

Kit Review

Minicraft, Boeing C-97%20Review_files, Stratocruiser/C-97/KC-97

By Ed Cope



This review covers the recently issued Minicraft Boeing C-97%20Review_files Stratocruiser and the USAF variants, C/KC-97. The kit fits together fairly tightly with some cleanup required. There are some exceptions but most of these can be cleaned up with a little knife and file work. If you are looking to make an IPMS National Contest winner, you are in for a lot of work, but if you just want a nice looking representation of the "Queen of the Skies" that will go together fairly rapidly and look like the prototype, this kit will do nicely.

Construction

Fuselage: The fuselage consists of four pieces. Right and left sides, clear cockpit nose section and the nose radome. (Clear boom operators station, flying boom, boom rest and Air Refueling Director Light housing, on the KC-97 version.) There are flashed over holes in the bottom to be opened to add the boom operators station and the refueling boom rest for the KC-97 version. There are also open holes on the bottom middle section for the addition of the air refueling signal lights on the KC-97 version (these need to be filled on the other versions). Holes for the nose radome are included in the fuselage pieces. This radome was utilized on nearly all of the military versions of the C/KC-97, but not all of the Stratocruiser models. It was added late in life to Northwest and Pan American aircraft. I don't know about the United, American Overseas, or BOAC. It can be deleted on the aircraft using the Pan Am kit decals and still be correct. (It does fit nicely) The clear nose section needs a bit of care when fitting. There seems to be some flash that needs trimming to avoid a noticeable step. Lots of dry fitting and trimming will insure a perfect fit on both sides. Don't forget to add nose weights. (Use more than indicated. I used the suggested amount on the C-97 and ended up with a tail sitter.) I use lead fishing sinkers flattened in a vise then superglued in. The instructions indicate that the fuselage sides should be glued

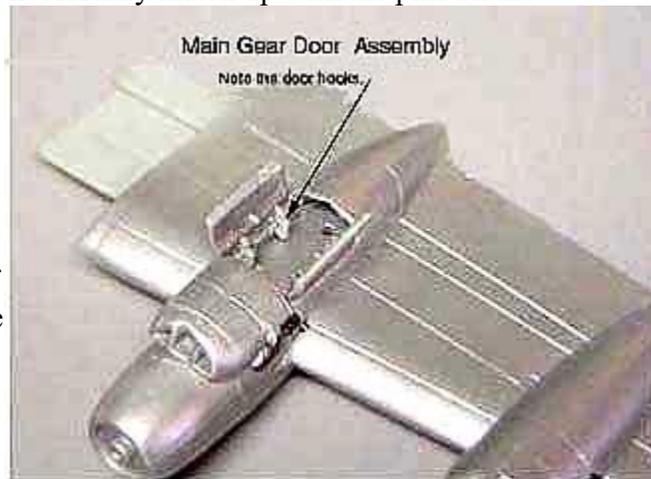
together then the clear nosepiece glued in. I fastened the nosepiece to the left side then glued the right side to the assembly. The aft locating pin on the rudder is too long and should be shortened, otherwise it will protrude through the mating surface on the rudder.

Doors and Hatches: The Matchbox "Trenchdigger" seems to be alive and well and working for Minicraft in China., as far as the panelines and doors and hatches are concerned in this kit. There is no right side door and hatch on the C/KC-97s, however the civil Stratocruisers had hatches and doors on the right side and none on the left side. I recommend that you fill the unneeded scribed hatches with Mr. Surfacer. This also includes the antennae on the vertical tail surface.

Wings: The wing assembly requires some cleanup, as the upper and lower surfaces don't seem to meet properly. It's nothing that a few good swipes with a file and sandpaper won't clean up. The fit of the wings into the fuselage cutouts is a problem, particularly on the right wing, however both wings have the problem. This problem manifests itself as the wing trailing edge at the root being too thick to fit into the cutouts on the fuselage. This can be corrected by filing the root trailing edges down to fit. After the trailing edge wing root problem is solved, you will find that the wings and fuselage fit together nicely, and stay together without glue. This will come in handy when you get to final assembly.

Engine Nacelles: This assembly is the most screwed up part of the whole kit. The holes in the wings meant for the nacelle assemblies do not necessarily match up with the pins on the

assemblies. This can be corrected by laying each nacelle piece on the appropriate part of the wing and marking the proper spot. The proper spots are close enough that you can elongate the kit holes with a knife to accommodate the assemblies. It is also necessary to recontour the edges of the nacelles to achieve a good fit to the bottom of the wing. The fit of the engine cowlings to the wing also needs work. The kit instructions indicate fitting the propellers into the retainers before fitting the cowlings to the wing assemblies. I don't agree. The fit of the propeller shafts is tight enough to hold the propellers into the cowlings/engine assembly so the retainer is not necessary. Secondly you are going to have to do enough fitting, filling, and sanding around the air intake joint that you are surely going to break some blades off before you're done. The fit of the cowling/air intake is very poor, and considerable dry fitting, reshaping and filling is required.



Propellers: The propellers are enough to make a grown man cry! The blades are very thick and appear to be bent back. The shape is very basic. The pointed spinners for the Stratocruiser version fit over the basic propeller hub leaving a slight gap, however there is no indication of the propeller cuff. There is no requirement for the spinners on the C/KC-97 versions, however the basic hub representation is not very good either.

Landing Gear: As gross as the propeller molding was the landing gear is very fine. Unfortunately the gear doors were designed by the propeller team. Mounting the gear doors requires some forethought and planning. The main gear doors have hooks that fasten around ridges molded in the nacelles. Attach the doors before inserting the landing gear into the wing. Otherwise you are going to have a lot of fun trying to get the doors attached. It can be done but it is very frustrating. Be sure to attach the wheels to the gear before inserting the gear since the doors cover part of the wheels. The nose gear is very delicate and the method of attaching it is confusing. The kit instructions indicate that the assembly is to be added after the fuselage is complete. However examination of the nosegear and fuselage show that there is a hole in the wheelwell roof for the part and there is also a set of receptacles for the pins on the side of the gear assembly. This means that the nosegear assembly would have to be installed at the same time the fuselage halves were joined. I don't think the delicate nose gear would ever survive the rest of the construction, so I recommend cutting off the side pins and only using the roof cutout for attaching. The nose gear door is much too thick and a notch must be cut in the forward wheel opening in the fuselage for the attachment. All in all there is a bit of extra work and potential frustration in making an "on the ramp" model of this kit! **It looks pretty good with the gear up, mounted on a pylon!!**

Horizontal Stabilizer: This is the poorest and most irritating fit on the whole model. The surfaces are designed with negative chamber (airfoil is upside down) with recessed cutouts on the fuselage to accommodate the stabs. However when the tabs are inserted into the fuselage slots there is a small but noticeable gap. I have carved on the cutout, filed down the root end of the stabs, and the gap remains! The only solution I have found is to fill the gap with a filler. This is particularly irritating when the stab is NMF and the fuselage is white, per the Stratocruiser kit scheme.

Painting and Final Assembly

The major subassemblies, Fuselage, Wing Assemblies, and Horizontal Stabilizer may be assembled and held together without using any glue, so each subassembly can be painted by itself. I prefer to mask off the cockpit windows and it really isn't very difficult. The window outlines are deep enough allow you to see the cuts if you use a thin masking tape. (Thank you trenchdigger!) If you do this it is a good idea to paint the inside of the transparent nose black, except in the window area. Others may prefer to paint the cockpit windows black to match the decal windows. I have used Mr. Surfacer 500 to fill the seams in the assemblies and it seems to do a good job. The only colors you will need for the model using kit decals are White, Aluminum, and Black. If you want to jazz it up a little you could use Steel for the propellers and landing gear; and a mixture of aluminum and gray for the fabric covered control surfaces. There is a small gap where the wings plug into the fuselage. This can be filled with white glue and touched up with aluminum paint, if you want to go to the trouble. If the overstated panel lines on the model are not to your liking you can fill them with a filler like Mr. Surfacer and they will still show up but will be very faint.

Decals and Aftermarket Stuff

The Kit decals are very good. As mentioned earlier the Pan American scheme can be used with or without the nose radome. The KC-97 painting guide does not show any red color on the wings

from the inboard edge of the ailerons outboard. SAC KC-97s had red wings if they carried the "Arctic Markings." To correct this problem is not easy since the

USAF and the Insignia had a two inch natural metal outline. The simplest method of handling this problem is to completely omit the red markings, since many KC- 97s did not carry Arctic Markings, and some that did, had them removed in the summer time. If you really want to get colorful, you could add the fluorescent orange nose, wingtips, and aft fuselage band, used during the late 50's and very early 60's, on KC-97s. These were even used in conjunction with Arctic Markings. Several aftermarket decals are being issued for the Stratocruiser. I had some old early Pan American and Northwest decals issued for a 1/144th Griffin Vacuform kit. There are United decals from ATP; BOAC from Flying Colors; and TAL decals from Airway Graphics. Later Pan Am markings are on the way, and Northwest and American Overseas Airline are also rumored to be coming out. There are no aftermarket accessories on the market yet, but a kit of proper propellers, landing gear, wheels, and engine cowlings is reported on the way.



Overall Assessment: Even with all my criticisms the kit builds up to be a nice reproduction of the prototype right out of the box with a little care and cleanup. It looks like a Stratocruiser/C-97 and if you construct it "gear up" many of the problems go away. I think you will enjoy the simplicity, after doing a Tamiya/Hasagawa/Accurate Miniatures masterpiece.

Attached to this review are several detail pictures of the KC-97 at the AFM. Of particular interest may be the pictures of the Nacelles, Landing Gear, Propellers, and Hatches. These may be used to improve some of the weak portions of the kit. You will also note that there are some black walkway lines on the top of the wing on the KC-97. I don't remember them on SAC operational aircraft, so don't feel bad if you want to leave them off.

Some Reference Photos.

