

IPMS DAYTON MODEL REVIEW

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Subject: Grumman F8F-1 and F8F-2
Bearcat

Manufacturer: Sword Models kit SW-006

Scale: 1/72

Material(s): Injection-molded plastic and resin

Source: Squadron Shop

Analysis: A short-run injection molded plastic kit with two complete fuselages and alternative parts to build either the F8F-1 or F8F-2 version. The resin wheel wells, cockpit interior, engine, and rockets are beautifully cast and highly detailed. Decals are given for a -1 of VF-1, a -2 from VF-151, and an Armee de l'air F8F-2 of GC1/22 during the French Indochina War. This one takes some time to build but it produces very accurate and nicely detailed models of either version

Construction review:

According to the pilots who were lucky enough to fly one, the Grumman F8F Bearcat was a fighter pilot's dream. It was designed to get from a carrier deck to the altitude of an incoming threat in the least possible time and then outfly anything it

encountered. With a rate of climb of 6300 feet per minute and outstanding maneuverability, the Bearcat was much more than a match for anything the Japanese would have had during

WWII and its four 50-caliber machine guns were more than sufficient. It was the first Navy fighter to have a bubble canopy and its long, double-hinged landing



gear provided clearance for the big four-bladed prop, a wide stance for good ground handling and, typical for Grumman, was sturdy enough for carrier operations. The 1944 Joint Fighter Conference pitted the F8F against the P-47D and M, the P-51D, and F4U-4; it was selected as the best all-around fighter for operations under 25,000 feet. VF-19 was equipped with F8F-1s and halfway across the Pacific in USS Langley (CVL-27) when the war ended. Bearcats equipped 24 squadrons at their peak, but by the time the Korean War began jets were needed for air-to-air combat and the Corsair's greater payload capacity made it the choice for air-ground operations. The Bearcat never fired a shot in anger in American colors.



Its lack of a combat record is probably responsible for a relative lack of 1/72 scale models of the Bearcat. I'm aware of only two, Frog's F8F-1B and Monogram's F8F-2. Both were nice kits in the '70's, but neither is easy to find today and both lack much in the way of wheel well or cockpit detail. Sword Models' latest kit takes care of that nicely.

The kit consists of 35 rather soft gray injection molded parts with very fine engraved panel lines and surface detail, 9 beautifully cast resin pieces, and a two-piece injection-molded clear canopy. The plastic parts are pretty standard for short-run kits, with some large feed tags, a little flash, and no locating pins for anything. The resin parts have no bubble holes, pin-holes, or other blemishes, but they do have big feed reservoirs that must be cut away with a razor saw in most cases. The wing interior castings have all the wheel well structure, the big air ducts, wiring, and other very crisp details. As indicated above, decals are provided for three aircraft; these markings are taken directly from the Squadron/Signal "F8F Bearcat In Action" and are complete and accurate. Instructions provide a short history, seven "exploded-view" assembly steps, decal placement drawings, and some painting information. The squadrons associated with the decals are not identified on the instruction sheet, though.

The large feed tags mean that virtually all the plastic parts need some cleanup, but the soft plastic makes that job easy. Don't try to cut the resin parts off their feed reservoirs with a knife-- it's easy to break the resin. Rather than provide separate forward fuselage (there are several differences in the exhaust panels) and tail sections, Sword has provided two sets of fuselage halves. Dry-fitting

showed that these matched up well, but the complete vertical tail is molded with the left fuselage half and you wind up with a substantial gap at the bottom of the fin on the right side. I painted all the resin parts, picking out the seat belts, instrument faces, engine details, and wheel well fittings and wiring, along with the interior of the wing and fuselage, before beginning assembly. The interior casting fit well, but I had to sand down the engine cylinders a bit to get the forward fuselage halves to fit. There's no indication of where the engine should fit-- you have to "eyeball" the fit to provide proper clearance for the prop. The wing interior took some "fit, sand, and try" to get it located snugly in the bottom wing molding and the upper corners had to be sanded a bit to allow the upper wing halves to mate up to the lower wing.

This is not a "shake the box" kit; the fuselage seam had to be filled with thick primer and the gap below the vertical tail on the right side needed some putty. The horizontal tail halves are intended to be a butt joint, but I drilled through the fuselage and super-glued a piece of brass rod with about 1/8 inch sticking out of each root. Corresponding holes were drilled in the tails and they were attached with super-glue, giving me a much stronger joint.

The wings simply did not fit onto the fuselage; I sanded both the inner edge of the upper wing half and the root section molded with the fuselage until the wing assembly would snap into place with the appropriate dihedral. Needless to say, this left another seam to fill and sand. By the time I'd gotten all the seams to look decent, I'd also eliminated a fair portion of the very fine engraved panel detail, which then had to be re-scribed. Oh, yes-- I almost forgot; the -2's cannon bulges are molded onto the wing upper surfaces, so if you're building a -1 they must be sanded off. That, of course, means still more panel lines to re-scribe.

At least the color scheme is simple; overall dark Glossy Sea Blue. Well, perhaps! There's a lot of controversy over the color of the wheel wells, gear legs, etc. There's no doubt that at the time Bearcats were built, the specs called for the cockpit to be painted Interior Green, other interior surfaces were to be painted

Zinc Chromate, and the inside of "movable surfaces" (dive brakes, speed brakes and ???) were Insignia Red.

There's also no doubt that many overall Sea Blue aircraft had gear legs, wheel well doors, etc. painted blue. None of my reference material helped very much-- a properly exposed photo of a dark blue aircraft shot on a



bright sunny day doesn't show much detail under the wings! I finally decided that Grumman would have built them with paint according to specs, but that the first time they were repainted in the field, very little got masked. So my -1 has Chromate Green on the inside of the gear doors, with aluminum and steel gear legs while everything is blue on the -2. Who knows for sure? I used the kit decals for the F8F-2, but having met Cecil Harris once, I decided to model his -1 as it's shown on the cover of the Squadron/Signal Bearcat book. The kit's national insignia were used with yellow letters and numbers from my decal box. The kit decals are very thin as a wetting agent like Micro-Set is definitely required if they are to be moved at all. The decals from one kit worked fine, but those from the second were a little brittle. They do snug down just fine.

About the only thing left is the canopies. Mine were a bit cloudy and the canopy frames aren't especially pronounced. I sprayed Glossy Sea Blue on some clear decal film, cut that into strips, and used it to make the canopy frames. When that was dry the canopies were dipped in Future, which did help to clear them up as well as seal my thin decal strips to the clear plastic. The sliding section fit very well, but there was a bit of a gap dead center on the fixed glass. Kristal Klear and a dab of paint took care of that. At first glance, the landing gear legs look like they should fit at the ends of the gear wells. Actually, they will fit there, but shouldn't! They actually mount about 1/3 of the way inboard. Super-glue them to the outboard edge of the chordwise structural member and they'll be surprisingly sturdy when the retracting arm is added.

I'm very pleased with my finished models-- Sword has gotten the shape right and all the details that make the two versions different are modeled accurately. All

dimensions are within two scale inches (0.03 actual inches) of perfect, which is closer than I can see without help. Overall, my Sword models compare quite nicely to the older Monogram kit; outlines and surface details are on a par and the Sword models have MUCH better interior and wheel well detail-- not to mention that you can make an accurate -1 from this kit! I spent 20-25 hours on these models, though-- quite a bit of time for out-of-the-box models but much of it was in parts preparation, seam filling, and re-scribing panel lines. Was it worth it? Absolutely-- I've always wanted to add a WWII Bearcat to my collection but was too lazy to do the conversion work. Now it's not necessary.