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Model Kit Report

Gallery Models 1/48 H-34 US Marines

Time to change things up with a build along.

Most scale modelers, if asked, could tell anyone which kit of a particular subject is the best kit available. They know about the accuracy of the shape and dimensions, the fit of the parts, the quality of the molding, and whether the kit is really worth the time and effort to build. And, every now and then, a new model kit comes along that raises the bar. Such is the case with the Gallery Models H-34 US Marines kit.

The Sikorsky H-34 Choctaw is a military helicopter that was originally designed for the US Navy to serve in an anti-submarine warfare role. It is the last helicopter designed with the standard combustion piston engine, as turbine engines were starting to become the preferred form of power. From its first flight in 1954, it was used by every brand of the US military for a variety of duties to include utility transport, anti-submarine warfare, search and rescue, medical evacuation, and a few were modified by the Marines during the Vietnam War to serve as helicopter gunships.

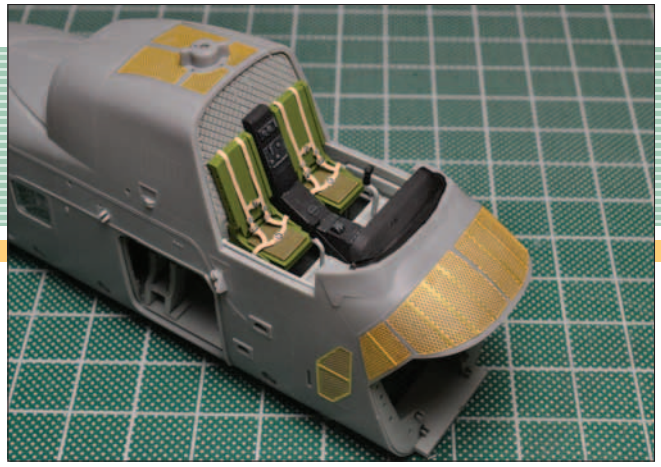
The lifting capability of the H-34 led to its use in space capsule recovery during NASA's Mercury Astronaut program. In 1961, while attempting to recover Liberty Bell 7, the second manned launch into space, the hatch deployed prematurely causing the capsule to fill with water. Sadly, the excess weight of the seawater was more than the H-34 could handle, and the capsule had to be released to sink into the depths.

The Gallery kit depicts a 1/48 United States Marine Corps UH-34D Seahorse, and contains 275 parts molded in gray and clear plastic. The kit contains two large frets of photoetched metal detail parts, including screens for the engine cooling vents, harnesses for the pilot and troop seats, as well as steps and various other parts. The kit features a full cabin interior and detailed cockpit, a full engine (the first in a kit of this subject), and options for a folded tale section, open or closed cockpit windows, and open or closed cabin door.

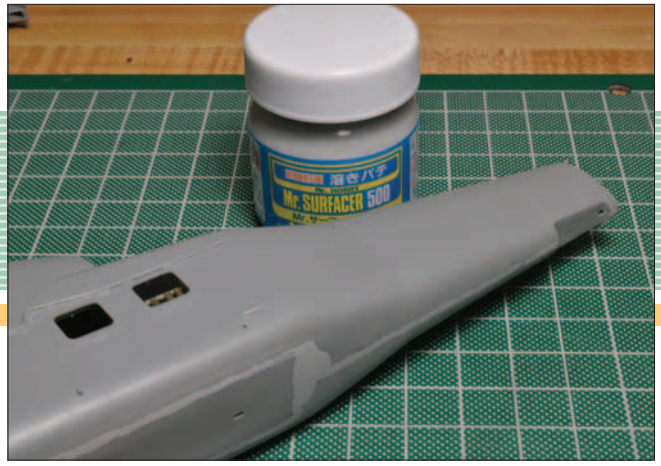
Reading through the instructions, the interior is comprised of several bulkheads, the cabin floor and the cockpit. All of these must be assembled and painted, then are encapsulated when the fuselage halves are glued together. The build begins up front with the cockpit assembly, which includes the back wall, pilot seats, floor, and instrument panel, and continues with the engine assembly. Most modelers, especially those with experience, will not strictly adhere to the assembly sequence, skipping around and doing portions of different steps to speed the process; it is best with this kit to follow the instructions fairly closely, as many of the initial phases of construction build on the previous assemblies.

Small assemblies, like the turbine motor, are built first and are then sandwhiched between the fuselage halves.

Once the cockpit and engine are completed, the cabin is assembled. The seats, wall and floor, and bulkheads are



There are a number of fine photoetched details like these vent grates which must be fitted during the assembly process.



With all of the bulkheads in place, the fuselage halves are glued together and the seam filled with light-weight surfacing putty.

painted and then glued in position. The engine and guns were not added until the final assembly, to avoid any potential breakage or painting problems. Various small parts were glued to the fuselage halves, and then the cabin was attached to one side and the halves glued together. The bottom panel of the fuselage is glued into place, but the engine bay clamshell doors were left for later.

After installing the overhead console, the cockpit glass and top sections are glued into place, and then the cockpit windows were masked for painting. The tail was assembled and attached in the extended position. The main rotors do not have an option for placing them in the folded position, so the folded tail seemed incongruent. However, the engine is beautifully represented, so the clamshell doors were prepared in a manner where they would be viewed in the open position. The various photoetched metal screens and steps were attached using cyanoacrylate glue. The instructions give paint colors for several manufacturers. The paint colors for the model were chosen based on references, which gave the correct Federal Standard colors.

After the aircraft had been painted the base color, a bit of post-shading was done on various panels to replicate faded paint. Then, after the model had been gloss coated, the decals were applied. The kit includes markings for three different USMC helicopters, and the lightning bolt markings were too good to pass up. The decals are thin, printed in perfect register, and applied like a dream, settling into panel lines and over raised details with just a few drops of decal setting solution. When the decals had set, a flat coat was applied and final assembly began.

The Gallery Models H-34 US Marines helicopter is exceptionally detailed, and the results are a model that belongs in a museum.

The landing gear and winch were installed, along with the various antennae and lights. There is a photoetched plate that is intended to go on the underside of the fuselage, covering the air intake. In most of the reference photographs showing the helicopter in the field, it had been removed, so it was not installed on the model. When the cabin door was attached in the open position, it completely covered the national insignia decal, so in hindsight, that particular decal could have been omitted.

The guns were glued into their cradles. The engine was carefully attached in its position, and the braces and piping were added. The tail rotor and main rotor, having been assembled earlier, were not glued into place. This means that they could later be removed, so the model could be more easily transported to shows or future contests.

The instructions indicate attaching the clamshell doors in the closed position, and the reason became obvious in trying to place them in the open position. Along the edges of the door to fuselage contact points, there is very little surface area for glue. The weight of the doors tended to cause them to sag before the glue could cure. Eventually, small brass wire pins were used to mount them in the open position. But, since the engine is so nicely detailed, and this is the only kit of this subject with an engine, the doors really need to be open to provide the best view, and it was worth the extra bit of work involved.

This is clearly a State-of-the-Art kit that builds into an exceptionally detailed and beautiful model. While a novice could complete the model, perhaps with assistance from a more advanced modeler, the complexity of the kit and the large number of photoetched parts clearly target this kit for the more experienced scale modelers. It is not a kit that can be built in a weekend, as it demands time, patience and precision to build properly. In the hands of an expert modeler, the Gallery Models 1/48 H-34 US Marines kit could easily produce a museum quality masterpiece. **HM**