Building the Hobbycraft B-36D

By Pat Hawkey

The Hobbycraft B-36 is a good news-bad news sort of thing. The good news is that finally there is a good representation of an important airplane in a manageable size. (Wingspan is about 20 in.) The bad news (but not awful news) is the kit will make you work a bit for a really good finished model. I came to it after building Hobbycraft's B-47, which in my opinion was a superb 1/144th kit. The B-36 was not quite the same delight.

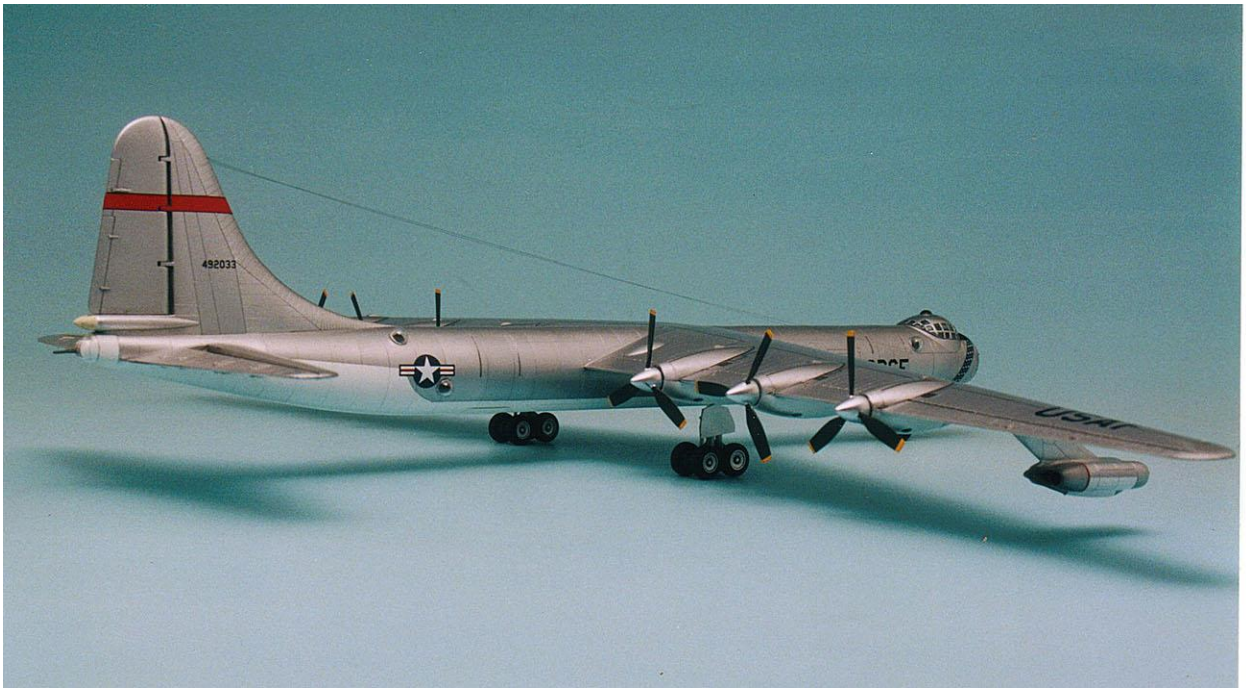
Like their B-47, the kit is offered in a trio of versions. I built the "Jet-Prop Peacemaker", which is allegedly a B-36D. However, according to my "B-36 in Action", the long tail gunners radar fairing that comes in the kit would make this not a D, but an F, H or J.

The biggest frustration with this kit is the texture that appears on the exterior surface. In an apparent cost cutting move, the company that cut the molds did not polish them so the B-36 comes with a distinct orange peel effect. This, of course, is the last thing you want to see on a model that will eventually wear a natural metal finish.

Step one requires the sanding and polishing of the fuselage and wings mirror smooth. The wings with the nacelles and the other lumps and bumps will take some time. This step will also remove some of the engraved surface detail, which in my opinion needs some reducing. It can be argued that in 1/144th scale there should be no panel lines.

Assembly starts with a cockpit consisting of a floor, consoles, three seats and a pair of control yokes. Take it from me; all of this becomes virtually invisible under the extensively framed canopy. Next come the wings and propellers.

Props are two-piece affairs with the spinners and blades attached to a hub. The fit is not great. Eliminating the seam requires careful filling and sanding on a tiny curved area around the fragile propeller blades. By the time you get to the sixth one, you'll be an expert. (And perhaps build nothing but jets for the next few months.)



Steps three and four are assembly of the nose gear and wheels, which present no problem, but the nose gear doors are presented with some strange asymmetric tabs on the front. None of my limited references showed this on the real airplane. Step five is assembling the fuselage halves together. Fit is good, but there's no mention of the need for weight in the nose.

At this point I deviated from the instruction sequence and fitted the turret cover pieces in place. (I'm told the early version comes with turrets? This jet-podded version does not.) Not surprisingly the covers didn't exactly click into place over their openings. The same is true for the separate bomb bay door piece also added at this point.

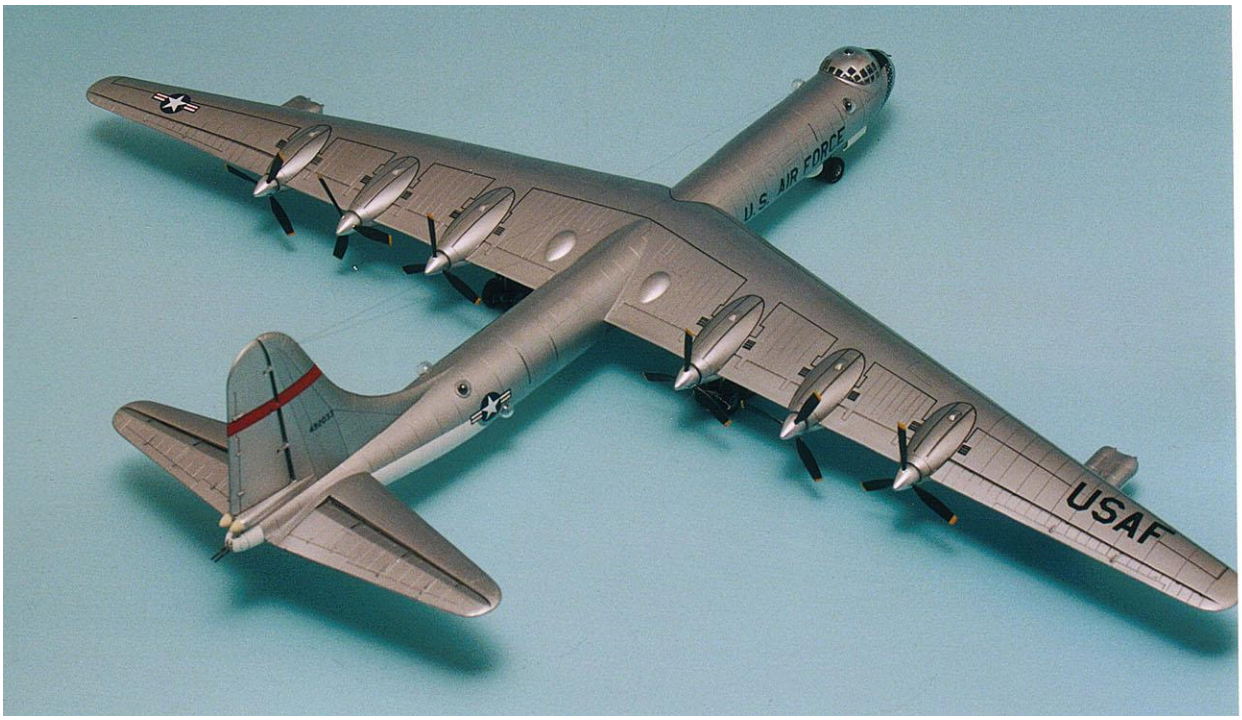
With fuselage built, I added the separate rudder and horizontal stabilizers. The fit is acceptable. Next came the wings. I was told that in test shots this was a perfect fit. I had some work to get my wing to fit into the fuselage cutout without a noticeable step up top. I ended up spending some time and gap filling super glue smoothing everything out. And of course, due to the natural metal finish, the key word throughout the project was "smooth".

With the basic airplane built, I stuck the jet pods together. The intake and exhaust end caps are slightly bigger than the center section. If I ever build another Hobbycraft B-36, I'll consider a very thin shim between the pods
top and bottom pieces. The pylon to pod fit required some filling.

The main landing gear assemblies went together with no problem and the portion of the gear strut that mounts in the wing are keyed with flat sides that should prevent you from putting left gear into right wing and vice-versa.

Retraction struts are shown in the simplest of forms in the instructions and I could not understand where or how they were supposed to go. Fortunately I have a Monogram 172nd scale B-36 and their instruction sheet made clear what to do with these pieces. The two-piece doors are molded as one and must be separated for a "gear down" configuration.

I could not figure how the strut door fit, nor did photos of the real thing provide much of an answer. I can only assume these are largely inside the inboard engine nacelles when the gear is lowered. I simply left them off the model. The wheel doors have a pair of holes through them and one would assume they would correspond to pins on the gear struts. (One would be wrong.) I filled the holes with sections of stretched sprue and glued the doors in place flush against the gear struts.



The clear parts are a challenge to fit. The gun sighting blisters have flat bottoms that are to fit on a curved fuselage. Rubbing the bottoms of the blisters on a big half-round file achieved a much better effect. The canopy and bombardier's lower nose is not a

click fit. And they are framed. (Boy are they framed.) How to deal with this micro framing will have to be a judgment call by the modeler.

I masked the canopy framing with Tamiya masking tape and cut out the framing with a fresh scalpel blade. The lower nose seemed too intricate to apply the same treatment, so I painted it free hand. Choosing the path of least resistance, I went with the kit decal sheet for markings. Two options are provided. One is a terribly plain all silver number while the other has a white bottom and a red stripe across the tail. I chose the latter. The back of the box provides all the marking info, and it isn't very clear where the white undersurfaces should be. Monogram's instructions came to the rescue once again.

The decals are very good. Colors and registration are spot on. All the wing walks are provided and this is a blessing. (Walkways for the stabilizers shown on the Monogram kit are not provided.) I spent about an hour and half applying the walkways. Trimming the clear film as close as you can to the inside of the curved stripes going around the engine nacelles will pay dividends in the end.

Black decal stripes are supposed to indicate the bomb bay, but these were too long. I ended up marking mine with masking tape and a soft lead pencil. Red warning stripes often seen around the jet pods are not provided.

I didn't worry about accuracy of outline of the kit. It looked very good to me, although I wondered about the droop of the wings. To show one in flight accurately, one would have some tricky work to do here, I think.

As can be seen by the images, a nice B-36 model can be coaxed out of the kit, but it will probably take more than a weekend. Mine took 32 hrs. which were many more than anticipated