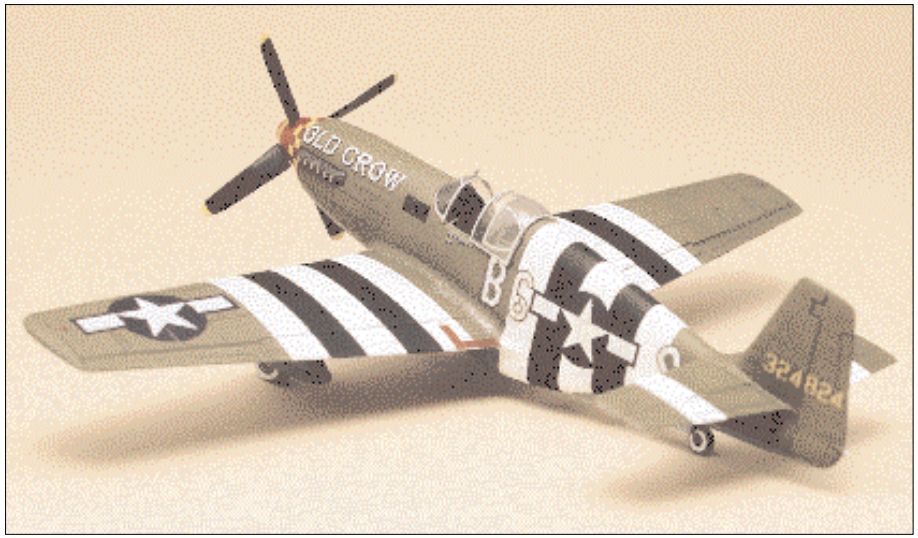
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Improving prepainted aircraft

A professional modeler jazzes up Revell-Monogram's P-51B

By Pat Hawkey Photos by the author

What could you do with a kit if someone had already painted it for you? We asked Pat Hawkey to find out with this 1/48 scale kit of "Old Crow."

To make it simpler for newer modelers to build good-looking aircraft models, Revell-Monogram has extended its line of "ProFinish" kits to include some 1/48 scale aircraft. The line consists of veteran kits with the major (and many of the minor) components already spray painted.

That's the good news. The bad news is that it's usually with good reason that one paints a model plane after it's built, and certainly not before it leaves the sprue. In other words, Revell-Monogram is doing one of the last steps first. That presents some challenges, but, as we'll see, the resulting plane can be quite good.

My mission was to assemble a prepainted kit, retaining its factory paint job but improving its appearance. I had to put myself in the position of someone likely to purchase one of these kits. That person, I assumed, would not own an airbrush. (Since I literally had not finished a model plane without an airbrush in about 30 years, this was a challenge to me.) I also would limit myself strictly to common Testor paints, as I didn't want to use anything the budding young – or mature – modeler wouldn't have access to. This would be interesting.

The ProFinish kits may not be perfect for everyone – but they're a quick and relatively easy introduction to the hobby for first-time builders, and a fine starting point for advanced modelers who have experience with making corrections and adding aftermarket parts.

Personally, I favor any attempt to bring young blood into this hobby, and I hope the ProFinish line achieves that. The kits should make great gifts for youngsters who are spending way too much time in front of their computers – I remember my delight as a kid in the late 1960s with Monogram's prepainted F-105 and AC-47. With any luck, these kits may inspire a whole new generation of model builders. FSM



1 The Pro Modeler P-51B "Old Crow" is molded in olive, and the invasion stripes, undersurface, interior, tires, prop, spinner, and canopy frame come prepainted in a flat finish.



2 Care in assembly was paramount, starting with removal of parts from the trees. I scissored most of them close to the sprue, then cleaned off the burrs with a fresh hobby knife blade.



3 An immediate area of concern was the spinner. Without a white base coat, the red applied to olive green plastic was decidedly dull, and wouldn't match the decal. I glued the front and rear halves together without the propeller to better clean up the significant seam. Next, I brush painted the spinner flat white, then sprayed it a couple of times with Testor 1204 Gloss Dark Red. I separated the propeller blades, cleaned them up with a medium-grit sanding stick, brush painted them gloss black, and installed them individually. I masked the tips and brush painted them yellow over a white base coat, then added Hamilton Standard logos to the blades from a spare Mustang decal sheet.



4 I matched the interior green with Testor Model Master Interior Green (34151) mixed with Field Drab (30118), then brush painted the tail wheel well and extended the green fuselage interior. After building the cockpit interior to the stage shown, I gave it a wash of acrylic flat black thinned with a 30/70 mix of dishwashing soap and water. Once the wash is dry you need to be able to rub it off everything but the cracks it settled into, and the soap breaks down the adhesive qualities of the paint. The black wash adds depth and definition, and a dry-brushing of silver over the top and edges provides even more. The landing gear well on the right has received this treatment.



5 Since sanding seams would mean saying goodbye to the factory finish, it was important to strive for as precise a fit as possible. Here the inner surfaces of the wings are smoothed of any raised blemishes with a coarse sanding stick.



6 With as tight a fit as I was going to get with the wing halves, I touched a loaded brush of liquid cement to the edges. Capillary action took the glue where it needed to go, and maintaining clamping pressure on parts kept cement "squeeze-outs" to a minimum along the seams.

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7 After sanding the mating surfaces of the fuselage halves, I glued from the inside with gap-filling super glue. The fit isn't great, even if you're careful to line things up. I puttied the rougher seams and matched the ProFinish gray with my own mix (Model Master Medium Gray 35237 with a touch of blue).



8 I swiped with a medium grit Flex-I-File across the spine to even out the seam. Here I didn't use any putty. The paint was thick and I managed to remove the visible seam without too much sanding. Matching the black and white of the invasion stripes with paint dabs from a hand brush wouldn't be too difficult.



9 Happily, the upper-wing-to-fuselage fit was pretty good. (Underneath was a very different story.) After carving away half of the given raised ridge on the fuselage and carefully applying liquid cement, a styrene shim, and some epoxy putty, I closed the gap between the windscreen and the fuselage.



10 I masked and painted the nose band a base coat of flat white, then proceeded to mask off everything that was not going to be Olive Drab. The hole in the nose for the prop shaft accepted a needle file, which made an invaluable handle for the rest of the project.



11 After a few quick sweeping squirts from a spray can of Testor Model Master Olive Drab (34087), my paint job was on. Some olive drab seeped underneath the masking tape, but I was able to scrape it off with a sharpened toothpick. I brush painted the nose ring Testor 1114 Gloss Yellow with a touch of brown to match the spinner's yellow decal band. Since half of this area would be covered by red checks, I didn't try to make it perfect.



12 To eliminate silvering, I brush-painted the entire upper cowl and the small area to be under the "kills" decal with two coats of Future floor polish. A second kit gave me another decal to layer over the fuselage markings, and a second "Old Crow" – the plane carried the name on both sides. Never trusting decals to conform correctly to a curved surface, I cut out the red checks and applied them to the nose individually.



13 I spent some time with a pointed brush touching up the minimally damaged ProFinish areas, but since this model had a flat finish and would represent a used warrior, little of this was noticeable. But my model still looked two-dimensional. To animate it, I gave the entire model the same flat black acrylic wash as I had given the cockpit and the wheel wells. Not only did it accent all the panel and separation lines between flying and control surfaces, but it stained the flat finish a little bit as I suspected it would. I rubbed it off the invasion stripes as much as I could, but liked the effect on the green and gray and left that uneven look alone.



14 I used a silver Prisma pencil to apply a few paint chips, and lightly added black pastel streaks trailing from nose area panel lines to suggest oil and grime stains. I dulled out the code letters and fuselage insignia with gray chalk pastels to contrast with what would've been the fresher white invasion stripes. I put on the canopy framing with a combination of silver decal film and hand brushed Polly-S Bright Silver. Bud Anderson's real Old Crow featured white-walled tires (Why, Bud? Why?) and these I lifted from the Mustang International decal sheet. I turned an old unused landing light into a rear-view mirror, added a whip antenna, and that was it.



Pat set aside his trusty airbrush and used only Testor spray cans and hand-painted enamels to spruce up this prepainted Mustang.