

Build a TANK this WEEKEND

Here's all you need to know to build a Soviet T-34 model – quickly

Story by Lawrence Hansen Photos by William Zuback and Jim Forbes

My assignment was straightforward: Come up with an easy-to-build armor project that a modeler can complete in a weekend. It wasn't quite as simple as it sounded, though, because I'm an aircraft guy who had only one tank under his belt. What model would be good for a quick-build armor project? I needed the advice of seasoned armor experts, so I logged onto the **FineScale.com** forum and explained my project.

As always, the FSM forum members couldn't have been more helpful: The subject mentioned most was a Soviet T-34. The local hobby shop had Tamiya's reasonably priced T-34/85 kit in stock – I had my model. It's an older kit, and the lower hull has vestiges of an earlier motorized version. That

wasn't an obstacle because I intended to build what car modelers call a "curbside" model – one without engine and underside detail.

To stay in the "spirit of the game," I figured the project should take 10-12 hours spread over a 48-hour period. Painting and finishing would have to be kept simple so it could be done between, say, Friday and Sunday nights.

About a third of my time was spent on painting. The turret, hull, chassis, drive sprockets, and road wheels received a base coat of Testor dark green from a spray can. The segment of spare track on the front plate, the machine gun barrel, and the tow cable were painted flat black. The

instructions indicated the engine exhausts should be "metallic gray," but that didn't seem right, so I made them burnt umber. I painted the lens of the single headlight silver and, when it was dry, dabbed some Future on it to make it look more "glassy." That's all the painting I did beyond the base coat!





1 Following the kit instructions, assembly started with the road wheels. Sprue cutters paid for themselves on this project alone with the time they saved on parts cleanup. The road wheels and drive sprockets have inner and outer halves, all with mold lines that had to be removed – by far the most time-consuming part of the project.



2 I removed the mold lines and what little flash there was with sanding sticks and sanding film. I wanted everything to fit as tightly as possible to minimize the need for seam filling. It worked: I didn't have to fill a single seam! Here, the mating surface of the turret top half gets cleaned up before assembly.



3 There's a choice of two hull rear plates, but the kit instructions don't explain why. I picked the one with more detail (top, already attached to the hull). There was no alignment notch for the center fitting on the plate I used, so I cut off the part's locating pin and glued the fitting in the spot the instructions indicated.

The model has markings only on the turret, so I brushed on a coat of Future where the decals were to go and let it dry overnight. A little Polly Scale decal setting solution and solvent coaxed the decals into “snuggling” down. A coat of Testor spray-can clear flat sealed them and eliminated the Future's shine.

When I started to apply the

“204” decal on the right side of the turret, I discovered – oops! – a small vent right where it was supposed to go. I hadn't thought about that during construction. Placing the decal over the vent, I put a brand-new No. 11 blade in my hobby knife and trimmed away the bit over the vent. When the decal was dry, I touched it up with white paint to make the num-

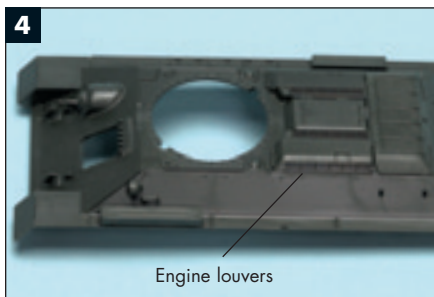
ber look like it had been stenciled right over the vent. I don't know if that's what the Russians did on full-sized T-34s, but it preserved my model's aesthetics.

After painting was completed, I assembled the main components, added the road wheels, and installed the tracks. The tracks were already molded in metallic black rubber, so I decided not to paint them. This turned out to be a good move: When it was time to fit them, they were a bit too tight – so I carefully stretched them like a rubber band to get more slack. Thinking that someday I might want to disassemble the model to do more finishing, I friction-fit the track ends rather than use Tamiya's recommended hot-knife method to bond them. I lightly anchored the tops of the tracks to



Project at a glance

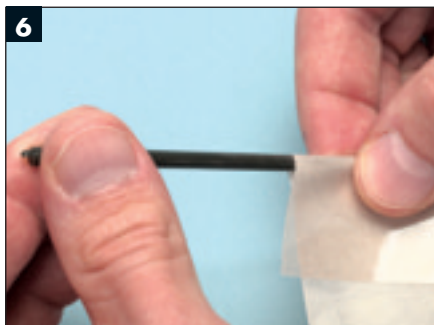
- Tamiya T-34/85 tank kit (No. 35138)
- Hobby knife with No. 11 blade
- Sprue cutters
- Tweezers
- Sanding sticks (various grits)
- Sanding film (various grits)
- Liquid model cement
- Five-minute epoxy
- Spray paint: Testor Model Master dark green (No. 1910) and clear flat (No. 1960)
- Bottle paint: flat black, silver, burnt umber
- Small paint brush (size 0)
- Black permanent marker
- Future floor polish
- Decal setting solution (optional)



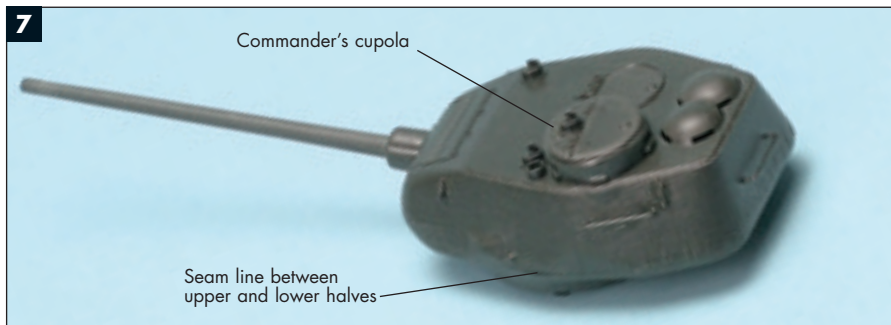
I began attaching the details to the large hull top piece. At first, the engine side louvers did not want to go gently into their openings. When I got one positioned and tried to hold it to apply the glue, it slipped away and shot across my work table. Except for a few spots where the gap-filling properties of tube cement were needed, I built the model with quick-drying liquid model cement, dabbed on with a small paintbrush.



Like the intricate hinges on the driver's hatch here, some parts were too small for sanding sticks, so I cleaned them up with my hobby knife. I had to be careful not to slip and slice my finger or launch the part into space like a tiddlywink. Where the mold lines weren't prominent or removing them was likely to damage the part, I left them alone. Self-locking tweezers (i.e., they open when you squeeze them) worked great for this project.



The gun barrel came in halves that had to be glued together, which left two unsightly seams running along its whole length. The muzzle crown is yet a third piece that goes on the tip. All the seams had to go, so I wrapped successively finer grades of sanding film around the barrel and twisted it rapidly to work out the seam. The barrel's a little thinner now, but seam-free.



The top and bottom halves of the turret meet at a "natural" seam line. To avoid misalignments at the joint, I glued the halves together in stages, starting at the front and working back. I aligned the parts as I went, brushing on cement from the inside and letting capillary action take it into the seam. When it was dry, I scraped away the little beads of melted plastic that oozed through the seam and sanded it just a tad. To freshen up the casting detail around the seam, I stippled the area with a bit of liquid cement on my brush. Patience and careful use of my sanding sticks were needed to remove the particularly tenacious mold line on the commander's cupola.



Call me the road wheel warrior: I took periodic breaks from the other construction steps to work on the road wheels. After cleaning up mold lines, I laid the wheels out on strips of masking tape, along with the sprue of polyvinyl axle hubs and sprayed them dark green (left). After coloring the rubber portions (center), I assembled the wheel halves (right).



Here's where the rubber meets the road wheel. Following a tip from an old FSM article by Mike Ashley ("15 tips for better armor," July 2000, p. 62), I painted the rubber portions with a black permanent marker. It worked great! The marker dries shiny, so I stuck the wheels on more tape strips and sprayed them with Testor clear flat lacquer.

the road wheels with little dabs of five-minute epoxy.

Overall, the project went smoothly, with only a few minor fit problems, but I figure that adds authenticity. World War II Soviet armor was built quickly in crude factories by largely untrained workers, so fit and finish on real T-34s was probably pretty rough.

I put about 15 hours into my T-34, a bit much for a leisurely weekend project, though not a killer if you start on Friday night. If I'd been less fussy about removing mold lines from small parts, I could have shaved several hours off the total. My T-34 won't win gold medals at national shows, but I'm pleased with the result. Now, for next weekend, maybe that F-16 I've been meaning to build ... **FSM**



I decided to paint my 48-hour wonder from a can; this is not a cheap alternative, but in terms of set-up time and clean-up, it suited my expedited schedule. The holes in the bottom of the chassis (far left) are vestiges of the kit's motorized origin. Since I was building a "curbside" tank, I didn't bother to fill them.