ACADEMY'S F/A-18C HORNET

Finally, an all-new big-scale kit of the do-all fighter

By Larry Schramm Photos by Jim Forbes and William Zuback

Academy's F/A-18C Hornet comes in a huge box containing 18 sprues of medium-gray plastic parts and one clear sprue. The kit also includes metal landing gear struts, screws, rubber tires, and a screwdriver. Total number of parts: 827! Don't be alarmed though; you'll use barely half of them, **1**.

Lotsa options. Let's run through all the options that contribute to the "wow factor." Academy includes parts for two cockpits: seats, instrument panels, sticks, and throttles – obviously, a two-seat issue is coming.The boarding ladder can be posed up or down, and the wings can be folded. Extra parts are provided for the folded version.

A spotlight is included for Canadian, Swiss, Kuwaiti, and Finnish aircraft, but no markings for them are provided. More options include opened or closed afterburner nozzles, different under-nose grille setups, IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) antennas, an openable speed brake, fin reinforcers, seated and ladder-climbing pilot figures, two deck-crew figures, engines, drop tanks, and loads of ordnance.

The decal sheets are striking, with markings for the VFA-192 "World Famous Golden Dragons" (two variations), and the flag-nosed CAG (Commander Air Group) bird from VFA-146 "Blue Diamonds," the Hornet I modeled, **2**. A huge decal sheet is dedicated to the ordnance alone, **3**. There are even decal options for the deck-crew "float coats" – survival jackets. The 40-page instruction booklet contains a history, 52 assembly steps, parts maps, and paint and marking guides.

Controls. The separate trailing-edge flaps can be posed in any of four positions (deflections of 0, 20, 30, or 45 degrees), with eight hinge parts per position. That means 32 hinge parts but only one set of eight will be used. If you choose any of the drooped positions, there are also flap extension rails to be installed. Leading-edge flaps can be deployed, the hori-

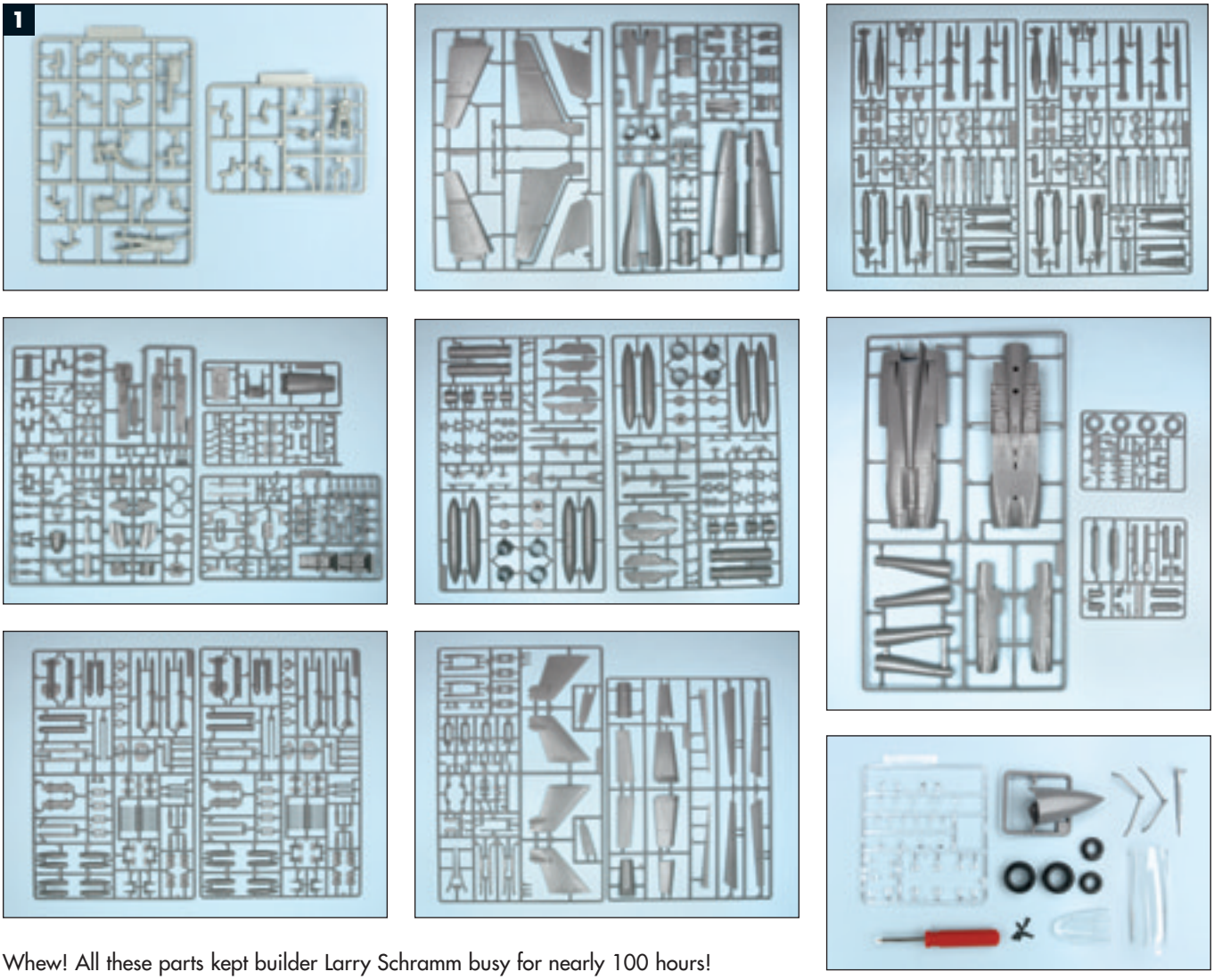
The bigger the better? In the case of Academy's 1/32 scale Hornet, yes!

zontal stabilizers are movable, and the rudders can be posed in any position.

Ordnance. Academy provides (scale) tons of ordnance, including six AIM-9L/M Sidewinders, four AIM-120 AMRAAMs, and two AIM-7F Sparrows, along with four 330-gallon drop tanks. For air-to-ground missions, you can use a pair of GBU-31 JDAMs, two GBU-10 Paveway II and two GBU-24 Paveway III laser-guided bombs, and two AGM-84D Harpoons (with the option to make the extended AGM-84E "SLAM"). There are eight Mk. 82 500-pound "dumb" bombs with optional parts for fuse extenders and "Snakeye" retarding fins, four AGM-88 HARMs, and four AGM-65E Mavericks. To guide the weapons, Academy has molded AN/ASQ-173 LDT/SCAM, AN/AAR-50 TINS, and AN/AAS-38 FLIR pods, and all the launch rails and pylons needed to carry the loadouts.

The ordnance accounts for a whopping 443 parts – that's more than half of the parts in the kit! That's not bad news, as

Kit: No. 2191
Scale: 1/32
Manufacturer: Academy, imported by Model Rectifier Corp., 80 Newfield Ave., P.O. Box 6312, Edison, NJ 08818, 732-225-2100, http://modelrectifier.com
Price: $150
Comments: Injection-molded, 827 parts (metal gear strut cores, assembly screws, optional rubber tires), decals
Pros: Excellent detail, many options, huge array of ordnance, excellent fit, good decals
Cons: A few assembly glitches, seat harness is simplified



Whew! All these parts kept builder Larry Schramm busy for nearly 100 hours!

the extra ordnance can be used on other 1/32 scale models!

Start at the front office. The detail on the separate instrument panel and console is outstanding, **4**. The seat is good, too, although the harness is simplified. You can pose the nose open to display the complete radar array, **5**.

The detailed nose gear well attaches to the underside of the cockpit tub. Detail and fit are superb throughout. The nose gear strut with its metal core is a model in itself, comprising 21 parts if you use the rubber tires or 23 parts if you use the plastic parts. I chose the plastic tires so I could flatten them for a more realistic set.

The instructions show installing the gear strut in the wheel well before joining the forward fuselage halves, but I left mine off just so it wouldn't get in the way. However, doing that caused some trouble inserting the aft strut, part No. G36, into its locating cradle within the wheel bay. I had to trim the locating pins on both sides of the strut to get it to slide into place. No big deal; once it's in place you can't see it anyway. The strut fit is snug and nearly self-aligning.

When I enclosed all of this in the forward fuselage halves, I didn't use cement or the screw at the rear of the fuselage. I'll explain later.

The intake trunking and engines, **6**, are enclosed in the rear-fuselage halves. Academy provides basic engines, but you can't see them once they're buried in the rear fuselage. Two screws are provided to secure the upper and lower fuselage halves but I didn't use them; the fit is so snug they weren't needed.

Step 9 talks about joining the upper and lower wing halves, but to fold the wings, I skipped to step 36 before completing all the work in step 9. I cut the inner and outer wing sections apart along interior recessed lines, **7**. More parts are added to create the piano-hinge effect, but I had to file between the "fingers" of the hinges to get everything to mesh, **8**.

The cut edges of the main wing top halves have to be thinned so all the parts fit snugly. I didn't glue the folded sections in place yet; the joints were weak and more work on the model was only going to invite breaking them.

After the sides of the rear fuselage section were glued on, I attached the forward fuselage. Here's why I didn't glue the rear portion of the forward fuselage assembly: I had to spread this area just a touch to get the forward and rear fuselage assemblies to line up. I ran a bead of super glue around the joint for strength and to fill a few tiny seams.

The intake lips and splitter plates fit nicely with the intakes, but the splitter plates don't reach the inner fuselage. I glued

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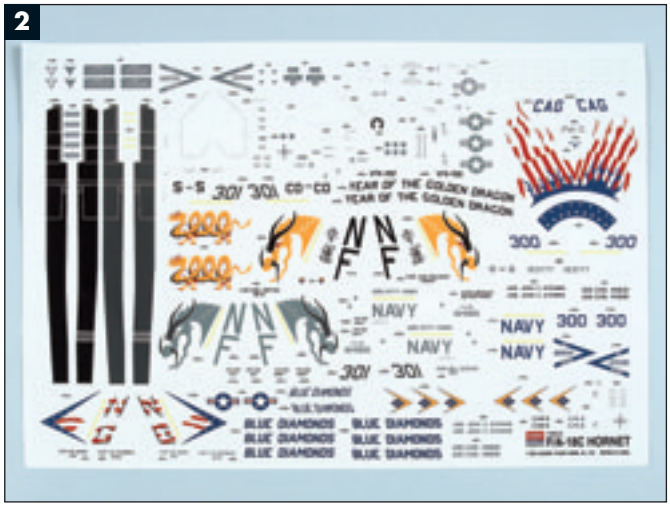
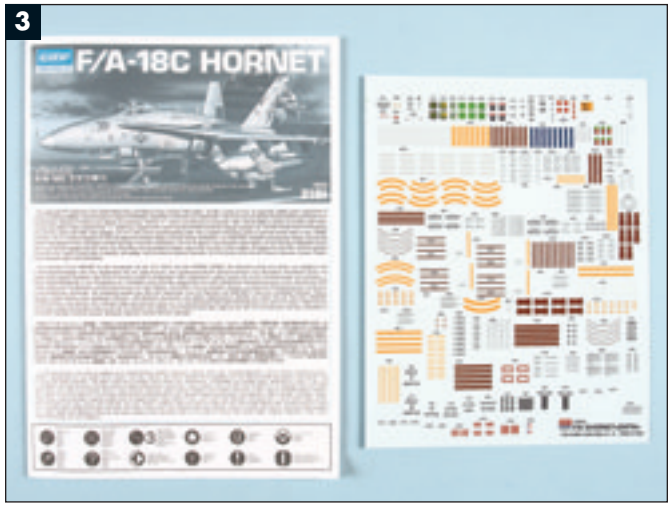
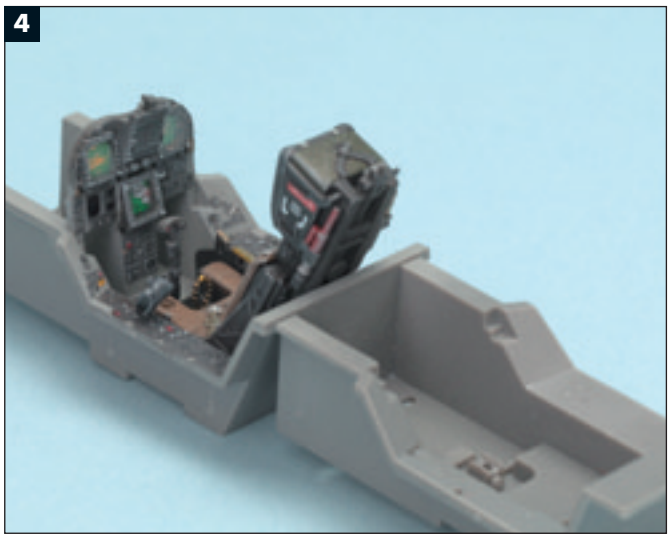
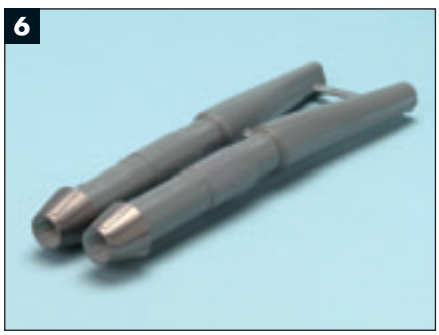
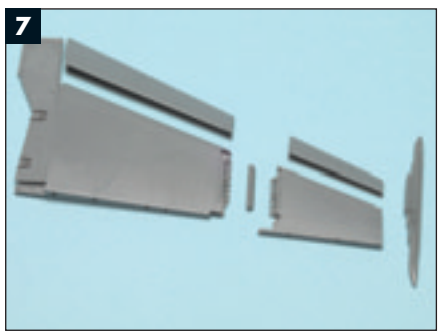
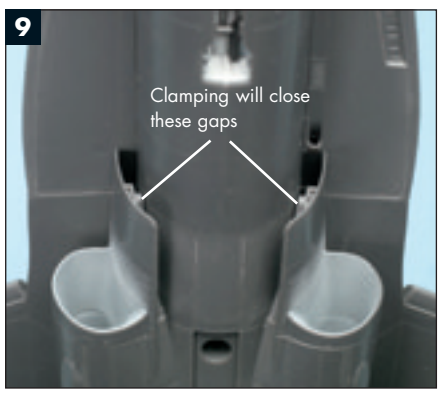












2 The colorful decals are well-printed and went on without trouble.

3 A separate sheet is provided just to mark the ordnance. The instruction booklet has 40 pages.

4 The cockpit has great detail and hints of a two-seater for the future.

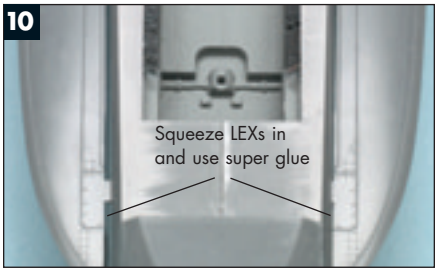
5 The finished radar set slides in and out of its compartment in the nose.

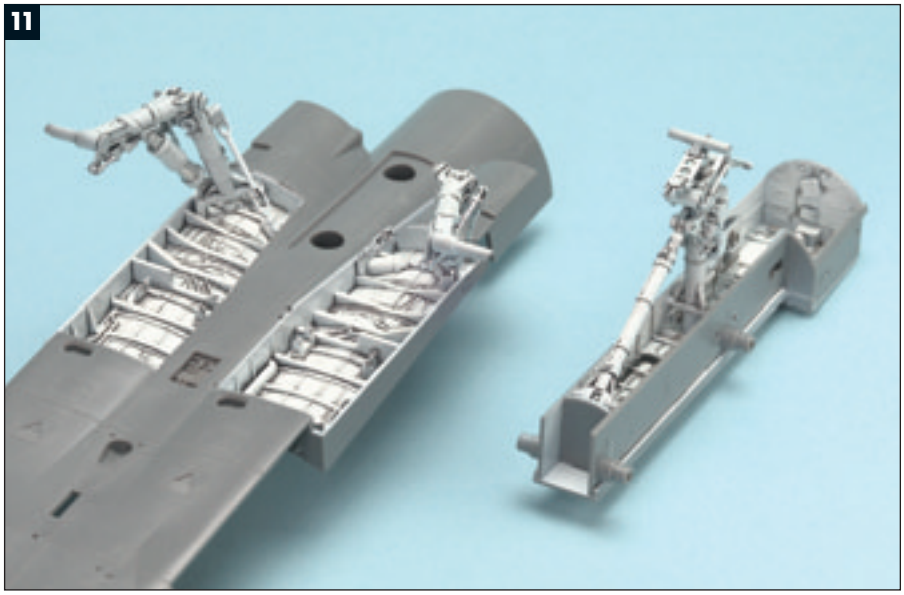
6 The basic engines and intakes will be hidden inside the rear fuselage.

7 For the folded-wing option, you must cut away the outboard panels and insert hinge detail.

8 The finished folded wing looks right but is fragile.

9 One assembly problem is getting the intake splitters to reach the fuselage.





10 The gap between the LEXs (leading-edge extensions) and the fuselage must be closed.

11 The complex landing gear of the Hornet is perfectly captured by Academy.

12 The 45-degree dropped flaps will collide with Sparrow missiles unless the flaps' corners are trimmed.

13 The bottom view shows the fold-down boarding ladder, extended radar, and just a little bit of the ordnance selection.

14 What can we do to put you in a Hornet today? How about lots of ordnance!

them to the intakes first, and when they were completely cured, I carefully clamped the splitters to the front fuselage and cemented them, **9**. Watch out for the tiny splitter braces (parts B30A and B30B). If you take your time and let all these steps dry completely, you'll eliminate the need for filler. Patience.

LEX Luthor. I had a little problem attaching the leading-edge extensions (LEXs) – the "chines" – to the fuselage, **10**. If you try to glue the back edges and the inside joints at the same time, you'll end up with gaps. I glued the back edges first and let them dry completely, then pushed the LEXs in along the fuselage and used super glue so I wouldn't have to hold, tape, or clamp the parts. Super glue secures everything fairly quickly. If you take your time, you'll once again avoid using filler.

You're probably saying, "let this dry – let that dry – doesn't that waste a lot of time?" Not really; there were plenty of extras on this model to keep me busy while subassemblies set up.

She's got legs! Anyone familiar with the complexity of the Hornet landing gear realizes this is a potential molding quagmire. Well, Academy nailed it. Each main strut breaks down into 17 parts, including the cast-metal core (for strength). The parts are keyed and pegged male and female. Including the plastic tire halves, wheels, brakes, and retracting struts, each main gear assembly comprises 25 parts. They all fell into place with minimal adjustment required. And when I plugged them into the wheel wells, they fit nicely and lined up well, **11**.

By the way, if you choose to model the VFA-192 Golden Dragons bird, bright yellow is the correct color for the main-wheel struts!

Final assemblies. The only other problem I ran into was that the trailing-edge flaps in the full-down, 45-degree position interfere with the Sparrow missiles on the fuselage launch rails, **12**. There are three fixes: Use the 30-degree hinge set, leave the missiles off, or cut away more of the flap corner.

So many weapons, so few pylons. Academy provides a loading chart for the huge array of weaponry. Some of the ordnance is not typically carried by Hornets these days. For example, fuse extenders were commonly used in the Vietnam War but are rarely seen today. I studied photos of Hornets in action that showed realistic loads and mounted a couple of laser-guided bombs, one HARM, one SLAM, and a center-line gas bag. I also installed Sparrows on the fuselage mounts, and 'Winders on the tip rails, **13**.

I built all the ordnance just for show, **14**. There were no assembly problems, but some of the decal stripes that go around the bodies of the missiles weren't long enough. Extra stripe material is provided to solve the problem, though. I had to use a little white glue to persuade the stripes to adhere to the slender missiles.

Patriotic markings. I couldn't resist the flag-nosed CAG bird. I was surprised that a few slices with a blade and a good dose of Micro Sol were all that was needed to get the decal to conform to the compound curve of the radome.

This is a gorgeous kit: Great detail, gobs of features, excellent fit, and loads of appeal. Because of the number of parts and complexity of some of the assemblies, I recommend it for modelers with as few years of experience. I spent 95 hours on my model, including building and finishing all the ordnance. You won't find a better Hornet model in any scale. **FSM**

Academy's Hornet has everything including great looks.