



Tamiya's Panzer III Ausf L kit benefits from a few easy-to-install aftermarket parts. Jim Forbes photo.

Easy armor detailing

Aftermarket parts make a great Panzer III kit even better

By Matthew Usher

Times are changing for armor modelers. The latest kits are fantastically detailed and include everything you might need right in the box. It's not uncommon for us to open up a new kit release here at FSM and find big frets of photoetched parts and turned-metal gun barrels in the box along with piles and piles of parts trees.

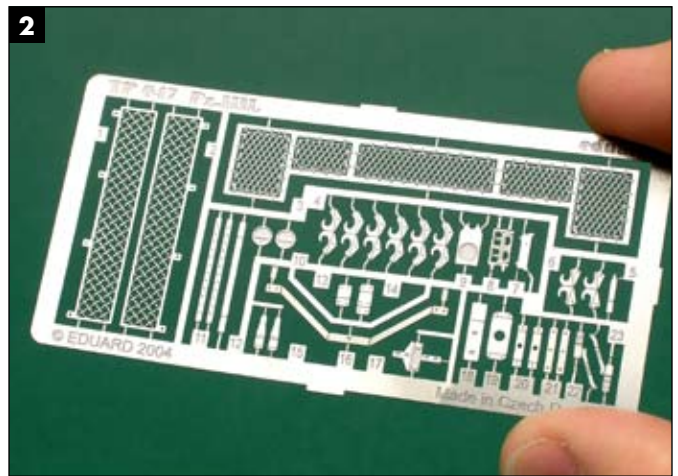
I'm a slow builder, which means it takes me forever to finish a kit with hundreds and hundreds of parts. It also means I have a lot of older kits in my unbuilt collection, like Tamiya's Panzerkampfwagen III Ausf L (kit No. 35215). OK, the Panzer is only ten years old, so it's not exactly in Kit Classics territory along with Aurora and Strombecker kits. It does mean, though, that it's a nicely molded plastic kit, but one without all the extra

bells and whistles. But with a little extra work at the workbench and a small investment in aftermarket parts, Tamiya's Panzer III can easily do battle with brand-new high-tech kits.

To add a little detail, I picked up Eduard's turned-aluminum gun barrel (No. 34024) and its Zoom photoetched set (No. TP047), **1**. I love adding detail, but I don't always add every little piece that's included in bigger photoetched sets. Eduard's Zoom sets are smaller and less expensive, but still include a good variety of parts. The Panzer set includes intake grilles, lift hooks, latches, and a few smaller pieces, **2**. The turned-aluminum barrel doesn't add a lot of detail over the kit parts, but it does save you from assembling the two-piece plastic gun that comes with the kit, **3**.



1 Eduard makes a turned-aluminum gun barrel and a small photoetched-metal detail set for Tamiya's Panzer III.



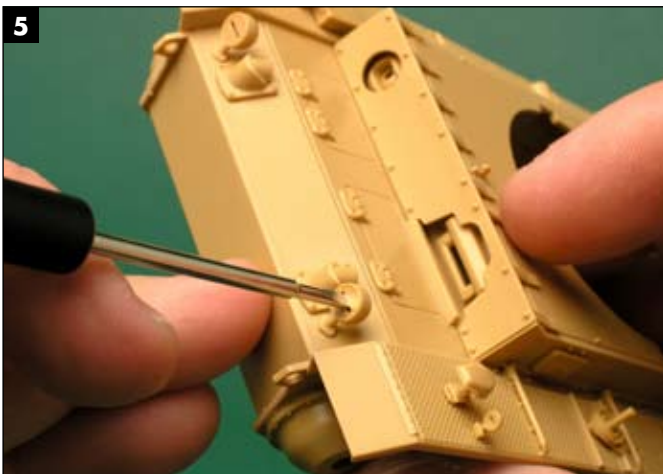
2 The smaller Eduard photoetched set has basic details: engine grille, lift rings, and brackets.



3 I can never get two-piece gun barrels to go together without some warp or a noticeable seam. The turned-aluminum replacement saves a lot of building time.



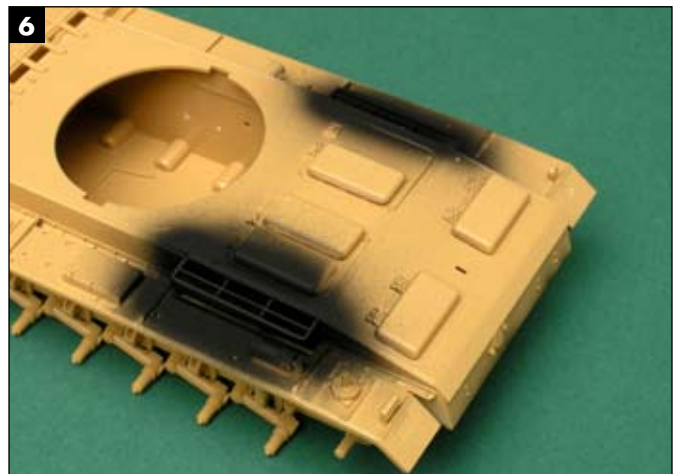
4 Be prepared to spend some time installing the kit's individual suspension arms and assembling its running gear. The parts fit perfectly, but there are a lot of them!



5 Inserted into the slotted opening, a jeweler's screwdriver makes the headlight lens easy to install and adjust before the glue dries.

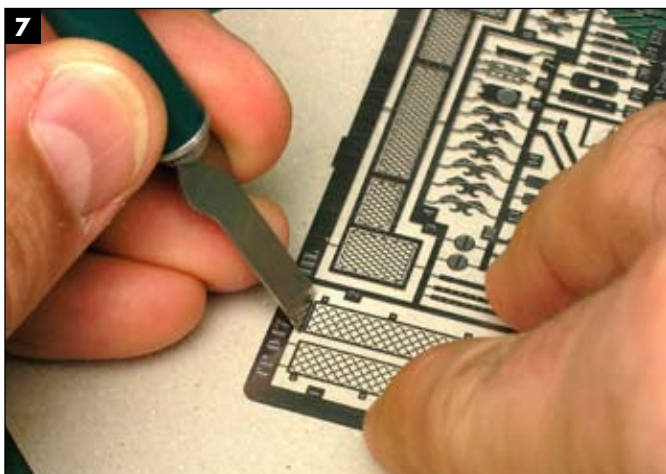
Road wheels and hull

I started work on the model's hull. Each of the Panzer's suspension arms is a separate piece, and they're not all the same, so take your time and check the part numbers as you add them to the

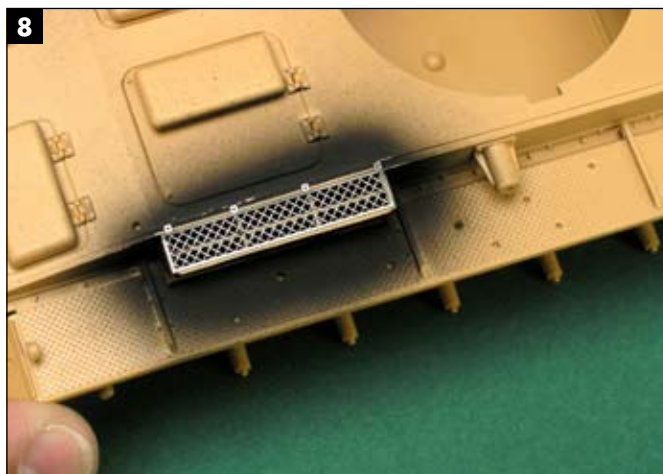


6 A quick pass with some flat-black paint adds depth to the engine intake ducts before the grilles are installed.

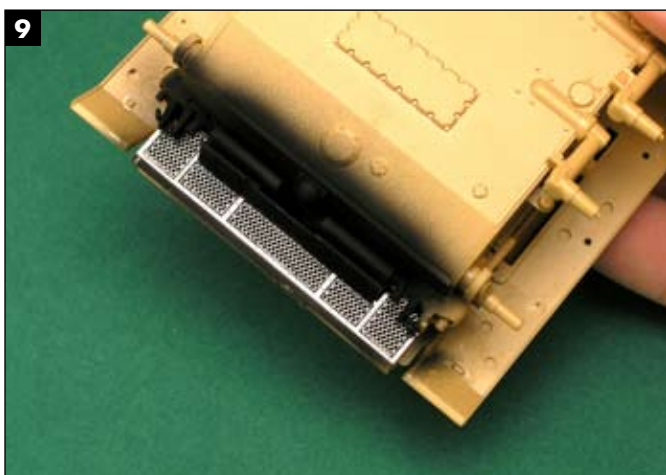
hull. I used slow-setting super glue to attach them so I could make sure they were level, **4**. Next, I moved on to one of my least-favorite parts of armor modeling, assembling all the road wheels. Counting the hull-mounted spares, the Panzer has 14



7 A chisel-type hobby-knife blade makes it easy to remove the delicate photoetched parts cleanly.



8 After sanding the flat-black paint away from the duct's edge, Matthew glued the grilles in place using super glue. Regular model cements won't work with metal parts, but super glue and epoxy do.



9 The biggest grille in Eduard's set tucks under the rear end, just above the exhausts.



10 The turned-aluminum barrel plugs into the kit breech after the original plastic barrel is removed. Matthew used a jeweler's saw to cut the plastic parts.

road wheels, six return rollers, plus the usual drive sprockets and idlers. That's 24 wheels, with two parts each.

While the road-wheel glue was drying, I added the upper hull plate. Tamiya provides a lot of parts for the outer hull, including the spaced armor for the front of the superstructure. I added the headlight housings (A40) to the hull and when the glue was dry I installed the blackout lenses (A39). I slide the lenses over a jeweler's screwdriver, and use it to place them on the housings. The screwdriver makes it easy to adjust the headlight slits parallel to the ground before the glue cures, **5**.

With most of the hull completed, I decided to install the photoetched intake grilles. The intakes the grilles fit over are deep, so I airbrushed the openings flat black, **6**, and made sure the paint made it all the way to the bottom. It's better to err on the side of black than end up with a spot of bare plastic under the photoetched grille.

The attachment points on the photoetched fret are thin and easy to cut through. I placed the parts over a thin sheet of cardboard and chopped them off the fret with a chisel-tip hobby-knife blade, **7**. A medium-grit sanding stick cleaned up any excess.

While I had the sanding stick out, I sanded the black paint from the face of the grille opening on the hull to provide a clean spot for the glue. I installed the parts with gap-filling super glue,

8, applied with a toothpick. The largest grille probably won't get noticed unless I drop the model on its roof; it's tucked under the rear deck, just above the exhausts, **9**.

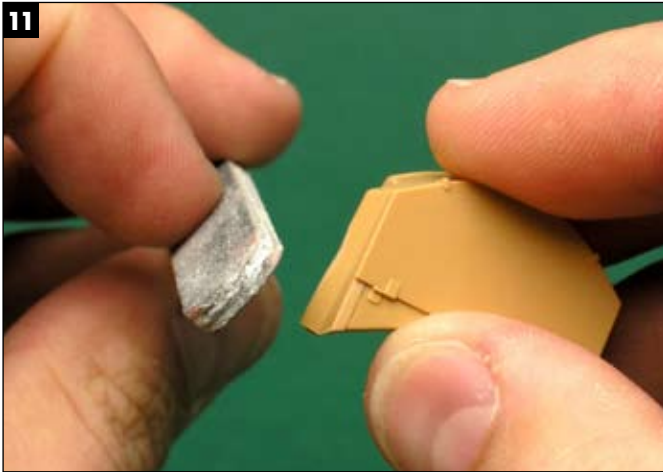
Turret

Adding the turned-aluminum gun barrel meant a little surgery was in order. Using a razor saw, I cut the barrel halves away from the kit breech. The turned barrel is neatly designed, and fits perfectly into the face of the kit breech, **10**. Gap-filling super glue attached it securely.

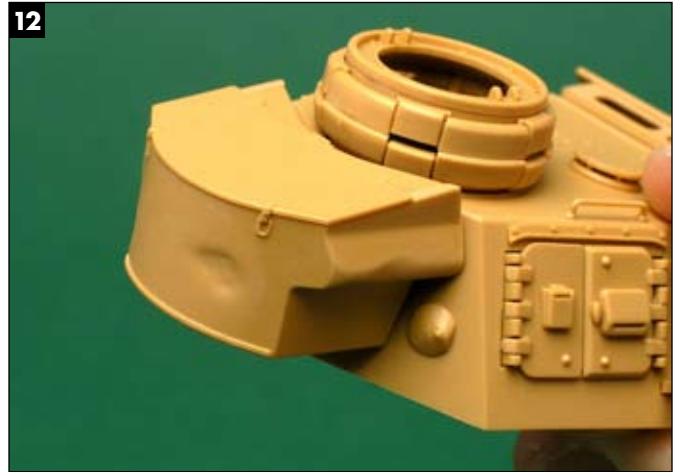
The Ausf L has the easy-to-spot "Rommel-kiste" stowage bin on the rear of its turret. Using a sanding stick and my motor tool, **11**, I added a few dents and dings to the kit bin. It only took a few minutes to round off the corners and add some scrapes and ripples, **12**.

As the turret turned, the metal bin could touch the tank's fender-mounted antenna and short out the radio. The solution was simple – crews installed thin strips of wood to the edges of the bin to insulate the antenna. Using reference photos as a guide, I added insulating strips made from .015" x .040" styrene strip, **13**. Where the strips crossed a dent, I used the tip of my hobby knife blade to chip away the strip and create the appearance of split-and-splintered wood.

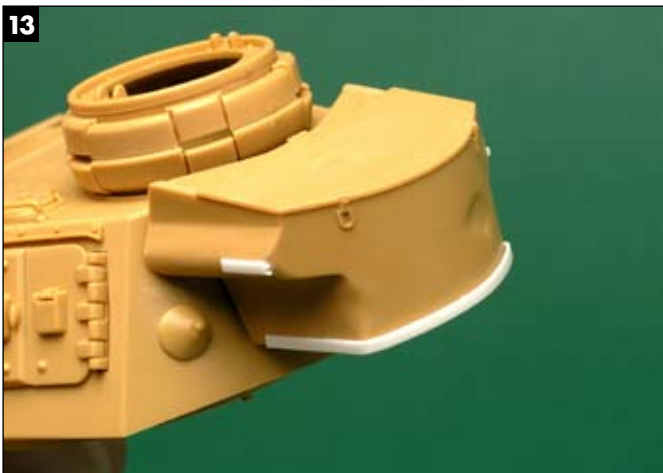
Finally I added the extra armor to the gun mantlet, and the



11 A medium-grit sanding stick helped dent the turret storage bin.



12 Matthew used a grinding bit chucked in a motor tool to add the bigger dents.



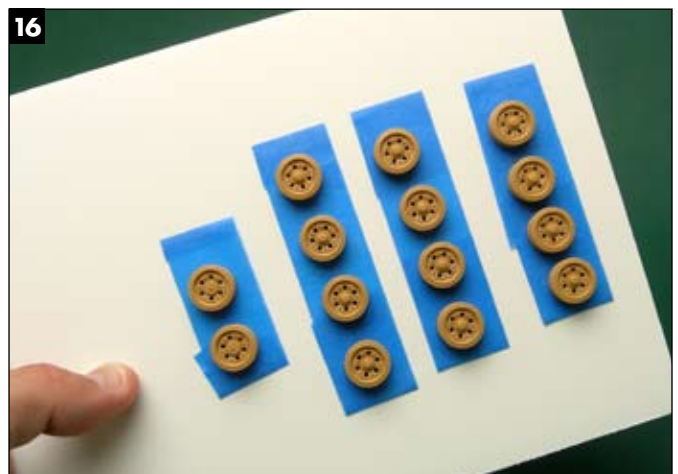
13 Sheet-styrene strips simulate the wooden strips added to insulate the radio antenna from the metal storage bin.



14 The finished turret, ready for paint.



15 Matthew applied an overall coat of dark yellow paint to the hull and turret using an airbrush. The airbrush made it easier to reach tight places, like inside the space armor and around the suspension parts.



16 Matthew painted the road wheels off the model, after attaching them to a piece of scrap foam-core board with masking tape.

finished turret was ready for paint, **14**.

Paint shop

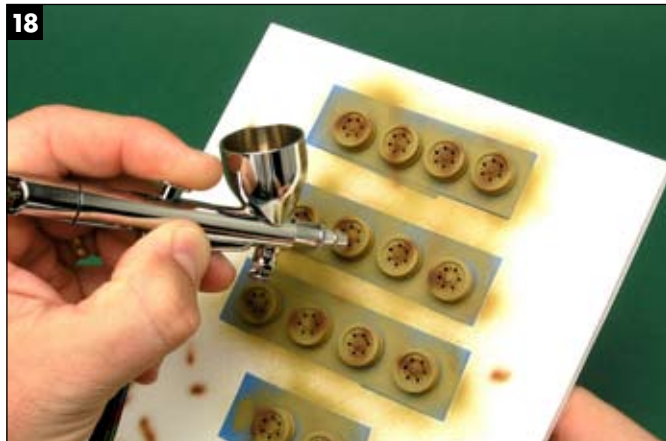
Panzers of this period left the factory in either dark gray or dark

yellow paint. I decided to add a little color to my collection and model a dark yellow Panzer with dark red field-applied camouflage, like a vehicle fighting in Russia in 1943.

Step one is easy, just do what the factory did. I thinned some



17 Tamiya's red brown paint and a smaller airbrush pattern added the field-applied camouflage pattern.



18 The taped-down road wheels were much easier to airbrush.



19 Matthew painted the roadwheel rims flat black before installing them on the model.



20 It's done, but it looks like its commander just had it washed and detailed. It needs a little grime!



21 A soft brush helps apply the artist's-oil wash to the finished hull.



22 The wash deepens the upper hull's molded-in details...

Tamiya dark yellow (XF-60) and sprayed the hull and turret, **15**. To paint the road wheels, I attached them to scrap piece of foam-core board with strips of sticky-side-out tape, **16**.

After the yellow paint dried for a couple of days, it was time to add the red brown camouflage. There's no set pattern for German camouflage of this period. The camouflage colors were supplied as paste that was about the consistency of Kiwi shoe polish. The paste could be applied to the vehicles in a random pattern of stripes by hand, or it could be thinned with gasoline

and sprayed on. I thinned some Tamiya red brown (XF-64) and put on a random pattern of stripes, **17**. To make things easier, I painted a section at a time, and sprayed the turret and hull separately. I camouflaged the road wheels while they were still attached to the cardboard, **18**. When I was done, I let the paint cure overnight.

To soften the contrast between the colors and give the red brown stripes a worn and faded look, I filled my airbrush with highly thinned dark yellow paint. Working from a distance with



...And the delicate welds and recesses in the road wheels show up much more easily.



Finally, a steel-colored artist's pencil adds a little wear and tear to the edges of the hull and turret.

a medium spray pattern, I shot the mixture over the vehicle varying the amount I applied in any given area to give the finish an unevenly worn appearance. After cleaning my airbrush, I filled it with straight Tamiya thinner and misted a coat over the whole model. This final coat of thinner softens the finish even more and helps eliminate the camouflage pattern's "freshly airbrushed" appearance.

I let the model's paint rest and cure for a couple of days, then I brush-painted the road wheel rims flat black. Sticking each wheel on a toothpick and turning it against the paintbrush makes things go much faster. When the paint was dry, I glued the road-wheels onto the suspension arms, **19**.

Wash

I spent the next evening combining all the finished subassemblies. I added the soft-plastic tracks, then installed the pioneer tools, extra tracks, and spare roadwheels, **20**. The model was finished, but certainly didn't look like a veteran of the Russian Front. A little dirt and grime was in order.

I mixed black and raw umber artist's oil paints with mineral spirits until the mixture was the density of strong black coffee. Using a wide, soft brush I let the mixture flow all over the model, **21**. The pigment not only darkens the overall finish, but it also deepens the recessed details. The wash really makes a difference on the turret roof, **22**, and the running gear, **23**.

Finally, I used a steel-colored art pencil to simulate wear along the edges of the vehicle, **24**, and anywhere else where the paint might get knocked off, like around the hatches and grab handles. The effect is easy to control with the pencil, and it can be blended in with a clean cotton swab for a more subtle effect.

The finished Panzer III makes a colorful addition to my German armor collection. I spent a couple of weeks honing my detailing, airbrushing, and weathering skills, and didn't have to break the bank in the process. **FSM**

REFERENCES

Achtung Panzer No. 2: Panzerkampfwagen III Dai Nippon Kaiga, 1991

Matthew's model represents a Panzer III of the 11th Panzer Division, 15th Panzer Regiment, Russia, 1943. Jim Forbes Photo.

The Ausf L SdKfz 141/1

Germany's Panzer III medium tank had a long life and evolved through a number of types, from A to N. Ausf L production started in 1942. Although its general layout was essentially the same as earlier versions, it mounted a long-barrel KwK50 L/60 main gun to help combat Russia's heavily armed T-34s and KVs. Extra armor was added to the front superstructure and gun mantlet, and the suspension system was beefed up to handle the resulting extra weight.

Power was provided by Maybach's HL120TRM V-12; the water-cooled V-12 produced 300 horsepower and was mated to a six-speed gearbox. Normally outfitted with a crew of five, the tank served in North Africa and on the Eastern Front, until it was relieved by the larger Tiger I and Panther. 653 Ausf Ls were produced from June to December 1942.

