

DETAILING A D-DAY DUCK

Aftermarket accessories create an all-star amphibian

By John Plzak Photos by Jim Forbes

If the DUKW hadn't already existed before D-Day, the Allies would have had to invent it for the operation. The versatile amphibious vehicle played a pivotal role in the success of the Allied invasion by maintaining a constant supply of food, fuel, arms, and ammunition to the beachhead. After picking up cargo from the larger vessels in the English Channel and carrying it ashore, the DUKW could drive right up on the beach like a truck and continue on straight to inland supply points.

Modeling a DUKW was a difficult project until Italeri released its 1/35 scale kit, which I reviewed in the January 2003 FSM. To commemorate the invasion's 60th anniversary, I decided to build another Italeri DUKW, this time in a D-Day configuration.

Getting it right with research

Like every modeling project where accuracy is the goal, my D-Day DUKW started with research. A visit to the local library yielded general books on the invasion; I concentrated on ones with plenty of photographs of DUKWs at the beachhead. While the photos were not the best references for markings or details, they revealed a lot about how DUKWs were used and loaded with cargo.

More specific books like Squadron/Signal's *DUKW in Action* provided the details I needed for my model.

Another useful resource was the Internet. I found dozens of detail shots of the interior and exterior of a DUKW in the walk-around photo section (www.kmk-scaleworld.be/walkAround/DUKW/) on the English-language web site of a Belgian modeling organization, the Kempense Modelbouw Klub.

–John Plzak

REFERENCES

D Day Warren Tute, Macmillan Publishing, 1974
The Second Front Douglas Botting, Time Life Books, 1978
D-Day Operation Overlord: From the Landing at Normandy to the Liberation of Paris Tony Hall, ed., Smithmark Publishing, 1994
DUKW in Action Timothy J. Kutta, Squadron/Signal, 1996
The GMC 6x6 and DUKW: A Universal Truck Jean-Michel Boniface & Jean-Gabriel Jeudy, Motorbooks International, 1979

The kit

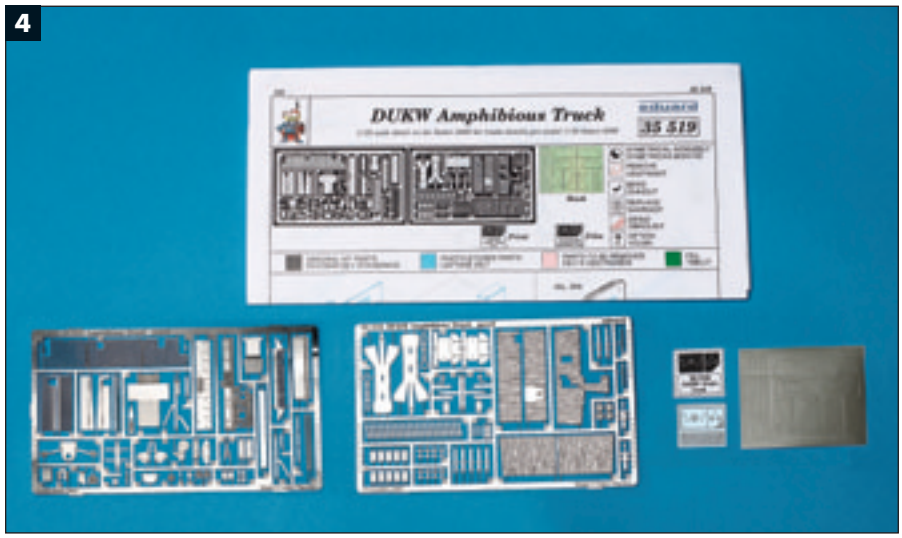






Built straight from the box, **1**, Italeri's kit (No. 6392) provides an excellent replica of the basic vehicle, but I wanted something special for my DUKW. Aftermarket detail sets issued since the kit's debut make it easy to model an accurate D-Day Duck.

I decided to revamp my model with two aftermarket sets from Verliniden: photoetched and resin detail parts for the vehicle itself (No. 1915), **2**, and a cargo load set (No. 1923) with 55-gallon drums, crates, bundles, and jerry cans, **3**. Additional hardware for the vehicle came from an Eduard photoetched set (No. 35-519), **4**.

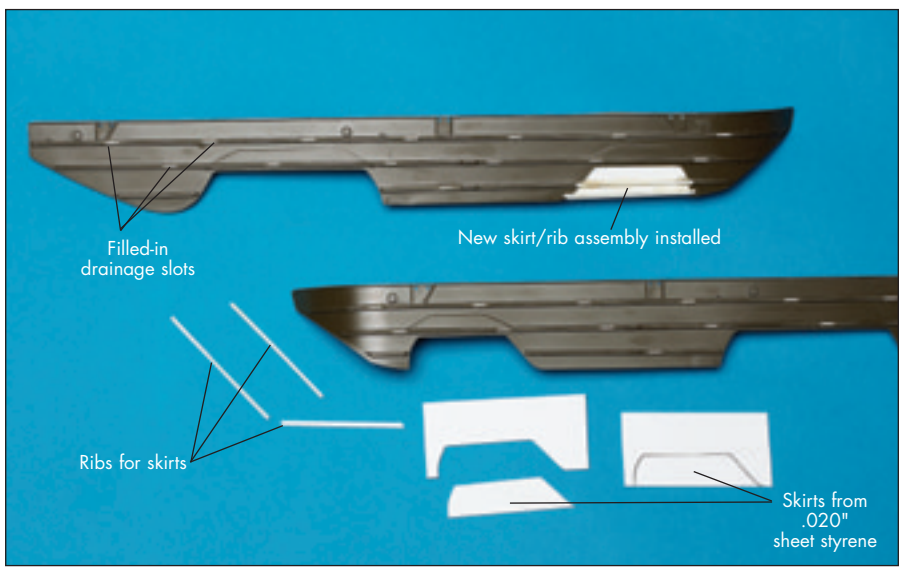


Hull modifications

The kit has small drainage slots molded in the side ribs of the hull, but none of the DUKWs in my reference photos have the slots. (I later discovered the slots were a modification made to production DUKWs after the war.) I filled them in with small tabs of sheet styrene, which were then sanded flush.

One complaint modelers have raised about the kit is that it doesn't include the wheel skirts that were common on World War II DUKWs. To remedy that, I traced the outline of the wheel openings onto .020" sheet styrene, cut out the skirts, and test-fitted them to the openings, sanding as needed to get a good fit. I made ribs for the skirts from .010" x .080" and .040" x .040" styrene strip cut to match up to the hull ribs.

I put small tabs inside the hull to support the skirts, and then sanded the ribs lightly to blend them in with the kit parts. It's important to make the skirts removable or hold off gluing them permanently to the hull until after you've installed the wheels.



Details, details

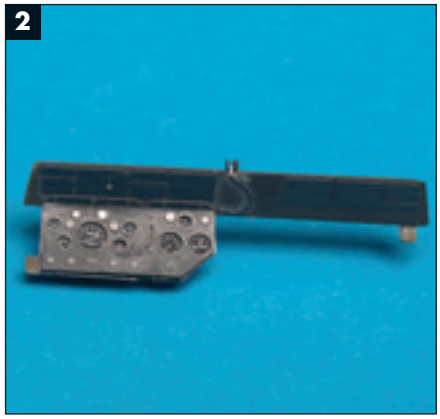
I used only a few parts from the Verlinden update set – mainly the resin seats and the floor behind the driver's compartment, **1**. The rest of the set won't be wasted; it'll be used on a future project. Most of the new details came instead from the Eduard photoetched set.

Planning ahead is important when adding photoetched items because many of the kit's molded-on details must be removed before installing the replacements. It's much easier to do this while the kit is still in pieces, rather than after assembly. I made good use of my Hold n' Fold, an invaluable tool for shaping photoetched parts.

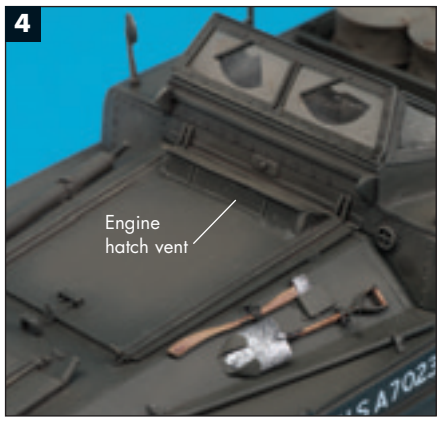
Eduard provides parts that nicely replicate the wood-grain texture of the plywood panels in the driver's compartment. The replacement instrument panel with film instrument faces really dresses up the dashboard, **2**. DUKWs were covered with myriad brackets and wing-nut fasteners, and the crisp photoetched replacements are a big improvement over the molded-on detail.

The kit's forward surf plate is designed to be built in the deployed position. That's how I built my first Duck, **3**, but I wanted it to be in the more-common stowed position on the D-Day vehicle. The hinge points on the upper hull had to be partially carved away, and the ribs on the surf plate were modified slightly to get the plate to lie flat. A good photo on a web site (see *Getting it right with research*, p. 26) showed how the support arms are stowed along the engine hatch, and fortunately Eduard provides the proper fasteners.









I added the Eduard photoetched engine hatch vent, **4**, which changes the look of the model from the basic stock kit. Many reference photos show the support bow for the canvas cover installed right behind the driver's compartment, even if the cover and other bows are not in place. I bent a piece of heavy copper wire to the correct shape using a resin cover panel from the Verlinden detail set as a template. I left 1" of insulation on the ends of the wire to represent the sockets the bow slides into.

The anchor also needed a bit of work. I carefully removed the blades and reshaped them to the correct pattern. Following reference photos from the same helpful web site, I fashioned the anchor-mounting bracket from a bit of strip styrene and a piece of scrap photoetched brass.

The DUKW takes to water

The U.S. Army's DUKW was developed early in World War II. It was unofficially dubbed "Duck," perhaps because of its designation (D for built in 1942, U for amphibious, K for front-wheel drive, W for rear-wheel drive), or because of its amphibious performance. Based on the 2½-ton CCKW truck developed by General Motors, the Duck was fitted with a boat-like hull and a recessed propeller so it could be driven off landing ships.

Despite its reputation as being difficult to handle and maintain, the DUKW soon became the Army's "go anywhere" vehicle.

Before taking part in the Normandy Invasion, the DUKW had been battle-tested in the Pacific and the landings at Sicily and mainland Italy. In the first few months after D-Day, almost half of the Allies' supplies were brought ashore by DUKWs.

Assigned to the initial assault were the 453rd, 458th, and 459th Transportation Corps Amphibian Truck Companies under the command of the 131st Quartermaster Battalion. Along with bringing in vital supplies, DUKW units did double duty evacuating the wounded from the shore to hospital ships.

More than 21,000 DUKWs were built during the war, and many were kept in U.S. service into the 1960s. DUKWs can still be found today in several tourist operations. I've had several rides on Ducks through the scenic Dells area of Wisconsin.

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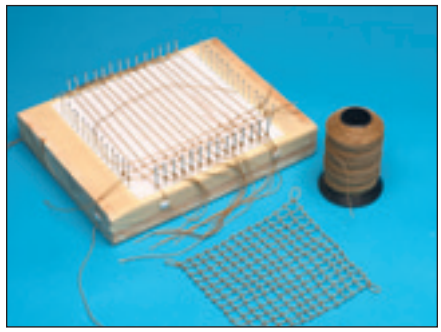
Caught in the (cargo) net

Prominent on just about every photo of a cargo-carrying DUKW is the cargo net. In fact, the net was standard equipment aboard every Duck. Photos of loaded DUKWs clearly show the laden cargo net simply lowered in the cargo bay.

Reproducing the net was a challenge. After watching a fellow modeler make a ratline for a sailing ship model using a jig, I figured that was the way to go. I tried a cardboard jig several times before I made a better one from wood. Using my computer, I printed a 3/8" grid on a piece of paper, then sized the grid to what seemed right for 1/35 scale – about 4 7/8" square – and extended it 1" past the size of the finished net. I taped the grid to a piece of scrap lumber and pounded finishing nails around the perimeter at each grid line.

I made the net from waxed polyester carpet thread, which seemed the right gauge and color. If you can't find carpet thread, similar thread may be available through a leather-craft supply house or a hobby retailer that carries model-ship supplies. A piece of thread was tied across each nail going horizontally about 1" above the board, then I tied the vertical rows one intersection at a time using a half-hitch knot.

It was a bit tedious, but once I got into a rhythm, I could do an entire column in about five minutes. The squares came out more uniform when I started one column at the top and the next column at the bottom. After the net was tied, I applied thin super glue to the knots along the edges to prevent those knots from falling apart

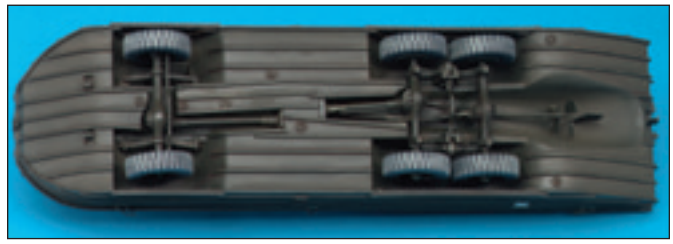


when the net was removed from the jig. I left the two threads at each corner extra long so I could tie them as the lifting loops of the net. A wash of burnt umber oil paint and mineral spirits (paint thinner) darkened the finished net.

Paintings and markings

I sprayed the model with a coat of Tamiya olive drab. This color is actually too dark to represent WWII olive drab, but it serves as a great base coat for shading. Next, I lightened the olive drab by adding one-third Tamiya desert yellow, which I sprayed on the flat panels and between the ribs. By carefully feathering the edges out to the dark base coat, I was able to add depth to the finish.

Information on D-Day DUKW unit markings was difficult to come by. I finally settled on a plain vehicle, marked only with a couple of stars and a serial number, based on photo of a DUKW on the beach at Normandy a few days after the invasion. The stars came from my decal scrap box, and I used an



Archer dry transfers sheet (No. AR35019W) for the serial numbers. An oil-based wash, followed by dry-brushing, helped pop out the little details.

A clutch of cargo

I filled the cargo bed with some barrels and all of the crates provided in the Verlinden load set. More resin crates came from an Armand Bayardi set (No. M35-121). The barrels were painted olive drab, then washed and dry-brushed with oils. I painted the crates Tamiya deck tan, desert yellow, and dark yellow, mixing the colors a little differently to vary the color on each crate. They were washed with burnt umber and raw sienna oils, also mixed a little differently for variety.

With the barrels glued in place, I spread the cargo net in the hold. The crates were piled on the net and glued to each other with super glue. I stuffed the excess net between the crates and the sides of the cargo bay, then glued the net's corners on top of the crates so they would appear to have dropped naturally to those positions.

The finished model shows what can be achieved by mixing aftermarket details with a little homegrown ingenuity. My collection now contains a one-of-a-kind model of a vehicle that served nobly in one of the most important undertakings of the 20th century. **FSM**





A long-time contributor to FSM's Workbench Reviews, John Plzak began modeling more than 40 years ago. His primary interest is armor, but he also builds aircraft, autos, and science fiction subjects. His article "Wash and dry-brush an Iraqi Freedom M1 Abrams" appeared in the July 2003 FSM.