

The LF Models 1/48 Verville-Sperry R-3 – Kit review

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LF Models kit No. 4807 "Verville-Sperry R-3". 29 resin parts, vacformed windshield, decals included. Produced by **LF Models, Gagarinova 10, 787 01 Šumperk, Czech Republic** (www.lfmodels.cz, phone/fax: +420 583 221282, e-mail: lfmodels@lfmodels.cz). Available in the USA from **Joe's Models, P.O. Box 81, Verona, NJ 07044** (e-mail: joefrancesco@comcast.net, phone +1 973 2397682).

LF Models have released a couple of 1/72 racer kits before, but this is the first in 1/48. The US Army Verville-Sperry R-3 is a very interesting choice - the Pulitzer Trophy races is a neglected area and the R-3, with its cantilever wings and retractable landing gear must have been an incredibly exotic plane in the beginning of the 1920s.

History

Three R-3s, designed by Alfred V. Verville, were built by the Lawrence Sperry Aircraft Co. in Farmingdale, Long Island. The first example made its first flight on September 24th 1922, just three weeks before the 1922 Pulitzer Trophy race. All three planes were entered, with race numbers 49 (pilot: Lt. Eugene Barksdale), 50 (pilot: Lt. St. Clair Streett) and 58 (pilot: Lt. Fonda Johnson). Barksdale finished a disappointing fifth at 181.2 mph. Johnson had serious engine problems and nursed his overheating plane to seventh place before the engine seized solid during the landing. Streett had to drop out on the last lap due to a broken oil line. The race was won by a Curtiss R-6 biplane, powered by the superior Curtiss D-12 engine. At the 1922 races the olive drab R-3s were powered by Wright H-3 380 hp V-8 engines driving wooden propellers. They were equipped with twin Lamblin "lobster-pot" radiators below the wing centre-section. The wings had wide-span ailerons and square tips. One of the planes set a 500 km world speed record at 167.8 mph (270.060 km/h) on March 5th, 1923, flown by Lt. Alex Pearson.

Before the 1923 Pulitzer Trophy one of the planes was re-engined with a twelve-cylinder 450 hp Curtiss D-12 and equipped with wing surface radiators. In order to cure some control problems the aileron size was drastically reduced and the wing tips rounded. A last-minute modification program saw the wing profiles of the wings being modified to solve torque roll problems. A Reed aluminium propeller was fitted and wheel covers

were added to the landing gear. The plane was still olive drab and carried race number 48. After the start of the race it turned out that the propeller, which was fitted one hour before the start, was seriously unbalanced. Pearson had drop out because the vibrations were unendurable.

Before the 1924 Pulitzer race the only remaining R-3 was equipped with a high-compression 500 hp Curtiss D-12A engine. The aileron shape was changed again and the plane was repainted silver with race number 70. In 1924 the Pulitzer era was coming to its end - only four planes were entered and competition and development was not as intense. The plane finally worked well during a race and won at the rather unimpressive speed of 215.72 mph, flown by Lt. Harry Mills. A couple of months after the race it was scrapped and burned. Although very advanced for its time the R-3 was initially handicapped by inadequate and rushed race preparations, and when it finally ran well it was past its prime, and the Pulitzer Trophy race was past its.

The kit

All the parts are cleanly cast in smooth, cream-coloured bubble-free resin. Most of the smaller parts have to be removed from rather substantial resin blocks. In some cases it can be done by scoring and breaking, but in some cases the parts have to be sanded out of the blocks almost like a vacform kit. The fuselage is split in vertical halves, which have some internal tubing detail. Otherwise the interior is rather sparse, probably because nobody knows anymore how the interior looked... It contains a floor, a seat a rudder bar, and a stick. The kit includes a paper instrument panel, which has to be glued to a plastic card panel. The cockpit opening is very small, so not a lot will be seen of the interior, but the minimum effort would be to add a seat harness.

The fuselage halves will need some filler at the joint, but nothing serious. The surface detail is in the form of recessed lines, sharp and discreet - the fabric detail on the rear fuselage is almost too discreet. I think the shape of the cowling above the cylinder head fairings is slightly wrong. The lines along the cowling are a bit convex, especially when seen at an angle from above and the side, whereas it looks from drawings and photos like they were straight. It is easy to correct, though, five minutes with a sanding stick and a flat file solved it without any problems. The "mono-trough" exhausts are depicted with what looks like fabric. This is probably a misinterpretation of the Paul Matt drawings - the exhausts should be sanded flat and a slit-like opening simulated. Four little fairings and scoops should be removed from their resin blocks and fitted to the fuselage - it might be easier to make some of them from scratch.

Some fitting and trimming will be necessary before the tail surfaces fit. They are thin and nice, but the fairing strips covering the elevator hinge lines are missing - again I believe the drawings have been misinterpreted. It will be simple enough to glue a strip of plasticard over the hinge lines. The rib detail on the horizontal tail is a bit exaggerated and should be sanded down. The wing is a

very nice, solid and straight casting. The trailing edges could perhaps have been thinner, but in photos it looks like the surface radiators made them rather thick. The strips covering the aileron hinges are also missing, and the aileron horns must be added. The shape of the trailing edges of the ailerons is perhaps a bit soft. The wing radiators are discreetly represented by scored lines, which I think looks good - it would have been so easy to exaggerate them. Again some fitting will be necessary, but the wing-to-fuselage joint will not need much filler.

The wheel "pots" are a bit shallow, but it looks in photos like the parts of the wells where the legs retract are correctly shallow. There is no detail in the landing gear wells, but it appears there wasn't very much on the real plane. There should be spanwise slots running from the centre of the circular "pots" to the fuselage centre line, where the diagonal retraction rods were pulled up into the fuselage. The inverted-V landing gear legs are also of resin, and removing them from their backing seems like a tedious job. The resin of the kit feels solid though, so it feels likely that they will be able to support the weight of the model, especially since they will be strengthened by the addition of the little fairings along the legs. The wheels were the only parts of my kit that had some bubbles. Their shape was also a bit irregular, and I think I will try to replace them with some other kit or aftermarket part. The stringer detail on the fabric landing gear covers is exaggerated, and I would suggest replacing them with scored plasticard.

The separate propeller blades are very well shaped, as well as the spinner. There are no holes or axles, so if you want the propeller to rotate you will have to do some work. The vacformed little windscreen looks adequate.

The tail skid and the stabiliser struts are the last parts of the kit.

The paint scheme is simple enough - overall aluminium dope apart from the brass wing radiators. It looks like the cowling and other metal parts were also painted, since it is difficult to see any difference in finish. The radiators will have to be painted some dull brass colour. The decal sheet is well printed and looks thin.

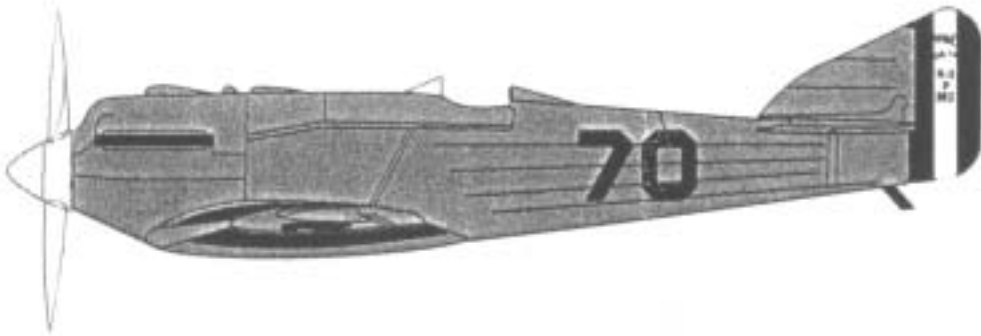
Conclusion

Despite the little shortcomings mentioned above I like this kit a lot. The casting quality is good and the surface detail is mainly good. Apart from the minor errors the kit is accurate, and the corrections will not be too difficult. It is so refreshing to see a 1/48 kit of a completely "new" subject, and I bet your WW2-era modeller friends will wonder what it is!

References

- **Thomas G. Foxworth: "Verville-Sperry R-3"** (Historical Aviation Album Volume VI, 1969) - includes drawings by Paul R. Matt, which are also published in "Paul Matt's Scale Airplane Drawings Volume 2" (Aviation Heritage, 1991)
- **Thomas G. Foxworth: "The Speed Seekers"** (Haynes, 1989)
- **Reed Kinert: "Racing Planes and Air Races, Volume I"** (Aero Publishers, 1967)
- **Reed Kinert: "Racing Planes and Air Races, Volume II"** (Aero Publishers, 1967)

A big thanks to Ladislav Fojtl of LF Models for the review kit!



The Verville-Sperry R-3 (drawing from the kit instructions)