

# Seagull Saga



**Neil Pinchbeck** tackles the 1:48 resin Supermarine Seagull II/III kit by Silver Wings and brings us the tale of the Seagull in Aussie service for good measure.



**Supermarine Seagull II/III**

**Availability:** Hannants

**Stock Code:** 48.001

**Scale:** 1:48

**Price:** £89.50

**Recommended Minimum**

**Skill Level:** Intermediate

**Author's Additional Investment:** Minimal

**Paints Used:** Humbrol enamels and Winsor and Newton artists acrylics.

**Special Tools and Equipment:** Nylon monofilament for rigging. 0.8mm and 1.00mm steel wire (undercarriage). Fine copper wire (engine detail).



## Spooky Start

Not long after I had finished reviewing the Silver Wings 1:72 scale AD flying boat, I was sitting musing over a morning cup of coffee. I was thinking how great it would be if a kit producer like Silver Wings brought out one of these early Supermarine subjects in 1:48th. The doorbell rang and the postman handed me a parcel. Inside was this kit. Spooky, or what?

## Kit of the Century?

So just what was it that our esteemed editor had sent me and did it measure up to these day dreams of mine? The answer is a resounding "Yes!", and then some.

For someone used to 1:72nd scale resin kits, this larger than life offering is smothered in

crisp, well-researched detail, both inside and out and presents a sumptuous challenge.

A collection of small bags proved an Aladdin's cave of interior detail parts, including a stowed life raft, mooring anchor and fire extinguisher alongside the more expected seating arrangements, control column, instrument panel, chart table and a superbly detailed scarf ring and Lewis gun.

Yes, folks – this one gets my vote for Kit of the Century!

## Inside Job

One of the first things which needs to be done is to decide how to treat the interior. Does the white painted interior of the Supermarine Southampton hull at the RAF Museum, Hendon represent something which the company did on a regular basis? Or should I follow the kit instructions for a varnished Mahogany interior?

There do not appear to be any definitive references, so without spending the rest of my life in favour of White.

I think that varnished Mahogany would have made an unsatisfactorily dark working environment for aircrew and at least I am following a known Supermarine practice in part. From the modeller's viewpoint, white certainly makes an ideal backdrop for all that superb kit provided interior detail.

## Wood Grain Wonder

With the interior painted and the fuselage halves joined, I decided to tackle the painting of the hull before too many bits and pieces got in the way.

I had given some thought in anticipation of representing varnished mahogany, and the first step was to prime the

whole with thinned Humbrol matt white, to give a glow to the overlaying timber shades.

Next came the application of a coat of reddish brown enamel which I mixed myself. Brush painting is an advantage here as a little streakiness will form the basis of the wood grain effect.

With this base coat thoroughly dry and lightly rubbed down with 1500 grit wet and dry, the final coat of the wood grain effect was applied. This was done with a dark brown acrylic wash applied with a bristle brush, using about the same amount of paint as when dry brushing. With a damp tissue standing by, I was able to wipe off any areas

I didn't like and re-do them.

All of this was allowed to dry overnight, then the hull was masked and the upper surfaces of the planing body sprayed white.

#### Research Response

I am aware of recent research which challenges the received wisdom that these hulls were finished as varnished Mahogany.

This research promotes the view that Supermarine covered these hulls with canvas, which was then doped dark green. This theory rests on the interpretation of contemporary black and white photographs - never easy, particularly focusing on Seagulls in Australian service.

Whilst I am willing to accept that Australian machines, particularly later in life, were treated in this way, I do not think that the case is made that this was a universal finishing policy by Supermarine. Indeed, in the case of the wooden hulled Southamptons, this was clearly not the case.

Besides, I was looking forward to my mahogany hull far too much to accept Brunswick Green as a substitute.

#### Weighty Matters

The next job was to perch the centre section of the lower wing on top of the fuselage. The whole unit was painted silver dope (Humbrol Metal Cote Polished Aluminium plus Matt White) and the paint removed with a scalpel from the points of contact.

Here I decided to depart from the instruction sequence and tackle the

undercarriage arrangements.

One of the things that I was beginning to notice about this build was the way in which the weight of resin components adds up at this scale. You really do need the 1mm diameter wire prescribed to

fabricate the undercarriage legs and bracings.

It was also

at this point which I noticed what I believe is a minor mistake in the casting of the undercarriage retraction arms. I think the bracing fillet is incorrectly configured. It was a simple job to just "snick" off the offending piece and replace it with a piece of rod stock in the correct place.

#### Tail Tail

Time to move back now, to that imposing tail unit. The separate elevators were set at a slightly depressed angle and the whole fin and tailplane painted silver dope before being set on top of the rear fuselage.

With "N" struts both above and below the tailplane on both sides, as well as bracing and control wires, it is clear that Mitchell knew about structural engineering but still had a few things to learn about aerodynamics!

#### Power Plant

The Napier Lion engine is a treat and a kit within a kit. I had a lot of fun painting and dry brushing in various shades of Metal Cote and applying acrylic washes in oily shades, together with extra copper wire to represent the electrics.

With the engine complete and mounted on its bearer frame, perhaps the most difficult part of the build was to set this assembly above the centre section of the lower wing.

This is where a jig or at least templates would have been the order of the day. The trouble is that



there are no scale drawings from which to construct such things.

In the end, I resorted to setting the engine on a platform of Blu-Tack, which was adjusted until the various support struts were in the right position.

### Ever Upward

Once again, I decided to depart from the instruction sequence and to continue upwards by setting the centre section of the upper wing in place over the engine.

Before this could be done, the gravity feed fuel tanks have to be fitted and painted in metallic finish, rather than the aluminium dope of the canvas surfaces.

An important omission from the kit is the cross-over winch lifting cables which lived above the upper wing centre section. I supplied these from suitably twisted fine copper wire and was lucky enough to find four ring bolts in the spares box.

### Strings and Wings

I had decided to rig this model with monofilament nylon, which meant that before the wings could go on, suitable

fixing holes had to be made with a heated needle.

The lines were then fixed into the lower wings with superglue before the ends were trimmed off beneath the wings and the holes filled with correction fluid.

Once the holes were sanded flush, the underside of the wings were painted and the wingtip floats painted and attached.

The lower wings could then be fixed in place, taking care to set the correct dihedral by elevating the wing tips 8mm. from the horizontal.

The outboard interplane struts were fixed to the upper wings which were then fixed to the upper wing centre section and the struts popped into place in the lower wings.

Once again, the weight of the growing model makes it apparent why the interplane struts have brass rod cast at their centres (how do they do that?!).

### Threading Up

Time now for that lovely job of threading the rigging lines from the lower wing up into the corresponding location holes in the upper wing. Once threaded, each line was held taut with a

piece of masking tape and fixed with a drop of superglue.

By now, and with all this effort, I was hoping to have something looking like a Seagull. Instead, the thing on the bench in front of me looked more like a nasty shaving accident!

Once the line ends were trimmed and the holes filled, things began to look up, especially once the upper wing was painted.

### Stencil Struggle

Another distinct problem was presented (at least to me) by the fact that this kit comes with a set of stencils rather than decals.

From what I saw on the internet, it did look at one time as though Silver Wings intended to issue a decal sheet for the Seagull but by the time I needed them, the intention seemed to have vanished without trace.

Single colour stencils for the code numbers did not seem too much of a problem, although I was loath to apply them directly to my lovely varnished mahogany finish.

Instead, I decided to create my own decals by stencilling onto Xtradecal clear sheet.

This worked well when I used traditional brush stencilling but spraying with acrylic was a failure. What happened was that the paint formed a skin over the stencil and the open space and I was unable to remove the stencil without peeling the paint off.

I was disappointed that I had not foreseen this but consoled myself with the thought that at least it didn't happen on the model. Xtradecal white code lettering from the spare decal folder saved the day.

With the national roundels, I wasn't about to even try to get three colour stencils to align, so these too came from the spare decal folder backed by suitable circles cut from Xtradecal white sheet.

### Finishing Off

Finishing off with small items such as the Scarff ring, (I decided to omit the Lewis gun), tail wheel, and windscreens revealed the lack of a pitot head, so I scratch built one from rod stock and copper wire.

Despite the difficulties, this is still the one on the display shelf which no one can walk past. Kit of the Century!



# Seagulls at home and Down Under

Neil Finchbeck examines the history of a Supermarine type that travelled from a Solent slipway to fetch up on the Great Barrier Reef.

## Enter a Designer

Reginald Joseph Mitchell had joined locomotive engineers Kerr Stuart & Co. of Fenton in 1911 as a sixteen year-old apprentice, and studied maths and engineering at night school.

In 1917 he joined the Supermarine Aviation Works Ltd. Southampton, where his talent caught the attention of managing director Hubert Scott-Paine, and progress was rapid, to Chief Designer by 1919.

## Amphibian Evolution

From 1919 onwards, Mitchell began to turn his attention to a new type of hulled craft, the deck-landing amphibian. These machines featured a stepped wooden hull for marine operations, and a retractable undercarriage for dry land and on the decks of the Royal Navys growing fleet of aircraft carriers.

First to appear was the Sea King: a fighter project with pusher engine, exhibited at Olympia in 1920, but not ordered into production.

Mitchell kept the idea alive with the 1920 Seal: a deck landing amphibian fleet spotter, with a tractor engine format.

This time encouraging noises from the Air Ministry warranted further development and Seal N 146 became the prototype Seagull I.

Following exhibition of the type at Hendon in 1922, modest development orders were forthcoming the following year and progress continued.

The next version to emerge was the Seagull II, in which the main fuel supply was transferred from fuselage tanks to two gravity feed tanks carried in the centre section of the upper wing.

Half a dozen aircraft of this type rolled off the production line to become the equipment of No.440 (Fleet Reconnaissance) Flight of the Fleet Air Arm.

440 Flight's six Seagulls were embarked aboard the aircraft carrier HMS Eagle on her commissioning cruise to join the Mediterranean Fleet in 1924.

However, by this time the FAA and Air Ministry had decided that the need for amphibious aircraft was to be met by conventional biplanes, which could be fitted either with a wheeled undercarriage or floats, as the

occasion demanded.

440 Flight remained the only unit to use the Seagull II and by the end of 1925 it had been replaced by Fairey IIIDs.

So it was, that after a career of barely three years, the Seagull and the category of deck landing amphibian passed from the Fleet Air Arm inventory, not to re-emerge until new, very different Seagulls sporting duralumin hulls, were to appear a decade later.

## Sole Survivor?

Until quite recently, I was under the impression that there were no surviving Supermarine Seagulls of the wooden hull variety. But it seems that in the early 1970s, some hawk-eyed enthusiasts spotted the nose section of an unidentified Seagull in a garden at Fareham, Hants, where it was being used as a garden shed.

In 1974, these remains were presented to the Fleet Air Arm Museum, Yeovilton, in return for the princely sum of a new shed. In 1983, it was loaned to the Southampton Hall of Aviation, now known as Solent Sky Museum, Southampton, where it may still be seen.

## Seagulls Down Under

It has to be one of the ironies of aviation history that at the same time that the Fleet Air Arm were scrapping the Seagull in favour of the Fairey IIID, the Royal Australian Air Force were making the opposite decision.

In 1925, the RAAF ordered six Seagull IIIs to replace Fairey IIID floatplanes.

On February 6th 1926 the first machine was christened by Dame Mary Cook at a ceremony in Southampton. All six machines were crated up and set sail for the southern hemisphere aboard the steamships Nicholson and Malderia.

The Seagulls had arrived by June 1926 when No.101 Fleet Co-operation Flight was formed at Point Cook, near Melbourne.

In August, the Flight moved to Richmond, which was to be its permanent base.

Throughout 1926-27, the Seagulls worked with HMAS Moresby and joined the photographic survey of the Great Barrier Reef.

In January 1927 an additional three

ex-FAA seagulls were purchased and survey flying was extended north, to New Guinea. Since these machines all had gravity feed tanks, they were from amongst the six which had equipped 440 Flight FAA, but which three is not clear. (If you know, why not drop us a line by e-mail, or to Scuttlebutt Lodge. The author would particularly like to know if N-9647 was one of the three.)

By January 1929 Australia had built the seaplane carrier HMAS Albatross. On the 25th February, six Seagulls were hoisted aboard at Geelong. These aircraft were used for reconnaissance, spotting and shadowing during naval exercises. Seagulls were not reinforced for catapult launching and were hoisted in and out by three winches on the deck of Albatross.

When HMAS Albatross was laid up in 1932, the remaining Seagulls were transferred to the Cruisers HMAS Canberra and HMAS Australia and were eventually superseded by the Seagull V (Walrus) in 1935.

The last serving Seagull II, A9-5, was gifted to Melbourne Technical College in 1935.

## Model Subject

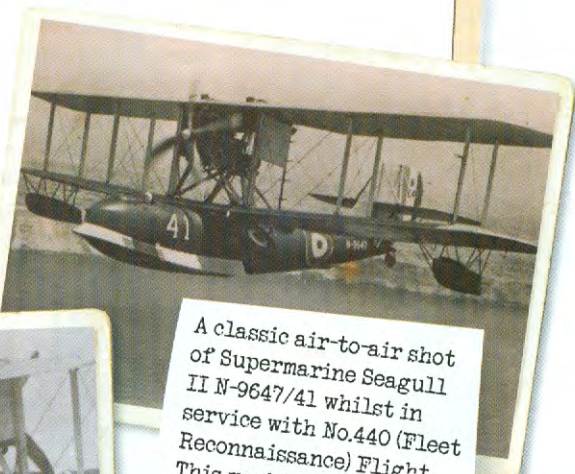
In Australia, the Seagull III was given the type designation A-9. The Aircraft A9-2, which can be built from the Silver Wings 1:48 resin kit, was shipped to Australia aboard SS. Nicholson. On 23rd. August 1926 it was recorded with 101 Flight, flown by Flying Officer Ross RAAF to Bowen, Queensland, to take part in the photographic survey of the Great Barrier Reef. By 18th March 1927, the machine had returned to base at Richmond. Little else is known until A9-2 is listed as converted to spare parts on 31st. July 1934.

Seagulls at home and Down Under

Supermarine Seal deck landing amphibian spotter of 1920. Minus the nose mounted Vickers machine gun, N-146 became the prototype Seagull I.



N-9565 was a Supermarine Seagull I. Note the absence of gravity feed tanks in the upper wing centre section, whilst the lifting cables are clearly visible.



A classic air-to-air shot of Supermarine Seagull II N-9647/41 whilst in service with No.440 (Fleet Reconnaissance) Flight. This machine is the subject of the author's build of the Silver Wings 1:48 kit.