

Stinson L-5/OY-1

Manufacturer: Sword Models

Scale: 1/72

Material(s): Injection-molded plastic

Price: \$11.50

Source: Squadron Mail Order

Analysis

Just to get your attention, I'll start by stating that the Stinson L-5 "Sentinel", in its L-5 through L-5G variants, was the most versatile airplane that American forces flew during World War II. Yes, I know how many different jobs that the Corsair, PB4Y, B-17, and other better-known warbirds performed but consider this. The L-5's usual liaison tasks included reconnaissance, both visual and photographic, aerial delivery of mail, messages, couriers, and VIPs to front-line locations, artillery spotting, some early forward air control, search and rescue, aerial laying of telephone and telegraph cables. More than 4000 L-5s were built, making it by far the most widely used liaison aircraft, and the most numerous variant, the L-5B, featured a folding turtledeck to permit a standard stretcher to be loaded into the aft fuselage. Most Marine Corps OY-1's were taken from L-5B production lots. From New Guinea to the Philippines, sergeant pilots of the famous "Guinea Short Lines" (occasionally known as the U.S. Army 25th Liaison Squadron) flew air-evacuation sorties from river banks and hacked-out jungle strips that a Corsair pilot couldn't have hit with a 500-pound bomb. They delivered cargo, mostly food, ammunition, and medical supplies to troops in contact with the enemy who couldn't be reached any other way. And they

often flew a replacement infantryman in on missions where they took out a casualty. Over in the CBI, L-5 pilots of the 2nd Air Commando group were often the only link between marauding ground forces and their headquarters. So add cargo, air evacuation, and



troop transport to the L-5's list. Guinea Short Lines pilots flew night interdiction missions (at least on moonlight nights) too, dropping home-made bombs, Molotov cocktails, and even empty beer bottles to harass Japanese troops. Volume 23, Number 1 of the IPMS Quarterly has a very good feature on the L-5, from which I quote: "One Marine General, involved in the New Guinea campaign, had a habit of requesting a local Air Corps unit (My note-- the GSL, most likely) for L-5 transport to reconnoiter a forward area having known Japanese activity. He would take along a satchel of hand grenades, entertaining himself by fragging the hapless enemy troops from the air". So add LB-5 to that list. Then there are the Marines on Iwo Jima who, faced with a shortage of close air support when they needed it, proceeded to somehow attach three bazooka tubes under each wing of their OY-1's and fly ground-attack missions in their pillbox-bustin' LA-5's! And you know that somewhere, someplace L-5's were involved in aerial combat. It was probably one-sided, but then I'd certainly like to have seen an Me-109 or Fw-190 pilot try to hold lead on a forewarned Stinson driver!

There are a couple more things that make this model a "must have" for me. My first airplane ride was a three-day trip in the L-5's even

prettier post-war sibling, a Stinson "Station Wagon". And while I like to think that with a little more training (and a LOT more money) I could fly a warbird like a P-40 or P-51, I know that I could climb into an L-5, crank her up and take her around the patch. Kind of a warm, fuzzy feeling, you know.



So, enough reasons for building this one-- what's it like? There's a really nice painting of an OY-1 banking over a dropped bridge span for box art-- I first thought it was a European setting, but the "OY-1" on the tail was a clue. Sword's boxes are all the same size, so the L-5 kind of rattles around inside, but it's bagged, so that's no problem. This is pretty much a typical "short-run" injection-molded kit with 39 parts in light gray plastic- no resin or photo-etched parts in this one. There's a 6" by 14" instruction sheet with six exploded views on one side (with some painting info) and a three-view of an OY-1 and a 4-view of an L-5, plus some history on the other. Unfortunately, neither set includes a front view. You'll have figured by now that there are

decals for an OY-1 (VMO-4 or 5 at Iwo) and an L-5 of the 153rd Liaison Squadron in Normandy. A closer look shows that there are two complete fuselages and two sets of "greenhouse" moldings -- that folding turtledeck resulted in a slightly different greenhouse at the



rear and Sword opted to give us two complete fuselages in order to do it right. You do have to study both the exploded views and multi-views to decide which parts are for which version, though. There's some really nice detail on the parts-- fabric areas show just a hint of ribs and tubes underneath, while metal panels have very delicate engraved lines and fasteners. All this is so fine, though, that I think it would be lost if you tried to prime the model before painting.

I began the build-up by removing the wings, fuselage, flying surfaces (even the vertical tail is a separate piece) and cockpit floor from the sprue. Although the "feeders" attached to each part are pretty hefty, I had no problems. The only mold lines are around the edges of these parts, and with the soft plastic, removing those and the nubs of the feed tags took only a couple of minutes. The instructions indicate that just about everything in the cockpit should be painted "interior green" but I took exception with that. The first coats of dope on a fabric-covered airplane are heavily pigmented with aluminum powder to keep sunlight from damaging the fabric, and I just couldn't see someone painting the inside of these airplanes after they were covered. Sword, by the way, has engraved the fuselage "tubes" on the inside of the fuselage halves in the cockpit area. There's no way I was going to be able to hand-paint those narrow lines, so I first sprayed the inside of the fuselage halves with Flat Aluminum. I then sprayed Zinc Chromate on some clear decal sheet and cut part of that into thin strips which I applied over the engraved tubes. The cockpit floor and back sides of the seats were painted interior green and after painting the instrument panel semi-gloss black I dry-brushed the raised instruments with silver. Although there are no locating pins, the fuselage halves, floor and seats, and nose bowl all fit and matched up very nicely. The seams were small and were filled with brushed-on primer-- no putty was needed.

While I was in the seam-filling business I added the tail surfaces. Their location is shown by very faint engraved lines, but since I do NOT trust butt joints, I drilled holes through the fuselage so that I could run a piece of brass wire horizontally to make a stub spar. After super-gluing the wire in place I carefully marked its location on the horizontal tails and drilled holes in those. Plastic cement on the root and super-glue on the wire gave me a stronger joint, and also at

least put the tails at the same position. A couple of pieces of wire glued into the vertical stab with matching holes in the fuselage took care of that, too. These are "bolt on surfaces, so there should be evidence of the joint but not a visible gap; again, the fit was good and only some primer was needed.

Things got more challenging after that. Sword has modeled the visible upper fuselage longerons and braces and the vertical "former" behind the pilot's seat with three pieces whose tubes are scale-size; i.e., pretty darn small! There's no flash on these and the mold lines are small, but each is held in the sprue by two or three "feeders" that are about three times the diameter of the tube to which they are attached. I was able to cut one loose and remove the feed tags and mold lines without much damage but the second broke in several places-- remember this is soft plastic. The third and largest piece began to lose sections of tubing before I got it out of the sprue, so I gave up, found some Evergreen rod of the same diameter, and scratch-built that section using the kit piece as a pattern. Actually, I think that you could do that with all three sections in less time than it takes to get the kit parts prepared. After painting these tube sections Zinc Chromate, I started to glue the vertical section behind the pilot's seat-- oops, too wide! I was able to sand the side tubes down enough to get it to fit in place, and then fortunately I got smart and checked the rest. The greenhouse is split longitudinally along the center frame because it's wider at the top than at the bottom-- so the crew could see over the side and down easier. I taped the two halves together and tried to fit it in place-- surprise, it won't go over the "fuselage" structure that way. You've got to glue each side in place separately, just like the instruction drawing shows. The next try showed me that the center tube structure was too tall-- the "glass" wouldn't fit over it and touch the fuselage. Out it came again and the bottom tube was cut off; now the glass would fit. The front and rear sections of tubing were glued to the vertical piece and one side of the greenhouse was tried again. The height was OK but the two sides obviously weren't going to meet in the middle. More sanding, this time on the outer corners of those precariously glued, cantilevered fore and aft sections. Obviously the guy who did the interior for this model and the one who made the relatively thick greenhouse never crossed paths! The good news is that I was able to get the two halves of the greenhouse

to mate up without destroying the interior tube framework. The bad news is that the "glass" was thicker than the fuselage sides and overhung the fuselage noticeably; it also didn't fit all that well around the cowling, either. The only thing I could do at this point was to glue it in place, sand it flush (and fill where necessary) and polish the whole thing out. Hindsight says that the fuselage was probably too narrow (remember the center framework didn't fit?) so if I were going to build another I'd build that vertical tube section out of brass wire and shim the front end at the instrument panel area to make the fuselage wide enough to fit the glass. I added the landing gear struts and my L-5 was ready to paint. Notice that I had not yet added the wings or the wing struts.

The Olive Drab and Neutral Gray color scheme is simple, but instead of trying to mask the "glass" and paint the greenhouse frames I simply masked the whole thing with Parafilm. I then sprayed O.D. over the rest of the Zinc Chromate I'd sprayed on the clear decal film and gave that the same coats of gloss and semi-gloss clear the rest of the model got during the decal process. Before fitting the wings I cut this O. D. "decal" into thin strips and applied it over the very slightly raised greenhouse frames. You see "chromate" from the inside and O.D. from the outside, just as you would on the real bird. The decals are excellent; thin enough to snug down into the fine engraved lines, tough enough to move around, and completely opaque. I chose the 153rd Squadron L-5 and so I had to paint the invasion stripes on before the decals could be applied. No problem on the wings, but more of a challenge on the fuselage. It would have been nice if those were included on the decal sheet.

Final assembly was a bit of a challenge, too-- I drilled out the "dimples" in the top of the greenhouse, but the pins on the wings were way too large and had to be sanded down. Don't forget to paint the wing root chromate before gluing it in place. Earlier I said that there were no front views on the instruction drawings, and there are no locators for the struts on the lower wing surfaces either. You have to glue one wing in place, set the dihedral by the old "TLAR" method (That Looks About Right) and then match the other wing to that. Since you're gluing the wing onto a clear piece (that carefully polished greenhouse) that's easier said than done. Once you do accomplish this, dropping the struts in place is easy. I didn't even

attempt to use the tiny short vertical braces included in the kit-- just cut more of that Evergreen rod to matching lengths.

Summary

I spent about 16 hours building my L-5, a few more than it usually takes for an "out of the box" single engine aircraft, but at least three hours were spent on the interior framework and greenhouse. Although I did encounter some problems there, they weren't that difficult to fix and the Sword L-5 is a whole heck of a lot easier to build than the old Rareplanes vacuform-- trust me on that one!! It's also a much better-looking model with enough surface and interior detail to really "look right". Finally, the dimensions are virtually perfect as well-- both span and length check out to within 1 scale inch of perfect 1/72 scale. Probably the biggest disappointment was the choice of decals-- in spite of the fact that there are no less than 11 profiles of "Guinea Short Lines" aircraft in the Quarterly article referenced above, none were included in the kit and given the short-run nature of these models, aftermarket decals seem unlikely. All in all, this is a very well designed and molded kit that builds up into an accurate, attractive, and very unusual model.