

Adventures in Plastic Surgery: SAAB 17A

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The SAAB 17 was originally designed as a light bomber and reconnaissance aircraft. Its design was started in 1937, and the first prototype flew in 1940. It was the first “own” design of the new company named Svenska Aeroplan Aktiebolag (= Swedish Aircraft, Inc., SAAB for short). Over 300 aircraft served in the Royal Swedish Air Force, and later the Imperial Ethiopian Air Force acquired 47 aircraft. In the 1950s several Swedish aircraft were transitioned to target-towing duty. The Swedish military “outsourced” this function to a private company Svenska Flygtjänst (Swedish Flight Service); two of those target tugs (of the 17A variant) were eventually sold to Finland where they served in 1959–1961. Characteristic of the SAAB 17 are its large streamlined landing gear doors, which also functioned as dive brakes!



Marivox has produced a decent 1/72 scale kit of the SAAB 17, accurate with respect to shape and dimensions, at least according to the plans in [Andersson 1997, Keskinen 1972, Karlström 1986]. The kit is “over-engineered” in the sense that it allows one to build any version of the SAAB 17 (three engine/cowling choices, land-

ing gear choices of wheels, skis or floats, equipment for bomber or target tug). Parts fit well, except that I had to use fair amount of putty to fill the seam between the fuselage and the wings. Surface detail on all major parts is very subtle (engraved lines, etc.).

Cockpit details are good enough given the style of canopy and how much is visible through it. The canopy itself is fairly thin and after a dip in Future floor wax turned out to be very good; it also fits very well. I masked and painted it in stages: first the latitudinal frames, then the longitudinal ones, airbrushing several coats at each stage. This turned out to be easier than cutting little rectangles from masking tape.

The under-fuselage target towing equipment was not usable so I scratch-built those items (the actual winch cable “outlet” as well as the guard rail in front of the tail-wheel). The wind-driven winch equipment on the right hand side of the canopy was usable, except that the rotor itself was a bit too crude; I had to thin the blades somewhat. Note that images in [Laukkanen 2008] show the rotor to actually be a bit crude in the real aircraft.

Other details that had to be added or replaced were tail-wheel doors, certain struts in the main landing gear, a whip antenna in the tail, and the antenna wire between the tail and the mast on top of the canopy (I used monofilament fishing line). I also added navigation lights on top of the rear fuselage and in front of the tail-wheel using small drops of superglue; the wingtip navigation lights were fine and merely needed some paint.

The Finnish Air Force color scheme is a good match with Model Master Insignia Yellow. The flat enamel variety of this paint covers very poorly, and many, many coats were needed. I had to mix my own version of the brownish-reddish color that was used for the chevron in the tail (a symbol for target tugs) and the front fuselage anti-glare panel—note that [Keskinen 1996] gives the FS 595 numbers for this and the yellow.

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For masking large areas (like when painting the anti-glare panel and the tail chevron), I placed the model in a zip-loc bag, cut the bag to expose some parts of the plane, and taped the edges with masking tape. This technique worked well and saved lots of time (and masking tape).



I used the decals from the kit's huge decal sheet which provides numerous Swedish (military and civilian) markings, as well as Danish, Finnish, Austrian and Ethiopian markings. Decals are very accurate although a bit on the thick side. The decal sheet gives a tail number for the Finnish "SH-1", but since I wanted to build "SH-2" I took the "2" from an old Tally-Ho sheet of Finnish Air Force markings. The black anti-slip material on the wing came from the Eagle Strike P-39 decal sheet. Also, the red stripes on the white tips of the propeller blades came from some old scrap decal sheet. Future floor wax and Testors Glosscoat were used for the final finish.

Note that Jyrki Laukkanen's new book on the IL-28 in Finnish Air Force service [Laukkanen 2008] also describes earlier target tugs used in Finland, and contains some absolutely terrific pictures of the SAAB 17s, some even in color.

Some References

- Svenskt militärflyg - Propellerepoken (Andersson); Allt om Hobby 1992
- SAAB Aircraft since 1937 (Andersson); Putnam 1997
- SAAB Aircraft (James); Archive Photographs Series; Chalford Publishing 1997
- Svenska Flygvapnets Bomb-, Attack- och Torpedflygplan 1926-1986 (Karlström); Flygplansritningar 3; Allt om Hobby 1986
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- Suomen Ilmavoimien lentokoneet 1939-72 (Keskinen et al); 1972
- Suomen Ilmavoimien maalaukset ja merkinnät (Keskinen et al); Apali 1996
- Iljushin Il-28 in Finnish Air Force (Laukkanen); Suomen Ilmavoimien lentokoneet 4; Apali 2008
- Aeroplane Monthly July 1996, December 1997
- Air Enthusiast #33, #119
- Flying Review November 1967

