

Dassault Mirage 2000C

History: Marcel Bloch, who had made a name for himself as a designer of first class aeroplanes before World War Two, returned to the field after spending the German occupation in the resistance with a new name, Marcel Dassault. In the 1950s his company designed and produces one of the world's great fighters of that time, the Mirage III, which was adopted around the world in a plethora of versions and colour schemes. The Mirage IIIO, which was produced in Australia by the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, served with the RAAF for two decades and is still remembered fondly.



In the 1960s Dassault moved on the Mirage F.1 which also proved extremely popular and then, in the 1970s, began development of the next generation fighter for the French Air Force. By the mid 1970s, however, governments and air forces around the world were becoming concerned about the escalating weights and costs of new generation fighters and the idea of the light-weight (and reduced cost) fighter became very popular. One outcome was the General Dynamics F-16, another the McDonnell Douglas F-18, and in France the Air Force abandoned plans for its new fighter and asked Dassault to instead develop a new light-weight high performance interceptor/fighter. Dassault returned to the delta wing platform of the Mirage III which offered a good compromise between structural simplicity, light weight, high speed and rapid acceleration because advances in avionics after the Mirage III meant that many of the problems of the delta platform (high landing speeds for example) could be overcome.

Within 27 months of project launch the first Mirage 2000 flew on 19 December 1975 and the first Mirage 2000C entered service with the French Air Force in 1984. Since then the Mirage 2000 had been sold to several foreign air forces but has never been as popular or widely adopted as the F-16 which has roughly equivalent performance. France has adapted a two seat version as their long range nuclear bomber and in the 1990s developed a more modern version, the Mirage 2000-5 which has also entered service in France and overseas.

Data: *Engine* 1 SNECMA M53-P2 turbojet of 6 560kg (14 462lbs) thrust. *Wing span* 9.13m (30ft). *Length* 14.85m (47ft 1in). *Maximum take-off weight* 20 860kg (45 950lbs). *Maximum level speed* Mach 2.2. *Internal armament* 2 DEFA 554 30mm cannon.

The kit: Airfix 1:72

It's got to the stage that when you buy a kit these days you really never know where it has come from. This kit may, for all I know, be an Airfix original or it may be from Heller but boxed under the Airfix label. Who knows? It has the feel of an Airfix kit - detailed but not to Japanese levels, well moulded but not as crisp as later kits, generally accurate but a bit vague (if you know what I mean) in some places when compared with the plans. By this I mean that I really should have gone to some trouble to do something about the cannons because they are only impressions (in the Monet sense) of the real thing but I was too slack to remedy then because they hide under the air intakes where nobody will ever see them. The decals are ho-hum and the instructions aren't exactly inspiring. I was not too impressed with the instruction sheet which is also too vague in places and incorrect when it comes to painting instructions. Talking of painting, the colours are described only as Humbrol numbers so, having used all the Humbrol 64, 128 and 144 paints that I'm ever likely to use I can pass them on to anyone else contemplating making a Mirage 2000. But if I was you (or I was me thinking of making another Mirage 2000C) I'd probably go and get a better, more modern kit than this one to work with.

Not that I could really complain too much about this kit, but then I'm easily pleased. It does, after all, give you a finished result that looks like a Mirage 2000C. Here are some pointers though, if you are thinking of using this kit. The plastic is very soft and things like antennae and nose probes tend to fall off the first time you brush them. I had some trouble getting the fuselage and wings to mate properly and ended up doing a fair bit of work and using some filler to blend the two together smoothly. There are some raised panel lines that need to be sanded off



(rescribing them in this soft plastic might be a bit of a worry) and there are some odd lumps and bumps that need to be smoothed down to match the smoothness of the original aeroplane. The kit comes with two kinds of air-to-air missiles which are a bit blobby.

I usually don't put underwing armament on my models. I thought this was because making them took up too much of my valuable/scarcely modelling time but I learned there was another reason for my approach that I must have forgotten in the mists of time. Because I quite like the look of Matra Magic missiles I went to some trouble to make them look a bit sharper with plenty of scraping, filing, filling and filing again. The end results didn't look too bad but as soon as I held one of them in place I saw that it detracted from the beautiful lines of the aeroplane itself, so into the spares box they went. By then it was too late to do anything about the wing pylons but they don't look too bad.

This past year or so I've taken to scanning all the pictures I can find of a model I'm working on to my hard disk and calling them up when I need to look at them. It saves having to keep piles of reference material around and lets me look at details very easily. Valma tells me that this is not entirely a good thing because all the reference material will be inaccessible if the computer breaks down or there is a power blackout. Ho, ho, what do women know about things like that! So I put on the base grey colour and started masking for the darker blue-gray... You remember that power blackout we had a few weeks back, that's when I decided to do it and since I couldn't look at the reference material I'd put on the hard disk I decided that I'd use the colour diagram on the instruction sheet instead... Such is life.

Even so, it's a lovely looking model but that's mainly because the original is so elegant.