

The Unlimited Air "Critical Mass" - Kit review

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Unlimited Air Racer Series No. 2 "Critical Mass". 1/72 kit, containing 5 resin parts, 28 metal parts, a solid clear canopy. Decals included. Produced by **Unlimited Air Models, 221-1-203 Higashimiyuki-cho Ohyama, Toyohashi, Aichi, 440-0843, Japan, e-mail QZQ10130@nifty.ne.jp.** Available from **HobbyLink Japan, Tatebayashi-shi, Nishitakane-cho 43-6, Gunma, 374-0075 Japan; Phone: + 81-276-80-3068, Fax: + 81-276-80-3067 (<http://www.hlj.com>, directly to the kit: <http://www.hlj.com/cgi-local/hljpage.cgi?FNMFU-02>).** Price JPY 9800 plus postage.

I reviewed the first kit from Unlimited Air, the Dago Red, in BT#6. This kit is of a similar very high standard. The basic airframe consists of the five resin parts: a one-piece fuselage, a one piece wing and the vertical and horizontal tail surfaces. They are cast in a medium-grey, soft, rather styrene-like resin. A couple of the parts had a slightly frosted surface that would benefit from a light sanding with a fine grade polishing stick. I found two little bubbles in the tip of one stabiliser, but otherwise the casting was perfect. Some filler will be needed, especially around the lower wing/fuselage joint and the base of the fin, but assembly should be no problem. A couple of rather prominent mould joint lines along the fuselage sides have to be sanded off. The surface detail is recessed and razor-sharp. The landing gear wells are a bit shallow and simplified, but perfectly acceptable if you are not the superdetailing type. There is no engine detail, but the engine is invisible on the real plane.

The metal parts are simply superb - sharp and without the slightest trace of bubbles or porosity. The propeller blades are among the best I have seen - of scale thickness and correctly twisted. Even the intake splitter plates are provided, almost to scale thickness. Some location holes have to be drilled for the spinner, propeller blades and landing gear legs. There are no location pegs for the landing gear doors, but the instruction sheet shows where they should go. The landing gear retraction rods must be added. A couple of the parts, like the exhausts and the leading edge intakes, should be attached to the main resin parts before they are assembled.

The kit contains no interior detail at all, just a box-shaped hole. The instruction sheet gives a couple of photos and a drawing of the instrument panel, so the information is mainly there if you want to add it. However, if you do, you will have to replace the kit canopy. This is the only real disappointment of the kit - it is not hollow, but a solid lump of clear resin with a slightly frosted surface,

including the canopy itself and the surrounding parts of the fuselage. It can be polished to a glossy surface, but it will still not look right, since the refraction of light in a solid piece of clear material is different from a hollow shell. On top of that, it does not fit well, but has to be trimmed at the front to match the fuselage. In my opinion the canopy has to be replaced. The fuselage parts around the canopy can be hollowed out with a power tool, and if you are very careful you can probably saw off the clear part and use it as a plug for drawing or vacforming a replacement.

The decal sheet, which depicts the 1996-1997 pre-"Taco Bell" versions, looks superb. It is printed in five colours and includes a very good representation of the "Tasmanian Devil" logo. All trim is supplied in two versions, either complete with both the black and the white, or with only the white trim, for

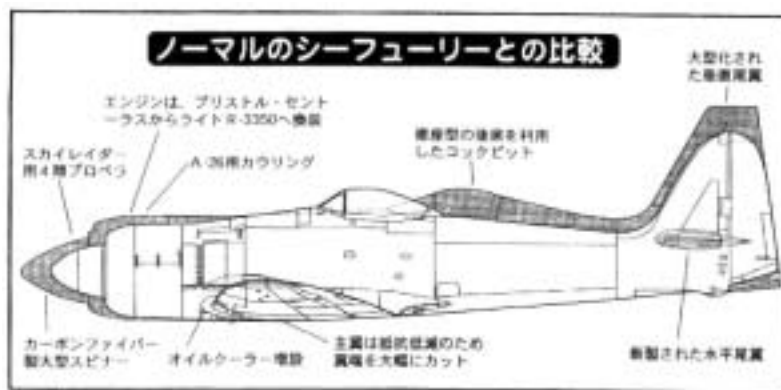
those who want to paint the black areas. You even get a decal for the "Danger - Radiation" remove-before-flight pitot cover! The "electron traces" around the fin race numbers are missing, but they are hardly visible on photos of the real plane. The instrument panel decal is wrong, the panel should be white or possibly very pale grey.

The instruction sheet is in Japanese, and that is a pity for those of us who do not understand that language. It is completely professionally produced and contains a complete history of the plane and a lot of other information. All the information that is necessary for building the model is translated to English, though, such as the really complete paint instructions - did you know that the red colour is 1964 1/2 Ford Mustang "Poppy Red"? A superb set of drawings is also included, as well as eight monochrome photos and one colour photo.

Conclusion

You will have noticed that I have used the word "superb" several times in this review. This not by accident - the whole kit, from the full-colour box top, through the separately bagged resin and metal parts to the decals and the instruction sheet simply oozes of quality and attention to detail. However, I think a kit of this price should include some interior detail. I also think the choice of canopy material is unfortunate - most modellers probably prefer a vacformed canopy.

It is an expensive kit - it costs four or five times as much as the High Planes kit of the same plane in the same scale (reviewed in BT#8). Is it value for money? That question can only be answered by a person who actually pays for it, but apart from the canopy and the interior, the

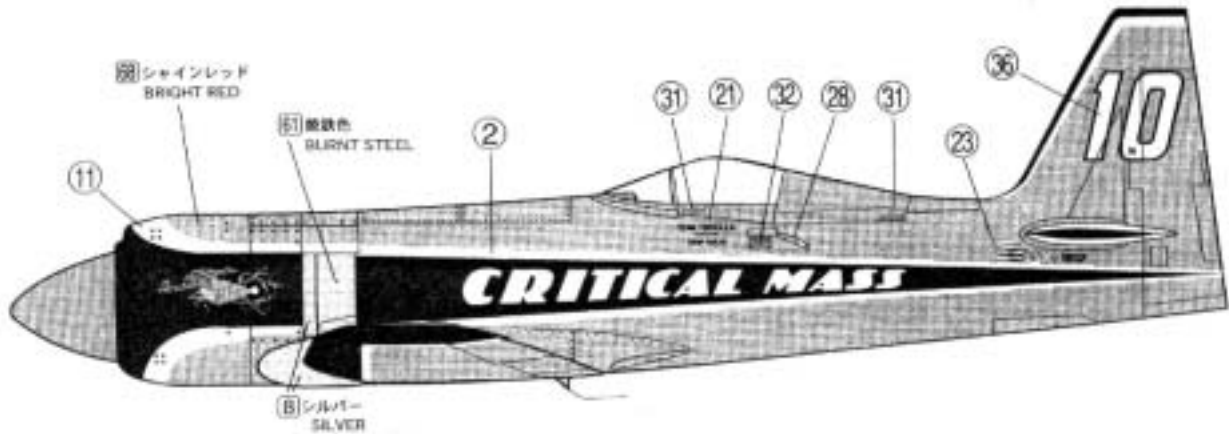


kit is better than the High Planes kit in most things. I perhaps prefer the more discreet surface detail of the High Planes kit, but I know that is a matter of taste. On the other hand I prefer the sharper exhaust and outlet detail of the Unlimited Air kit. One kit is resin and the other is plastic, if that matters to you.

The shapes and dimensions are pretty similar, so both companies have obviously done their homework. The Unlimited Air kit has a slightly longer and slimmer fuselage and a narrower, and I think more accurate,

cowling inlet scoop. The extended wing root inlets are narrower on the Unlimited Air kit, but I don't have an opinion on which is the more accurate.

There are two big differences. The first is ease of construction - you will probably be able to assemble the Unlimited Air kit in a third of the time required to build the High Planes kit. The second is that if you buy the Unlimited Air kit you will get a good-looking box and a superb instruction sheet with photos and good drawings - and that feeling of expensive quality!



Drawings from the kit instructions

A big thanks to Naohiko Kamiya of Unlimited Air Models for the review example!