

model airplanes



DAN BEEBY

If the pamphlet says, “Read and thoroughly follow the directions,” you should — especially if the instructions are telling you how to build a model airplane.

Flush with confidence and a child-like glee to start piecing together a model RAF Mustang III, I failed to follow said dictum. My wounded plane now dangles above my son’s crib. Should you choose to try this at home, know that the going is rough. But you can learn from my mistakes, which are chronicled below.

It’s been more than two decades since I’ve heard the names Snap-Tite, Revell and Tamiya, or put one of their products together. The hobby and specialty shops where the best models are sold still ooze generalized weirdness. Unlike chain stores, however, the workers at these stores will actually help you.

The mildly odd guy at my local hobby store gave me ample admonition: “I like to do all the painting before I start assembling. Otherwise, you can get yourself in a mess of trouble.”

Did I listen? Of course not. Instead, I nodded distractedly as I laid down my money and paid for the Mustang, acrylic paints and model cement. I went home, and didn’t

READ THE DIRECTIONS BEFORE YOU START THIS FUN, SOCIALLY HARMLESS PASTIME

BY MARK LUCE

read or follow the instructions closely.

That’s why my Mustang’s camouflage paint job has fingerprint smudges, the doors for the landing gear aren’t the right color, the landing gear isn’t sturdy and the left wing doesn’t stick together. I had to edit the version of what I screwed up because an unabridged list would require a miniseries.

A good model, such as Tamiya, will cost around \$20. You’ll need paints, too. Acrylics, while wet, will wash off with water if you make a mistake. Enamels won’t.

Nontoxic model cement doesn’t work nearly as well the toxic type. But the toxic cement is only harmful if you want to see how it tastes and/or pour it in your eyes.

You will also need some tweezers, a hole puncher, an Exacto knife, tooth-

picks and needle-nose pliers. Patience helps, as do small hands.

Now, *read* the directions. Read them again. Maybe read them one more time for good measure. Then begin, but use caution so you don’t do some of the things I did. Here are some of the bigger lessons I learned from my debacle:

- Don’t snap off the pieces from the hard plastic. Use the knife to cut them off cleanly. Failure to do so will yield improperly sized pieces, which will haunt you later and lead to cracking and breaking.
- Think about the paint scheme before dipping the brush. Inventory what you want to do, then execute your plan one step at a time.
- Dousing the pieces in cement before assembly does not mean the pieces will stick together better. Precision remains paramount.
- Guard the decals against wetness until ready to put them on your craft because spoiled decals leave inauthentic markings.
- Relax. Despite the obsession to detail that model making requires, it’s a socially harmless pastime.

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