

TANK

techniques &

Basic armor modeling skills are all you need

BY GLENN BARTOLOTTI

Sometimes it's nice just to build something. When I picked up Italeri's Carro Armato L6/40, I decided to eschew aftermarket products and use only what was in the box (which even provided a little photoetched metal to detail the light tank).

Alignment

Some armor kits come with the lower hull molded as a single part. But Italeri chose to make the L6/40's hull from four flat components.

It fits well, but it's important to pay attention to the alignment of the major components. A slight deviation at this stage is magnified as construction progresses, causing parts not to fit. So, take your time, dry-fit, and double-check any less-than-positive fits before finally committing glue to plastic.

I didn't have any major problems with the L6/40's hull, and I fit the interior parts at this stage before painting. It's basic, but it looks good, **1**.

Wheels

Building the rear idler assemblies, I discovered the part numbers were mislabeled in the instructions – another reason to check fits before gluing, **2**. When I attached the idlers to the hull, I was very careful about how they lined up, checking references to be sure they were right. It is important that they line up because the kit's link-and-length tracks are designed to fit a certain arrangement, **3**.

The suspension builds up in two units on each side. This arrangement allows for articulation but, because I was using the kit's link-and-length tracks, I wanted all of the wheels, from the idler to the front road wheel, level. Ensuring that I had the right parts and dry-fitting them helped. I glued Part 23A last to make sure it lined up, **4**.

I clipped the long runs of tracks from the sprue to ensure the wheels lined up, **5**.

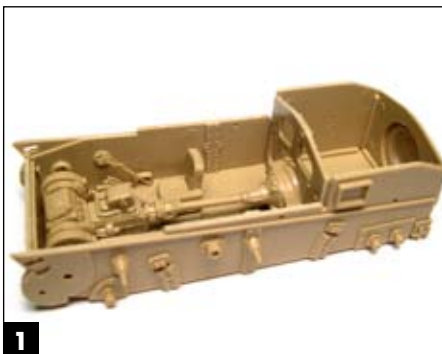
Tracks

When working with link-and-length or individual-link tracks, I glue a side's entire

run together first, then wrap it around the wheels. This may seem more difficult than dividing the runs into sections, but experience has taught me I get straighter runs doing it this way.

I assembled the runs according to the instructions, but added a few links at the end; it's better to take off extra links than to come up short, **6**. (I'm glad I did, because I needed 21 individual links rather than the 17 called for!) With the links pushed together, I brushed Testors liquid cement (the stuff with a pink label) over the back of the track run, letting the glue flow into the gaps between the links. Then I let the glue dry for about five minutes until it was tacky enough to hold the links together but still flexible.

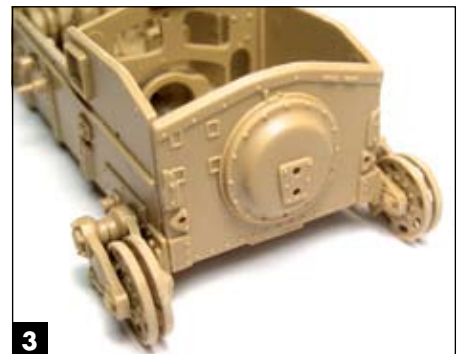
When I started to wrap the tracks around the running gear, I discovered a problem: The drive sprockets' teeth were too big for the corresponding holes in the links, and the spacing was off. To make a long story short, the tracks wouldn't fit on the sprockets.



1 Glenn made sure the four-part hull of the little Italian tank squared up. A misalignment this early in a build can cause big problems later.



2 Dry-fit twice, glue once: While putting together the idler assemblies, Glenn discovered the parts were mislabeled in the instructions.



3 When building a tank that will sit on a shelf, it's important that all of the road wheels touch the ground. Glenn made sure the idlers were positioned correctly before gluing.

tips



This may discourage some builders from using the kit tracks and/or drive sprockets in favor of aftermarket items. My solution, while less elegant, works well and is largely invisible: I cut the teeth off the sprockets wherever the tracks touched them, **7**.

After that, the tracks needed a little maneuvering to look right. But I'm happy with the results, **8**.

I feel tracks make or break an armor model. I attach them before painting so I know they are glued on well and look right. Some modelers question adding tracks this early, especially when it comes to getting paint into all the nooks and crannies. My theory: If you can see it, you can paint it ... well, kinda. First, I airbrush everything I can. Then, I apply controlled washes and let thin paint run around the road wheels to cover color shortfalls. Weathering washes

and pastels blend everything together, further disguising any unpainted areas. If I built a factory-fresh tank, my finishing style would not work.

Upper hull

After gluing the fenders to the lower hull, I assembled the superstructure. Once again, test-fitting showed that the upper hull didn't quite fit. I had to sand the edges of the section marked on the fenders to get a snug attachment, **9**.

I masked the interior and airbrushed it

Glenn is known for his detailed models and well-built dioramas, but his straight-from-the-box build of Italeri's 1/35 scale L6/40 shows his foundation in good, basic modeling skills.

flat white, **10**. If more of the fighting compartment were visible on the finished model, I would have airbrushed shadows and highlights. This tank is tiny, so I left the interior alone (except for picking out details and a little pastel weathering), **11**.

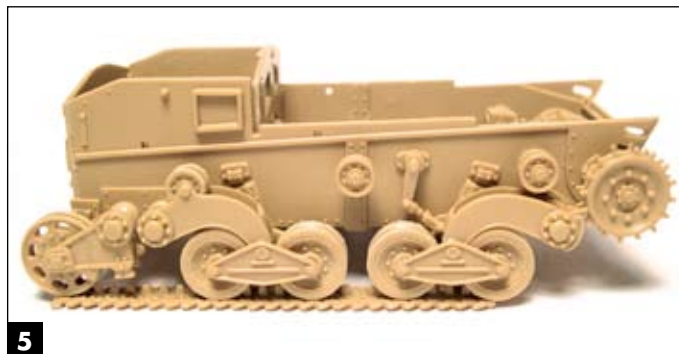
After gluing the upper hull in place, I attached the photoetched-metal details and other equipment, **12**. References are handy for positioning details when instructions are vague. I used Mr. Surfacer to eliminate minor gaps between subassemblies.

The kit's engine hatch clasps (parts 6B)



4

Italeri's clever design makes it possible to animate the L6/40's suspension. Glenn wanted his straight, so he test-fitted everything before adding glue.



5

A handy alignment jig? Glenn uses the kit's continuous bottom link to ensure that the wheels touch the ground and are aligned, front to back.



6

Glenn glues one side's entire track run with slow-setting liquid cement and lets it set for about five minutes, then attaches it to the model.



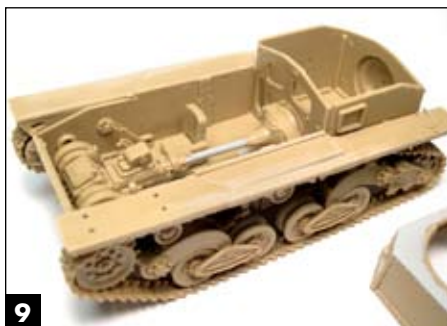
7

When Glenn discovered that the drive sprocket teeth were too big for the tracks, his simple solution was to trim the teeth.



8

Modifying the sprockets made it easier for Glenn to install the tracks. He prefers to attach them early in the build to ensure a good fit.



9

Glenn filed the sponson locator on the fenders to produce a tighter fit between the upper and lower hulls.



10

To minimize scraping and sanding of future mating surfaces, Glenn masked the edges of the hull components before airbrushing them flat white.



11

Rommel-approved! With very little of the interior visible from outside, Glenn painted details and added a little pastel weathering. It's just enough to look OK when the turret is off.



12

After assembling the major parts, Glenn added the kit's photoetched-metal details and brushed on Mr. Surfacer to hide gaps.

were out of scale, so I replaced them with fine wire, **13**.

Turret and gun

The turret assembled easily and, although the details were Spartan, Italeri included nice touches, such as bolt detail inside the turret.

The gun came in two parts; I damaged the barrel removing it from the sprue, so I replaced it with a piece of styrene rod, drilling out the muzzle and flaring it slightly

with a metal needle to replicate the original, **14**. After painting, the turret was complete, **15**.

Painting

I sprayed the model with Model Master gray enamel primer, then airbrushed Model Master Afrika braun (No. 1012) lightened with a little white. After a coat of Model Master clear gloss I applied kit decals for the Italian North African tank, then sealed the decals with a coat of clear flat.



13

Unsatisfied with the kit's over-scale engine-cover clasps, Glenn replaced them with short pieces of fine wire.

I painted the road-wheel tires with a black wash and painted the tools, **16**.

The figure has a Tamiya body with an Italian tanker head from Hornet.

I thought the kit's headlight lenses were too small, so I replaced them. First, I glued aluminum foil inside the light, **17**. Then I filled the light with tacky glue, a thick PVA adhesive used for crafts, **18**. It dries clear, looks very realistic, and is cheap, **19**.

Weathering

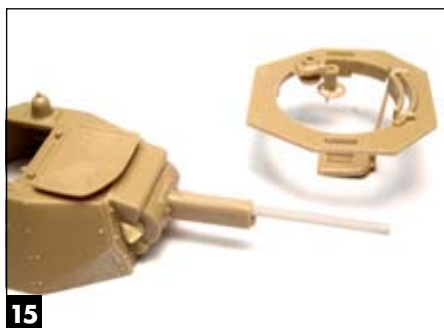
I use pastels and artist's oils for weathering.

The pastels are cheap, art-store sticks ground to a powder with a file. I mix them with odorless turpentine and apply them selectively as a filter, not over the entire vehicle.



14

After damaging the gun barrel, Glenn replaced it with styrene rod, drilled out the muzzle, then flared it with a needle to match the L6/40's gun.



15

Mounting the barrel on the turret completed major construction.



16

Glenn primed and painted with Model Master enamels, then gloss-coated before applying the kit decals to model a tank in North Africa.



17

The kit's headlight lenses looked too small to Glenn, so he replaced them. First, he pushed aluminum foil into the bezels ...



18

... then, he filled the light with tacky glue, a thick and inexpensive craft glue that dries clear.



19

Dried and weathered, Glenn's tacky-glue headlight lens looks the part.

I applied rust shades in wet glazes to the muffler and used slightly darker tones on the shovel blade.

I mixed light desert sand-colored pastels with white artist's oils and brushed on a thin layer to highlight prominent areas.

To apply a raw-umber wash, I first wet the area with clean turpentine. Then I use a fine brush to add thin paint around recesses and add streaks of color.

I never dry-brush my models. To my eyes, a dry-brushed finish looks OK from a distance – but put a macro lens on a camera and the model looks like a frosted cake. I've used this technique in the past and hate the way my older models look. I think it's easier and takes less time to add shadows and highlights with an airbrush, then fine-tune them with washes and filters.

Italeri's little L6/40 is a nice kit that builds up well out of the box – and sometimes that's just what the doctor ordered. A build like this can be the perfect antidote to Advanced Modeler's Syndrome, and a great way to practice the basic skills every model requires. **FSM**

www.FineScale.com

For a description of the technique Glenn used to join the link-and-length tracks, visit www.finescale.com/Videos/How To and view "Assembling individual-link tracks."



Weathering with oil washes and pastels finishes the L6/40. Glenn spent about a month on this out-of-the-box build.