

Miles Master III

History: The development of high performance fighters during the second half of the 1930s created a need for trainers in which pilots could learn to handle them. In Britain the Miles company began work on a high performance trainer powered by the Rolls Royce Kestrel engine. The Royal Air Force was not interested at first but Miles went ahead with the project as a private venture and the prototype flew on 3 June 1937. Very soon the Master prototype demonstrated a maximum speed only 15 miles an hour less than the Hawker Hunter that was entering RAF service, with similar handling characteristics. The Air Ministry ordered the trainer on 11 June 1939, but with a lower powered engine so its maximum speed was 70 miles an hour slower than the prototype. Even so, the Master was the most impressive trainer in the world at that time with a top speed of 226mph.

The first Master I flew on 31 March 1939 and as they came off the production line they were put into service, training fighter pilots and enabling a smooth transition from trainers to front-line Hurricanes and Spitfires. 900 Master Is were manufactured but the Air Ministry became concerned about the dwindling supply of Kestrel engines and ordered development of a new version powered by the 870 hp Bristol Mercury radial engine. The first production Master II flew on 8 April 1941 and 1748 were produced by 1942. They served initially with Advanced Flying Units and later from Glider Training Schools. Large numbers went to South Africa and the Fleet Air Arm and smaller numbers to the USAAF in Britain, the Royal Egyptian Air Force, Turkey, Ireland and Portugal.

The Miles Master III was ordered when the Air Ministry began to run out of stocks of Bristol Mercury engines. The new version was fundamentally the same as the Master II but fitted with the Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp Junior radial engine of 825hp. A total of 602 Master IIIs were produced, serving mainly as trainers for the RAF.

The relatively good performance of Master saw up to 24 Master Is fitted with six machine guns because of fears that the supply of front line fighters would be exhausted during the Battle of Britain. Another version of the Master was the Martinet, a target towing version that was also vital to pilot training. A total of 3227 Miles Masters were produced, making it the most



significant British trainer to serve during the war. Their daily training function made little impression on the public imagination but made a significant contribution to pilot training that was vital to the overall war effort.

Data: (for Master Mk.II) advanced trainer. *Engine* one Bristol Mercury XX nine-cylinder radial piston engine of 649kW (870hp). *Wing span* 10.85m (35ft 7in). *Length* 8.99m (29ft 6in). *Maximum take-off weight* 2528kg (5573lbs). *Maximum speed* 389km/h (242mph). *Range* 632km (393miles). *Armament* provision for one fixed forward firing machine gun and practise bombs.

The kit: Eastern Express 1:72

One thing you had to say for the old Frog company, they didn't worry themselves too much about making kits of aeroplanes that only the real aviation enthusiast knew anything about. In an age when most kits were sold to youngsters who had yet to realise there was a difference between a Bf109E and a Bf109G, a kit of the Miles Master was right at the edge of the known universe. But in those days, when kits were still relatively inexpensive, it didn't hurt to spend a few bob on the kit and so I, along with thousands of other kids, ended up with a model of the Miles Master. Even in those dark, forgotten days, this kit was obviously not one of the better ones. There was virtually nothing in the cockpit, the mouldings were coarse and there was plenty of scope to practice the use of filler.

So why, decades later, make another Miles Master from exactly the same moulds but now in a box with Russian writing on it. Frankly, I have no idea what possessed me to choose it out of all the much better kits waiting their turn to be made. The mouldings are as uninspiring as I had remembered but the Eastern Express decal sheet was quite good with options for a couple of RAF examples and an Irish one. The only trouble was that there was nothing in the instruction sheet about colours and markings. But, with stoic determination, I plodded on, perhaps only out of dedication for the few dollars I had spent on the kit at a swap & sell.

There is plenty not-to-like about this kit. The mouldings are fairly accurate but there is nothing in the large cockpit, the cooling grill on the engine looked more like something that came off a frill-necked lizard, there was a strange gap under the nose where an odd bit of plastic for



the air intake and exhaust pipes went, the wheels looked like a couple of doughnuts, the cockpit canopy bears only a passing resemblance to the real thing and ... I could go on. There is a Pavla kit of the Miles Master these days and if you really want a model of the Miles Master that is probably what you should be using. Try and off-load your old Frog version at a swap & sell and pick up the new Pavla kit instead. I haven't seen

what's inside the box, but I'm sure it must be a vast improvement on the old Frog kit.

But I stuck at completing what I had started. Some improvements included painting the entire cockpit interior black - I seriously contemplated scratch building something for the cockpit but fortunately was unable to turn up any information about it and so didn't have to bother. Another improvement was sanding off the cooling gills and scribing new ones. There was nothing to be done about the cockpit canopy, short of making a new one, and it was the fact that the canopy would always look wrong that stopped me from investing more time in the project to improve other parts of the kit.

As for the colour scheme and decals. After searching around for something in the various photos I could find, I decided to make something resembling one of the many Masters that had flown with the Flying Training Schools. It doesn't look too bad, but don't look too closely.