

Modelling from vacuform kits

A survey of today's market together with details on building vacuform kits by Alan W. Hall

TODAY'S MODEL AIRCRAFT maker has such a wide variety of choice that it often surprises those in the manufacturing trade that they are always asking for more. Even so, those of us who possess large collections continually request the more obscure aircraft type to complete a range of interest and are equally disappointed when told that our particular subject is not a commercial proposition. Depending on how long one is prepared to wait, or alternatively, how important a particular aircraft type can be to the individual, there is a way round it, and that's the vacuform model.

Vacuform kits first came into existence in 1968. The principles were known long before, but RAREplanes, the English pioneers, popularised the medium and are now firmly established. Others have come along since, most have produced a few models before giving up, leaving four leading manufacturers all of whom have their followers and all producing models to slightly different criteria. Prices range from 50p to £6.00 and size from diminutive pre-war American Navy fighters to a giant B-36 recently released from Sutcliffe. There have been few attempts at scales other than 1:72, mostly because the size is popular and also because the manufacturers themselves have their own likes on the subject.

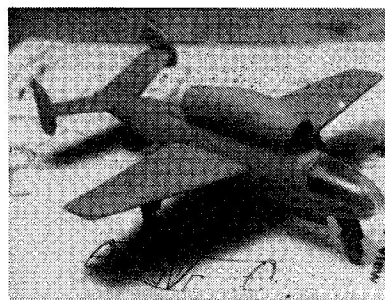
Talking to those in the business is very interesting because certain facts come to light on which conclusions can be formed. For example, the maximum production from any one mould is reckoned not to exceed 1,000 copies — not as may be imagined due

to the limitations of the mould itself, but because of the demand. Surely, one would think that with the large injection moulding manufacturers running a kit to something like a million copies, their smaller compatriots would be able to produce a few more. This, however, seems to be the extent of the sale and only varies with the subject's popularity.

There appears to be a considerable gap between the hundreds of requests for a particular type of aircraft model made by an injection moulding manufacturer and those who are prepared to tackle a vacuform kit of the same subject. Why should this be?

A careful analysis of those who buy and those who don't reveals that the age group prepared to spend money and time making a vacuform model is always amongst older people — older in the sense that they were probably modelling long before the injection moulded kit appeared and therefore appreciate the great challenge presented by a block of wood, a plan, a few chisels and some wood carving tools.

During the last few months I have asked several younger modellers, all of whose models I greatly admire, why they do not go in for the vacuform kit. The general answer seems to be that vacuforms are far too difficult and they would rather spend their limited time painting a model after having spent as little as possible on the construction. The strange thing is that most of these chaps appreciate accuracy and are fully prepared to take a shaving off here and add some body putty there to overcome some of



Airframe's Henschel Hs 132 model is small and can be made up quickly. All parts are simple to put together and the paint scheme is also a simple RLM Grey overall.

the small deficiencies of their mass-produced masterpiece. At the same time they will go to endless lengths to detail a cockpit interior or provide a weathered look to the paint work.

The other reason given is that to go in for vacuformed kits also implies a large spares box with many odd engines, undercarriages and props. Otherwise one has to go and buy a particular kit just to take out the accessories, and this can lead to expense not really warranted by present-day economies.

I certainly agree that vacuforms are not as easy to construct as injection moulded kits, the cost of buying perhaps several other kits to make one vacuform is also a valid point, but surely the whole matter rests on how much you want that kind of aircraft in your collection and to what lengths you are prepared to go in order to get it.

If you are prepared to go on making Bf 109s and P-47s for evermore, read no further, but if you want to take up the *real* challenge of modelling even to the extent of vacuforming your own small items then perhaps these few hints may persuade you to make a start.

When faced with the vacuform kit straight from the pack one wonders where to start, so over the last few years I have invariably cut out all of the parts first. This gets things almost on the same level as the injection

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No longer available, but still reckoned to be one of the best RAREplanes kits, was this Supermarine Spitfire. The photo on right shows the original model before cutting from the basic sheet, while that on the left is the finished model.

