

Tamiya 1/35 Cromwell by Mike Winters

Added March 2009



Winner, Best Armor special award sponsored by **Halby Marketing**

Hobby Expo 2009

February 21, 2009

On more than a few occasions the modeling tail wags the dog. Such was the case with my Cromwell tank--its inspiration was found in the old Tamiya kit of two German bicycles.

To cope with an episode of modeler's burnout a couple of years ago, I broke out the bikes and an Aber photoetch detail set. Soon I was lost in the uber-retentive world of Aber, almost succeeding in using every single piece of the very extensive photo-etch detail set. Now I had two handsome bicycles in need of a home. With tail in hand, where was the dog?

American soldiers shun bikes like they shun tropical khaki shorts. I decided it's a Limey thing. The two-wheelers called for Commonwealth armour. Deep in my stack of someday kits I found a venerable Tamiya Cromwell.

It seems only a short time ago that Tamiya represented the apex of model manufacturing. We've since been spoiled by Dragon, Tasca and others, yet a Tamiya model still provides good value and a sound starting place for a great project.



Aftermarket Suprises

I opened the Cromwell box and discovered I had bought two photo-etch detail sets and Fruilmodel tracks for the kit. Armed with all the right tools and an inexhaustible trove of spare parts in various boxes I was good to go.

The articulated track set would allow me to pose the tank in a real-world setting of mud and obstacles. First thing, I repositioned a couple of the road wheel arms to show them climbing over uneven terrain. Another early stage move--mud on the chassis. I love the natural look of mud clinging to the suspension elements and hate when I forget and try to add it later. So, with putty mixed with Testor's liquid cement and dirt, I spattered up the chassis then finished the suspension.

Construction was simple, aside from scraping away all the handles and replacing them with photo-etch and scratch materials. Assembling the intricate latches and hardware provided by Aber can ruin your eyesight but the finished product looks impressive.

The model was painted with Polly Scale acrylics, sealed with Future, then enhanced with generous washes of oil paints blended with Gamsol, an odorless mineral spirits sold at Riley Street and other arts vendors. Gamsol blends the oils but will not attack the underlying coats of paint and Future.

I'm very fond of the filter/wash technique. Using every color of oil paints known to man I can give a monotone tank a range of subtle color variations that look like real-world weathering.



Vendors Come Through Again

The markings come from a book I bought from a vendor at one of our Hobby Expos, held each February in Petaluma. (British Armoured Fighting Vehicles 1940-46 Vol. 3) I chose to paint on the stars, as decals would have difficulty conforming to the uneven surface of the turret. I cut the required shapes from Frisket masking material.

Painted markings mesh much better with the weathering process. Weathering consisted of the oil paint filters mentioned above, pin washes of thinned oils, smudges and dusting with pigment powders, and moderate paint chipping with pencils and paint. I didn't go entirely Spanish with the

chips as current fashion would call for.

Weathering is a time of right-brain freedom, akin to making mud pies in childhood, and probably the real reason I like building armor.

Left Brain, Right Brain

Now it was junk-on-the-trunk time. I added tools, bedrolls, nets, boxes, bottles and the bicycles to give my Cromwell that lived-in look. Here, keep in mind what it would look like on the real vehicle, how everything would drape and hang.

Apoxie Sculpt, available at Hobby Town and elsewhere, makes great bedrolls. I also used dental x-ray foil folded into fabric-like shapes. Oils paints over Mr. Surfacer produce the most realistic finish on fabric pieces.

Pioneer tools received a coating of pigments mixed with Gamsol to simulate dirt; Tamiya clear orange paint provided the wood grain pattern for handles. Wine bottles from some old after-market set litter the deck. My girlfriend, whose left-brain thinking balances out mine, noted that the bottles needed a fluid level so I tried to show that with Tamiya clear green.



Save Your Nylons

A helmet hanging off the turret, topped with a square of nylon stocking to represent camo net, turned out very well. Ultracast, the excellent Canadian company, provided the tank commander and the flimsy cans. I built the rack for the cans from old PE set frames allowing me to nicely dent and bend it. Armorscale supplied the nicely detailed, 75mm barrel.

Final weathering was added using pencil lead on exposed metal surfaces (I overdo it) and linseed oil to show wet patches in the mud. The hedgerow cutter up front benefited from dirt, linseed oil, and weed roots that mimic branches.

It's fun to turn a decent, older kit into something that really shines. Vintage Tamiya kits can be had for a song and make a fine canvass for improvisational modeling.

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