TRIPLANE tips

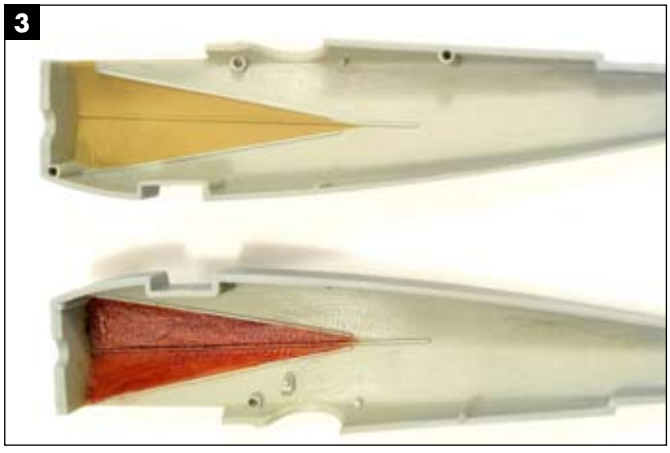
An easy-to-make jig ensures perfect wing alignment

By Kevin Kuster

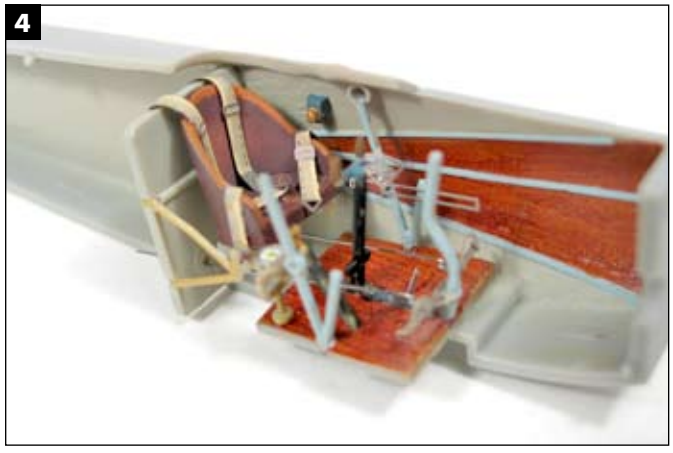
Have you ever wondered why you build plastic models? I know, I know … it's fun. Take a moment and look beyond the "it's fun" answer and think about what really motivates you. I sometimes have a hard time answering that question, and whenever I can't, I tend to keep my distance from the hobby room. However, on this particular build (Dragon's 1/48th Dr. I) I knew exactly what was motivating me.

I think it's running a little hot! Kevin's first Dr.I met its end in front of a space heater.

The kit's seat is pretty basic straight from the box, so to add a little detail, Kevin sculped a cushion using Aves Apoxie Sculpt.



Simulating wood grain can be tricky. Here Kevin has brush-painted raw-umber paint over deck tan to simulate the fuselage's wooden structure.



The completed cockpit. Careful detail painting and piano wire help bring things to life.

Running a little hot

While trying to rush the drying time of a previous Fokker Dr. I (Ltn. Rudolf Klimke, Jasta 27), I melted the entire plane and nearly committed hara-kiri with my hobby-knife blade, **1**. (In case any of you are wondering, drying oil paints with a portable heater so you can apply your decals quickly is not recommended!) While I was staring at my melted mess and trying to get over my anger, my wife walked up to me and said, "It actually looks pretty cool. Besides, you can always build another one." As always, she was right and I now had my modeling motivation. I would rebuild it … better … stronger … faster! Well maybe not faster, but I'd definitely try to do better on my next attempt.

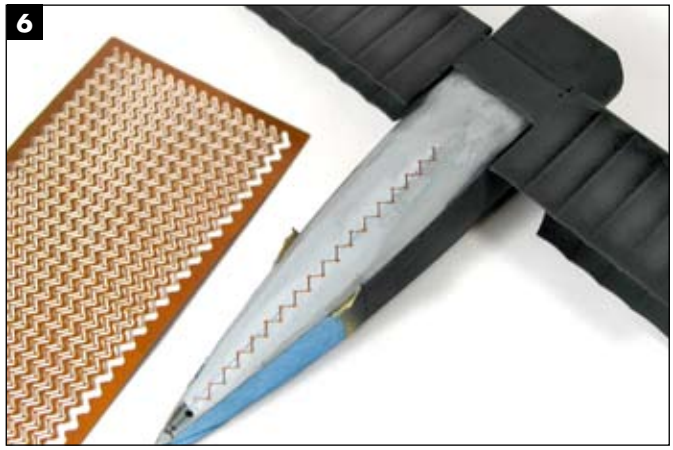
Tri, again

Since Dragon's 1/48 Dr. I can be hard to find, my friend Mike Laxton was gracious enough to quickly send me a replacement so I could get right back to the bench. (I think the fee for Mike sending me the kit was his non-stop laughter after I told him how I melted my previous attempt.)

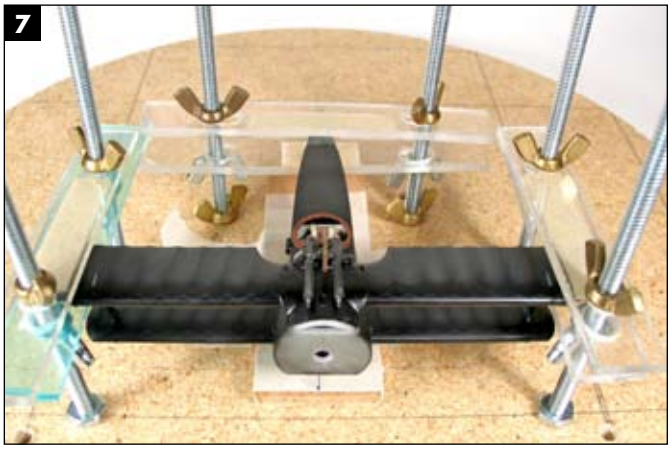
I started the cockpit by adding Apoxie Sculpt to the pilot's seat to create a seat cushion, **2**. Then I sprayed the entire fuselage interior with Tamiya deck tan (XF-55). Any wood areas such as the fuselage panel and floorboards were painted with Tamiya desert yellow (XF-59) and brushed with raw umber to create a subtle looking wood grain, **3**. Once the oils were dry, I painted all of the details with a variety of Vallejo paints and used .006" piano wire for the internal wiring, **4**. With the fuselage halves attached, I created a new engine-access panel out of plastic stock and glued on an Eduard photoetched gas cap, **5**. Parts from the Czech Republic make excellent photoetched stitching that I applied to the underside of the fuselage for a little extra touch of period-correct detail, **6**.

Although the lower and middle wings went on without any fuss, I created a jig (made from 4" screws, wing nuts, Plexiglas strips, and a wood base), **7**, to help hold the upper wing in place for positioning and gluing, **8**. With the addition of a little Blue Tac to hold the spreader bar in place, the jig will even work upside-down to help align and glue the entire undercarriage, **9**. All of the rigging was done with .006" piano wire and I added some Parts photoetched turnbuckles and control horns for detail.

After closing up the fuselage halves, Kevin made a new engine-access panel from sheet styrene and added a photoetched gas cap.



The distinctive zig-zag stitching is an aftermarket photoetched part from Parts in the Czech Republic.



Kevin's inexpensive, easy-to-make parts jig makes it a whole lot easier to line up and assemble the aircraft's wings.

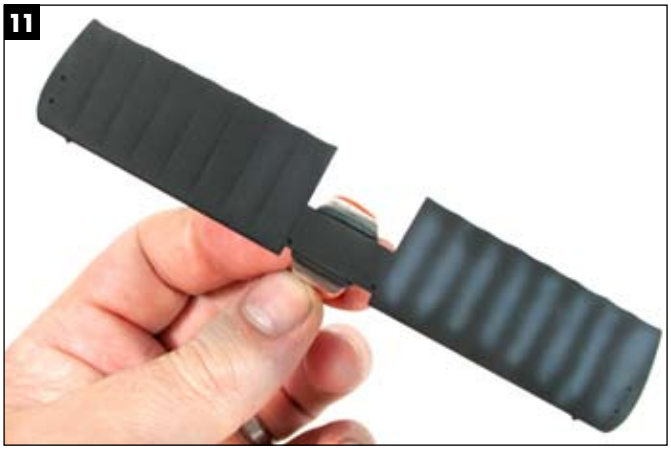
With the parts aligned properly, Kevin applied super glue using a large sewing needle. Cut off the top of the loop and it will hold a tiny amount of glue.

Now that's a sturdy jig! Kevin flipped the model and jig upside-down to apply glue to the landing gear.

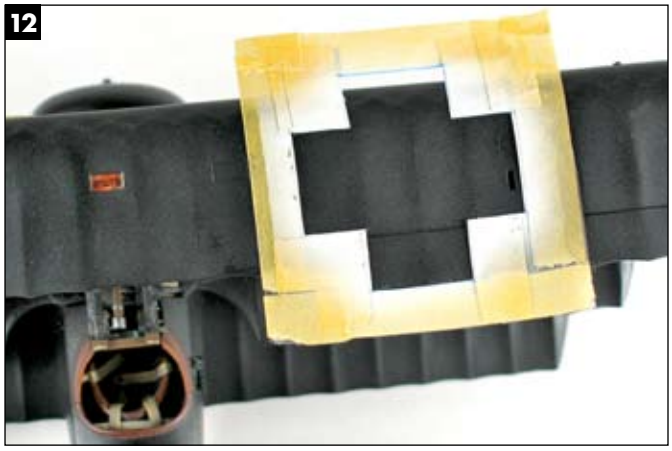
After getting the company's permission, Kevin reproduced one of Eagle Strike Productions' Flying Circus emblems.

Markings

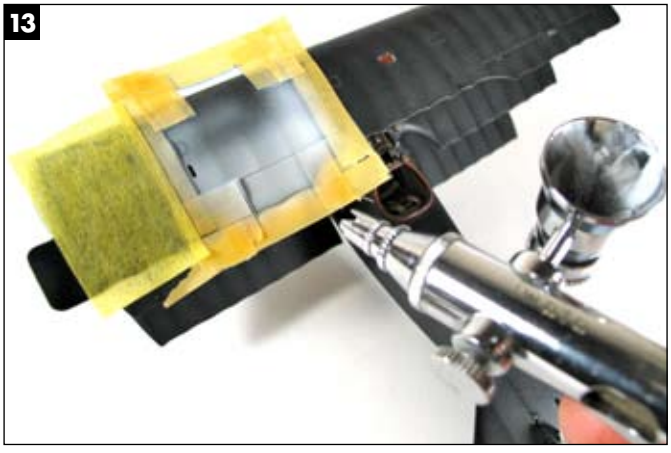
Since the provided decals were such poor quality and design, I opted to use Eagle Strike Productions' Flying Circus decals for the Fokker DVII. Not knowing that the decals made specifically for a DVII fuselage would be substantially larger then that of a Dr. I, I found myself in a tough spot. Not wanting to violate any copyright laws, I called the owner at Eagle Strike and asked him if I could scan his decal sheet, reduce the size and make my own decal to fit. Thankfully, he agreed. This might sound a bit extreme, however, the artwork on the Eagle Strike decal sheet is outstanding and I knew that without strong artwork, the all-black plane just wouldn't look interesting.



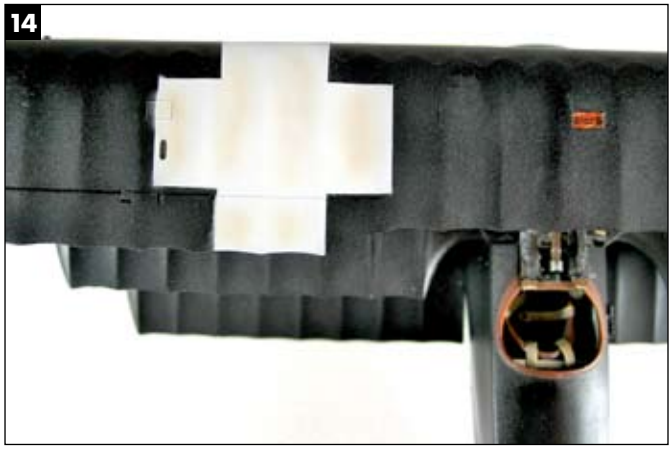
Kevin painted the wings flat black, then used dark-gray paint to highlight the ribs and bring depth to the monochromatic scheme.



Kevin used Tamiya masking tape to mark off the emblems before airbrushing. A carefully cut mask can be used more than once.



Tamiya's acrylic flat white was opaque enough to cover the flat-black wing. Kevin airbrushed it on in thin, multiple coats and let the color build up.



A little carefully airbrushed Tamiya buff dirtied up the white crosses.

Having never made any kind of decal before, I didn't really know what to expect and didn't know if I could pull it off. Fortunately, Bare-Metal Foil makes an easy-to-use clear and white decal sheets for laser printers. Since most of the "God of Wind" design on Josef Jacob's plane is white (and most printers don't print white) I knew I needed to print on the white decal paper (No. 125). Whites are traditionally created by the absence of color and are created by the white of the paper itself. Once I got the best-possible print, I sprayed the entire sheet with several light layers of MicroScale's liquid decal film to give it a protective coating, **10**. After drying overnight, I carefully trimmed out two of the best decals. I also cut slightly into some of the colored areas to eliminate as much of the white edge as possible.

The entire plane was sprayed with Tamiya black (XF-1) and each panel highlighted with Tamiya dark sea gray (XF-24). Highlighting between each wing strut and panel gives the illusion of the plane's internal structure, **11**. Once everything is highlighted, I highly recommend spraying a slight mist of black (20 percent paint mixed with 80 percent thinner) over each of the highlighted areas to create more subtle highlights.

All of the crosses were created with Tamiya tape, **12**, sprayed with white, **13**, black, and a touch of Tamiya buff (XF-57), **14**, for weathering. A few small local pin washes of Van Dyke brown artist's oil paint mixed with Turpinoid were applied to the wheels and undercarriage for weathering. Finally, the entire plane was sprayed with Humbrol clear flat for a dead-flat finish.

The all-black Dr. I looks great with its custom-made "God of Wind" emblems in place. Kevin printed the markings at home using his computer.

Although I had originally planned on rebuilding Rudolf Klimke's plane to replace my melted masterpiece, I ultimately decided that I had already climbed that mountain and needed a new modeling challenge. I can now say I have two totally different and "cool" looking Fokker Triplanes in my collection. **FSM**