I've known for more than thirty years that the best way to learn something is to write a story with what you think is the correct information. In my story on Cook Cleland's F2Gs (BT#41) I stated that after looking at many pictures, a photo-interpreter friend and I concluded that the tip plates of Cleland's 1949 winner were bare aluminium. That was correct, but what I didn't realize then was that we were looking at "stock" photos shot a day or two before the race so newspapers (especially the Cleveland papers) would have a photo of the winner ready for immediate publication after the race. A couple of weeks after BT#41 was printed, I received a nice letter from Mr. Adam Snelly, a SIG member and long-time member of the Society of Air Racing Historians, enclosing a modern colour photo that he'd taken of Cook Cleland and one of the actual tip plates from from #94 at the 2003 SARH symposium. The tip plate was definitely semi-gloss black, and Cleland recalled that "we painted the tips the day before – or maybe the night before – the race". That same photo clearly shows the sheet metal fairing over the tip stiffener mentioned in the Hauprich tables. With that photo as a start I then found a couple more – all taken by amateur photographers, not newspaper professionals – that confirmed a very dark shade for the tip plates, but they were all magazine or book photos. Mr. Snelly's photo was an original print and it definitely was black!

By then I already knew that my model of #94 had several errors, most significantly the taller F2G vertical tail, lack of the fuselage "stinger" extension, stock long tailwheel strut, and panel lines for the flaps. While I was contemplating building a better 1949 winner from the AvUsk kit, Special Hobby re-worked their F2G kit into the "Racer Plane" version (SH 72166) with the first two rows of a really nice resin R-4360 engine, both aircoop styles, and an optional resin "short" vertical tail. Special Hobby really did their homework; the kit includes very accurate instructions and beautifully printed decals to build any of four Corsairs flown by Cleland or Ron Puckett. It doesn't include parts for the 1949 winner, probably because it has the correct fabric outer wing panels for all other F2G's and we all now know that Cleland skinned the wings for that airplane with aluminium sheet.

Shortly thereafter XS-Models announced a conversion kit with resin and photo-etched parts and decals for the 1949 winner. In spite of saying that I'd use the AvUsk kit to build a better model of the #94, I changed my mind. The Special Hobby kit really is that much better.

I'd also been looking for something else in my collection of old magazines and stumbled on Robert McNinch's superb drawings for the #57 and #94 F2G's from the 1949 Thompson in the April 1958 Model Airplane News. Once I'd reduced those drawings to 1/72 scale the Special Hobby parts matched so perfectly that I believe they were the basis for the kit. Incidentally, I believe the draftsman had the Hauprich tables – the information in the drawings matches the table perfectly, and even includes the fairing on the tip plate stiffener. One of two errors in those drawings is the tip plate colour – they say bare aluminium!

I began by gluing the wheel wells to the lower wing half and grinding off a lot of resin from the tops until the wing halves fit together. The next step was clipping the wings. I removed 0.65 inches (47 scale inches) from each tip. XS-Models provides the small wing root coolant scoops used only on #94 as part of the conversion kit, but Special Hobby includes them too, along with well detailed wheel well inserts.
Getting rid of the fabric detail on the wings turned out to be easy. I carefully masked out the fabric surfaces and brushed on a couple of coats of Gunze "Mr. Surfacer". When that was dry I wet-sanded the areas smooth and removed the tape, leaving smooth "aluminium" surfaces. Be sure to fill all the flap panel lines and be especially sure to remove all those nicely done flap actuator fairings from the bottom of the wing. Photos confirm they aren't there— you can see them on all other F2Gs but not the 1949 version of #94.

The kit's R-4360 engine is accurate and beautifully cast; the front row has one cylinder at twelve o'clock, which makes the three bumps on the crankcase (two magneto flanking the prop governor) offset to the left a bit. I looked at lots of photos and concluded that's correct. After I completed that part of the assembly I bought the March/April 2008 Warbird Digest whose cover photo seems to show that is correct, too. Special Hobby packs a lot of resin and photo-etched detail into the cockpit; take your time here because it will all be visible through the big clear vac-form (yes, a spare is provided) bubble canopy. The engine fit perfectly but I did have to sand the edges of the cockpit floor and bulkheads a bit to get the fuselage halves to mate.

Special Hobby's soft plastic made it easy to cut the tall vertical tail and rear of the fuselage off the kit parts. Apparently they didn't make quite enough allowance for the resin's shrinkage, as the chord of the resin tail was a couple of millimetres shorter than the root left on the fuselage. I simply lined up the back of the rudder and sanded the kit plastic to match it to the resin tail. The XS "stinger" was just the opposite – slightly larger than the kit fuselage – but sanding that to size was no problem either.

Special Hobby provides the "plenum" air scoop for the 1947 winner and for McMillen's #57 as a plastic part, with a resin part for the slimmer scoop used for #94 and for Puckett's "Miss Port Columbus" in 1949, and for the restored #57. After gluing the XS photo-etched tip plates to the wings and adding the tiny stiffener, I made the "fairing" by simply filling the angle with putty.

Special Hobby is correct in that the cockpit should be Interior Green, but the inside of the cowling and firewall would have been Zinc Chromate. That issue of Warbirds International has a great interview with Dick Becker. Not only was the cockpit in the original Interior Green, but all but the basic flight instruments had been removed. For those of you modelling in larger scale, there should be a lot of holes in the instrument panel. The colour scheme is simple – everything is white. After looking at some original 8 x 10 prints in the Special Collections Archives at Wright State University my photo-interpreter friend and I concluded that the inside of the gear doors – and by inference, the wheel wells – were white. I believe that Cleland simply masked the gear struts and shot everything white. That's not the case with #57; the complex sunburst scheme required the gear to be up and the doors closed when that was painted.

I'm much more happy with this model of Cleland's clipped-wing #94. The XS-computer-printed decals are a
little thin in spots but really adhere to the model well. Look closely at photos — Cleland’s spinner necks down behind the prop blades and XS Models has this correct, too. That’s the second error in the McNinch drawings — he shows a conical spinner all the way back to the cowl.

I’d recommend the revised Special Hobby kit highly to anyone who wants to model Cleland’s 1947, 1948, or 1949 #74 and #57 F2G’s or either version of Ron Puckett’s airplane. Everything you need, including correct information, is there. You can do the #94 without the XS kit but it makes the conversion much easier — trust me, I’ve done it both ways. And the XS kit has the only decals I’ve seen for the small “B&G Spark Plugs” sponsor decal.