



RESOURCES FOR MODELERS

MODEL REVIEW

Encore Models Polikarpov I-15 bis, 1:72 scale

By Mark Deliduka

The Polikarpov I-15 biplane was first produced in 1938 by the Polikarpov Design Bureau. This was one of the last biplanes produced in World War II by any country. It first saw combat in the crucible of the Spanish Civil War where it proved itself against more 'modern' fighters that Germany sent over. The small size, low speed, and excellent maneuverability of this plane enabled it to hold its own against those more well-known aircraft flown by Germany and later, Japan. L. Shestakov himself claimed 39 confirmed victories during the conflict in Spain. Because of this, Chiang Kai-Shek hurried to fill out his Air Force in an effort to challenge the Japanese for control of his skies. The Russians used the Polikarpov during the Russo-Finnish conflict, mostly as a fighter-bomber, and continued to use it throughout the War, particularly during the opening days of the Russo-German War. The I-15 survived the early days mostly because at the time, it was the most advanced fighter in the Russian Air Force. Many of the Soviet Union's Aces started out in this plane, some claiming as many as 46 victories. Among these distinguished pilots are V. Lavrinenkov and V. Kubarev. This plane was so successful against those flown by Germany, that captured examples were used by the Luftwaffe whenever they acquired them.

The Model Kit

This is a 1/72 Scale Model of the Polikarpov I-15 bis that I won in the June raffle. It is put out by Encore Models, located in Carrollton, Texas. When I got home, I took a look at the instruction sheet to see how this model would go together. It looked fairly simple, as expected considering the size of the aircraft. The instruction sheet had only drawings for the assembly steps, showing how the different parts were supposed to go together. Read these carefully, since the placement of some parts is not too clear, and sometimes parts are not labeled. For instance, in Step 2, the Engine and Cowl Assembly, the part B-2 looks to be a solid round bulkhead with a hole in the middle. In actuality, the part B-2 is the plug that goes on the end of the propeller to make it spin. The round part indicated by the letter N is part B-23, the Exhaust Collector. Part B-27 in the last step goes on the end of the tail skid. This is not indicated in the drawing.

The parts themselves seemed to have pretty good detail that was not exaggerated, yet was crisp enough to see. They did seem to have a considerable amount of flash, but not too excessive. There was quite a bit of mold release agent on the parts, so I scrubbed the sprues in Dawn dishwashing detergent with a toothbrush to remove it.

Assembly

In Step 1, the Cockpit went together very well, but I noticed that the seat needed to be sanded slightly on the right side so that the seat would sit properly and not be pushed out of sync by the side stick next to the seat. Painting the cockpit was fairly easy. I didn't do too much detail as there was very limited visibility of the cockpit once it was mounted.

In Step 2, the Engine and Cowl are pretty straightforward. Again, note that Part B-23 is not labeled, nor is there an indication of where it goes. It actually goes against the Engine inside the cowl, once it is assembled. Before doing this, sand the bend on the inside so that it is more flush with the inside curve of the part. Otherwise, when you try to mount the cowl on the fuselage, it pushes the nose cowl out of kilter with the fuselage. The propeller plug needs to be opened out; due to flash that almost closes it. I also sanded a slight taper on the end of the propeller shaft to reduce the risk of breaking the plug by opening it too much. The four cowl pieces are pretty well molded to the right curvature, but are slightly off which results in a few gaps when you try to line them flush with each other. This is easily fixed with a bit of gap filling CA glue, and sanding. You want to put the top cowl piece on first, as it matches up to the air scoop on the front engine cover, and then mount the rest.

In Steps 3 and 4, the fuselage assembly was easy, although there was some difficulty getting the tail to close up enough. It needed a bit more shaving and sanding. I held it together with clips to keep it together. I still needed a bit of Gap filler underneath the fuselage by the tail, but everything else fit well. When mounting the cowl, again, make sure you've sanded the Exhaust Collector (B-23) smooth to keep it from pushing the cowl out of true. As it is, the cowl wants to push upwards, so watch for this when you mount it. There are no notches for the tail planes, so be careful to line them up right when you put them on. There are notches in the fuselage for the tail plane struts, (Notches! We don't need no stinking notches!) so this makes it easy to place them and keep the tail planes level. The Gun sight is labeled A-13, but is actually part number A-9. The canopy, or more rather, windscreen, is kept in a small manila envelope. It should be drilled out, so the Gunsight goes through it.

In Step 5, you have the option of making the wheels with or without the wheel covers. I made mine without, since the version I decided upon doesn't have them. For this step, you need to use a #68 drill bit on your pin vise to drill out the holes, so you can glue them on the struts. For those more adventurous, the struts are long enough so you can flare the ends so the wheels turn if you wish.

In Step 6, watch the fit of the lower wing. It actually slides into the notch in the fuselage, and then fits snug, although you'll need a clip to hold it into place until the glue dries since the wing likes to pull out. A small amount of gap filler can be placed inside the lines between the fuselage and the wing on top and sanded carefully. This is another thing I didn't do.

In Step 7, I was pulling out whatever was left of my hair because the top wing and support struts just did not seem to want to cooperate! The support struts, parts 30 and 31 should be trimmed off the sprues very carefully, so one is not shorter than the other. Also, in order for the main struts to fit into place, I had to bend the lower wings upward so that the struts would reach and glue where they were supposed to. I don't know if this anhedral is accurate, but it allows the main struts to be mounted. Also, when gluing the wheel struts into place, watch the spread of the struts. They should angle outwards about 2 to 3 degrees from vertical. And finally, it is not indicated, but part B-27 goes on the end of the tail skid.

Finishing

I decided to model my little Polikarpov after that one flown by the Baltic Sea Fleet. Painting it was simple, and was done by hand. At least two coats of base paint are needed, if not more, since the model is molded in an off-white color. I then coated it with a couple of coats of Future

floor polish before applying the decals. The decals went on smooth, and I left them overnight to dry. I then coated my plane with a flat finish, made up of roughly 60% Future, and 40% Tamiya Flat Base. Afterwards, I tried a little weathering around the cockpit opening, and applying exhaust burns.

This kit built up well. I don't know how accurate it is spec-wise, since I'm terrible at Math, and frankly, I don't know how to figure it out. The decals appeared to be accurate markings, according to a Russian website that depicted one.