

# Airfix 727 & DC-9

By Paul Hackmann

## Background

I became pretty well acquainted with Eastern Airlines and airplanes in general at a very young age. I was born in Miami, Fl. in where my father, after getting out of the US Navy, worked as an apprentice mechanic for Eastern Airlines. I really don't remember much of those very early years, but I do recollect the mechanic's union strike of 1963 when we had to move to St. Louis, Mo. My father being a member of the union at that time caught on with the McDonnell Corporation and worked assembling what was then known as the F4H-1 (later F-4B). We spent most of 1963-64 living in St Louis. By the fall of 1964 the strike ended, dad was rehired, we moved back to Miami and I started first grade. This was the first in a series of bitter fights between Eastern's labor unions and management.

From about 1964 to 1967 my most vivid memories are of getting to walk through Eastern's hangars located on the northeast corner of Miami International Airport. These were the jet age transition years of Eastern and most airlines; so the fleet included DC-7s, Constellations, Electras, Martin 404s, Convair 440s, Boeing 720s, DC-8s and the new Boeing 727 and DC-9 Whisperjets. I remember seeing the large radials being reassembled, the jet engine shop where the jets were overhauled and, the coolest part, getting to sit in the cockpits of various airplanes. I can remember how as a little kid I was amazed by all of the gauges, switches and knobs that the pilots and flight engineers were responsible for. I wondered how in the heck someone could ever keep track of everything. These were the days before hijacking and terrorists; we could walk down any concourse and go up to the observation deck. On each deck were large pedestal-mount binoculars, where for .10¢ I could watch all of the prep work done on an airplane close up.

During this same time period, the livery for Eastern was in transition. Prior to 1962, the paint scheme consisted of a red falcon on the tail and a blue and red stylized wing down the length of the fuselage. These markings are pictured to nice effect on the Electra below:



In 1963, Eastern rolled out an even more colorful scheme, which exhibited a more stylized “Golden Falcon” on the tail and a blue and red cheat line along the fuselage. This scheme is depicted on the Boeing 727-25 below:



By the late 1960's Eastern had phased out most of its piston-engined aircraft, although I have photographs of a flight taken from New York to Providence, RI on a Connie taken during the summer of 1967. It also was a transition for my dad, as he completed college, applied for and got into Eastern's DC-9 maintenance management area. This move gave him a pay raise, allowed him to work normal hours, be my little league baseball coach and allowed us to occasionally have steaks on the weekends. It also cost him several of his mechanic's union acquaintances.

A cost saving measure in 1967 changed the livery once again, this time to the more familiar two-tone blue hockey stick. While I do remember the earlier versions and have some old color photos, this is the scheme I remember the best and the one most everyone associates with Eastern. This scheme is depicted below on one of the numerous DC-9s that Eastern operated:



Eastern went into the 1970's with a strong operation and a new Vice-President of Operations, Frank Borman. Eastern also upgraded its fleet to include a wide body jet, the Lockheed L-1011. Nicknamed the Whisperliner by the airlines, but I often heard it referred to as the Whisperwhale. While awaiting Lockheed to deliver, EAL pilots got big jet experience from several leased Pan Am 747s. During the 70's, my father moved from the DC-9 maintenance department to a new division called "Tech Services". This was an area staffed 24/7 by maintenance specialists of each of the aircraft of the fleet. Having been with DC-9s since their inception with Eastern, my dad was promoted to the senior position of the DC-9 team. He began shift work again and I began 10<sup>th</sup> grade. In the later part of the 70's, again heated arguments between the mechanics' union and management broke out. Fuel cost increases led to another change in paint scheme, this time the removal of the upper white fuselage and a return to the "Great Silver Fleet". An example of this final scheme is depicted here on this L-1011:



By the end of the 70's, I was attending the University of Florida. I did take advantage of my student status and fly "Space A" from Gainesville for Thanksgiving and Memorial Day weekends. In 1978 Congress passes the United States Airline Deregulation Act of 1978, a move which leads to the demise of many of the great airlines. By 1979, I'm an Ensign in the USN and can longer be claimed as a dependent. I never again fly on an Eastern airplane from this point on. While I'm in flight school there comes two more times to fly home. The first is on February 7, 1980, when my personal advisor, Maj Bill Westphal, called me into his office to let me know that my father had a fatal heart attack. He would have been 47 years old on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The only flight I could get out of Pensacola was a Delta flight that had a 2 hour stop in Tampa. Who would have thought that a flight from Pensacola to Miami would take forever? The other opportunity was less than 4 months later when I hop on an Air Florida on Thursday, June 19<sup>th</sup> for my wedding on the 21<sup>st</sup>. From then on for the next 8 years all of my flying opportunities came courtesy of the USN.

I guess it was fortunate that he didn't live to see the airline run to ruin during the 1980's. The problems with the mechanics' labor union increased, finally to the point where the labor union leader Charley Bryan, an anti-management zealot, and CEO Frank Borman, ex-military officer, were no longer able to reach compromise. There were several strikes throughout the early 80's organized by Bryan, none that were honored by the pilots' or flight attendants' unions. Borman, with Eastern showing a \$67 million loss, retired from the airline in 1986.

**In a move to end the union problems that plagued Eastern, the airline was sold to Frank Lorenzo. Unfortunately for Eastern it now has an anti-management leader leading its largest and most militant union and a renowned corporate raider and breaker of unions in its front office. These arrangements lead to a machinists' strike that began on March 1988, which this time all unions honored. Instead of trying to deal with the unions Lorenzo tried to break the strike by filing for Chapter 11, a technique that he used at Continental. The judge in charge of the case declared that Lorenzo was in violation of several laws passed by Congress to prevent using Chapter 11 for strike breaking and, further, was unfit to run the airline and appointed a trustee. But, by this time, Eastern's financial resources were depleted, its credibility as an airline had deteriorated and most of its employee's had moved on to other jobs. Finally on the evening of January 18, 1991 Eastern closed its doors and ceased operations.**

## Markings

This was a project that I always meant to get around to, but for one reason or another I did something else. The initial inspiration came while in the local Hobby Lobby the December before the Chicago IPMS Nationals. I saw a Minicraft DC-3 in Eastern markings at ½ price. I bought it and Lisa asked if it would be kind of fun to put in a family entry of models of the planes flown by Eastern. I agreed that this would be a fun project and that our two kids could get a chance to learn a little about their grandfather. So, I scrounged the Internet to find what decals and models were available. Our original plan was to enter the DC-3, an Electra and two 757s. Unfortunately, baseball season kicked in and nothing got finished in time.

This year something happened that got me motivated again, the stark realization that I turn 46 this May 10<sup>th</sup> and that has really shocked me. I decided that the first two airplanes I should complete were the one's I most remembered. So I dug out the 727 and DC-9 markings that I had purchased from Airliners America (now out of business), went down to Venture before one of our meetings and purchased the Airfix 727 and DC-9 then, with the assistance of my two kids, started them the next day.



The color schemes I chose were the "Hockey-stick" markings of the 1970's as shown on the DC-9 pictured earlier in this article and on the 727 above.

### **Building the Kits**

Both kits are early 80's vintage and have been recently re-released by Airfix and, if you're building a 727 or DC-9, are the only game in town. Minicraft announced plans to release a 727-200 last year, but it never came out and is now showing a Fall 2003 release date. While Minicraft does have a very nice MD-80 out, the difference between a DC-9 and an MD-80 are too great for me to overcome.

Both kits are simply laid out, with the fuselages split vertically into halves. I began each model with the fuselage. You've got two options here, either use the supplied windows or use aftermarket decals for the passenger and cockpit windows. Since both sheets I purchased contained window decals (and I didn't see myself cutting out little tiny masks), I opted to put sheet styrene behind the passenger windows openings and then glued the fuselage halves together. I filled the windows of the 727 with Bondo scratch filler and sanded between multiple coats of filler. This was a timely process and I wasn't completely happy with the results. On the DC-9 I opted to use gap filling superglue, hit with a shot of zip-kicker. This allowed me to speed up the filling process immensely and gave much better results. On both models there were very prominent panel lines and visible steps between the fuselage halves. So much so that I dismissed using my normal 400 grit and went right to the 320. Here I enlisted the assistance of my two partners and had them do all of the rough sanding. Having experience with other Airfix models in my 1/72 scale life, I figured that now would be a good time to see how the cockpit windows fit. But before I did that, I loaded up the nose of each with as much lead shot as I could. Once that was ready, I glued in the kit-

supplied cockpit windows and, just as I thought, they were a little undesized. Since both the 727 and DC-9 fuselages are predominately white and natural metal once the munchkins were done, I went over each with 400, 600, 3800, 4000, 6000, 8000 and finally 12000 grits to remove any scratches.

Putting the fuselages aside, I moved on to the wings. Again the fit of each upper and lower half left something to be desired. Again 320 to the rescue! I had another problem with the upper port wing of the 727, the plastic had started to delaminate leaving pits in some portions of the wing. Again nothing a little superglue couldn't cure, but still something to deal with. Since the details on both wings for each aircraft were raised, I went ahead a rescribed leading edge slats but bypassed the opportunity to scribe all of the oval access panels. Now came the moment I really did dread, placing the wings on the fuselages. I must have been holding my mouth right or else the modeling gods were in alignment, because the wings on both models fit near perfectly without any need to fill and sand. I sat there stunned for a few minutes.

I did some final polishing on each fuselage/wing assembly, and then ran upstairs to give each a good bath with dishwashing detergent and warm water. Each model was put aside to dry and I began fussing with the 4 tiny engine assemblies. OK, I learned another bugaboo of the airline modeler. How the heck do you sand out those seams on the inside of the engine pod? A couple of hours, three fingernails and some fingertip skin later I was satisfied with the outer skin of each pod. All right, I did give up on the inner seams. Finally I put together the horizontal stabs for each model and now built up the courage to begin painting.

Beginning with the 727 I painted multiple coats of model Master gloss white over the entire model, but concentrating on the upper portion of the fuselage. In retrospect this was a mistake as the paint never really cured. Also painted gloss white were the left and right engine pods. For the DC-9, I chose to paint the entire model using Model Master flat white. This gave better coverage with less paint layers. Then in order to get the gloss finish I desired, I sprayed two very light coats of well thinned gloss white. Since these last two coats had a very high thinner to paint ratio, they cured very quickly. The two engine pods for the -9 were given the same treatment. Both fuselages were masked off and the remaining areas were sprayed with SNJ Aluminum and then polished with SNJ Aluminum Powder.

In order to protect the white paint against handling, I chose to apply a light coat of Future before I began decaling. After a couple of days drying, it was time to locate the Liveries Unlimited decal sheets that I placed in a protected spot where I wouldn't lose them. After about 30 minutes of looking, I finally did find that spot. Here's another bane of the airline modeler, long straight decals that represent the cheat lines. Not a good time to have caffeine shakes. Anyway I was really pleased with the handling and fit of the Liveries Unlimited decals. They are easy to apply and fit very well. Everything for both models was supplied, including passenger window decals, cockpit window decals, upper and lower wing corogard and all doors and hatches. Lots and lots of decals. I spent as much time applying decals as I did building and painting each model.

After I had completed all of the decaling, I washed each model with a little dish soap and warm water to remove any remaining solution. I seen a few airliner models at the various conventions I've gone to and the usual trend is to leave it in rollout condition. I'm not a fan

of high gloss models, so I mixed a little flat finish with my gloss coat to produce a more eggshell appearance.

I was happy with the final results and I finished something. The two models look great in the case. Next on the agenda are the L-1011 and the A300. Hope to have those by the next meeting I attend.