's effort I would like to revisit the Tamiya kit.

Tamiya's Mustang has been released in five different boxes and has had one update to correct a flaw in the kit. In the original release, Tamiya molded the sprue gates directly to the clear parts, the result being that clear could not be removed from the sprue without being marred. The subsequent revision moved the gate to the edge of the windscreen and the canopy but care must still be taken when removing the part that can be easily damaged. The main canopy is molded separately from the canopy frame and leaves a nasty seam if care is not taken in assembly.

The kit has some minor deficiencies; the interior is basic and not up to current day standards. The propeller consists of four separate blades and a two-piece spinner that does not go together easily and is best replaced with a resin propeller from Ultracast. The wheel wells are inaccurate as the main wing spar forms the rear of the well on the actual aircraft. The kit well has a rear wall that follows the curve of the well. The remaining issue is that seam on the underside of the fuselage is difficult to clean up as it runs through the supercharger exhaust and some raised detail. The wings are scribed and have reinforcing rivets over the wheel wells. Mustang purists may want to sand and fill the scribed panels

None of these problems is insurmountable and the kit remains a pleasure to build. Since released I have built five.

Meng's kit is billed as being "Fast Cement-Free Assembly". It contains well over a hundred parts as compared to the fifty plus parts in the Tamiya kit. I had read Brett Green's review on Hyperscale as well as his build in Military Illustrated Modeler. Several of his concerns in building his model carried over to my build and may have added unneeded complication to my build.

First things first, you cannot build the model without glue, some parts would simply fall off and others would have unnecessarily large gaps. Green indicates in his build that the tail wheel must be added before the fuselage is assembled, subsequent reviews from other magazines do not mention this. He also states that if you modify the landing gear struts they can be installed after the wing has been assembled. On my model I followed Green's example and found the exposed tail wheel could be easily damaged. I also assembled the wing with the landing gear installed and this complicated my build. Subsequent reviews I have read do not mention adding the landing gear before assembling or there being any problem with adding them afterwards. Inserts are provided for the machine guns in the leading edge of the wings. They do not fit well and require filling.



I started my build with the interior and it is a marked improvement over the Tamiya kit's interior. The only issue is the instrument panel decal that is rather crude. The instrument panel itself has only the outlines of the dials but no additional detail. One saving grace is that the panel is so deeply inset that it cannot easily be seen. This is also true of the Tamiya kit.

Assembling the fuselage is quick with huge connectors but some force (I used pliers twice) is necessary to get the parts closed and in some areas the gaps required an application of Mister Surfacer. The vertical stabilizer must be glued together and clamped or it also has a considerable gap. The curved upper fuselage piece requires that the antenna be added before it attached to the rest of the fuselage. I stole an antenna from a junked Tamiya P-51 that I added after painting.

The flaps and ailerons are designed to be trapped between the upper and lower wings. I cut off the forward part of the connectors so that I could install them after painting. I did this because I was painting stripes on the wings which passed through both the flaps and the ailerons and I thought this was make painting them easier. It did, but attaching them afterward was not as

simple as I had hoped, the remaining pins were fragile and easily broken. I also question the angle of the dropped flaps as it is much steeper than the Tamiya kit. As mentioned earlier the machine gun inserts are an extremely poor fit and require careful filling. Like the Tamiya kit the wing panels are scribed and Meng adds counter-sunk rivet detail.

The kit does have some positive aspects; the drop tanks are designed so no sprue marks are visible and glue actually isn't required for a good fit. Meng offers cuffed Hamilton Standard and an uncuffed Aeroproduct's propeller. These were easily assembled after painting and a vast improvement over Tamiya's props.



Both the original and the Dallas main canopies are included and require that the center-molding seam be sanded and polished out. As of this writing there are no canopy masks for the Meng kit, but I found that Eduard's mask for the Tamiya P-51D can be used with a slight modification. The windscreen required minor trimming to fit properly.

The kit provides a choice of two aircraft; a Fifteenth Air Force plane flown by Captain John Voll and a 9th Air Force plane flown by Captain Richard Turner. I elected to use Aeromaster sheet 48-226 Ninth and Fifteenth Air Force Fighter Aces. Captain Freddie Ohr, the only Korean American ace in World War II, flew the plane. The model was undercoated with Tamiya Gloss Black and painted with Alclad Aluminum and White Aluminum Lacquers. The yellow tail and stripes were Tamiya Flat Yellow and Tamiya Flat Red was used for the spinner and nose. I gave the finished model a wash with Flory water-soluble clay washes.

The finished model looks very nice and I am still unclear as to whether the problems I had were self-inflicted rather than the kit's fault. That being said, much of the engineering that went into making the kit "cement free" was wasted and a simple and more efficient build would have been possible if Meng had designed this as a conventional kit.



In summary, the Meng kit does have some advantages and I have a second kit that I will be building soon. On the other hand, I'm not getting rid of my remaining Tamiya kits and of course Airfix and Eduard have new kits on the horizon.

