

Belcher Bits BB-40: Fairey Firefly T.1/T.2 conversion 1/48

Background

In 1945, Fairey Aircraft saw the potential for a two seat deck landing trainer for the FAA and managed to convince the Admiralty of the need. Fairey undertook a Private Venture project to convert one of the Firefly Mk 1s then undergoing repair. The observer's cockpit was replaced by new structure which incorporated a second cockpit, raised about 12 inches above the front. This required increasing the fuselage width somewhat along the top decking and new structure to fair the hood into the rear deck.

The second cockpit was the instructor's cockpit and carried a much-reduced set of instruments but the only difference in use was some changes to the operations of the flaps. There were two prototypes for the T.1, the first (Z2033) being a flying mockup for spin trials while the true prototype (MB750) was painted in company colours of blue and silver and in fact, was civil registered as G-AHYA. It first flew in June 1946.

In all, 34 Firefly Mk 1s were converted to T.1 trainers; some retained the cannon armament but had the gunsight in the front cockpit. An additional small number of Mk 1s were converted to T.2 gunnery trainers which had gunsights in both cockpits. The Royal Canadian Navy operated 3 T.1s and 2 T.2s.

Kit Modifications

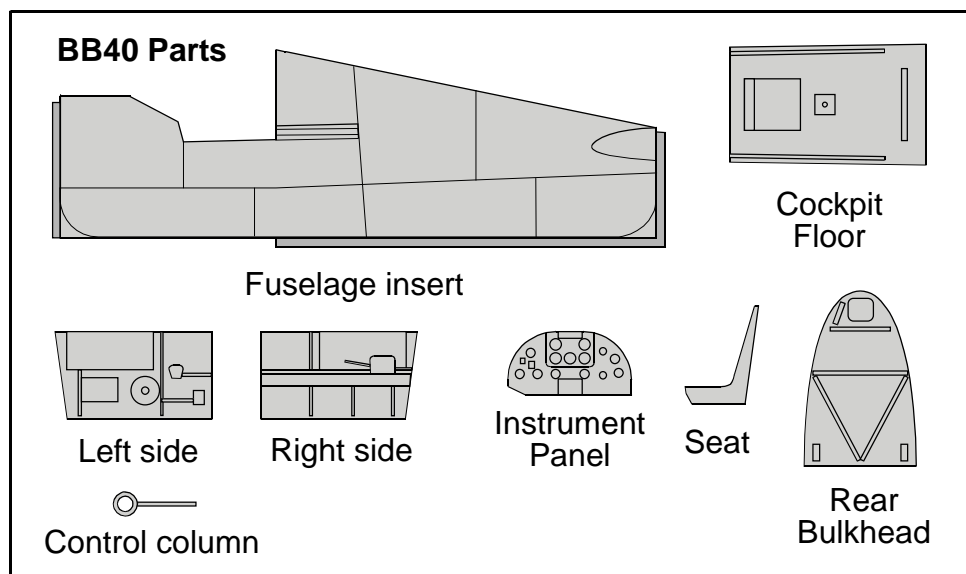
This conversion set has been designed for the AZ Models 1/48 kit of the Firefly Mk I (or its original release by Grand Phoenix); it likely will not work with the Special Hobby kit which has a slightly wider canopy. The following steps should be read in conjunction with the kit instructions.

Steps 1,2. As per kit

Step 3. Save the photoetched straps to fit on the second cockpit seat. Discard the seat.

Step 4. Ignore.

Step 5,6,7,8. As per kit instructions.



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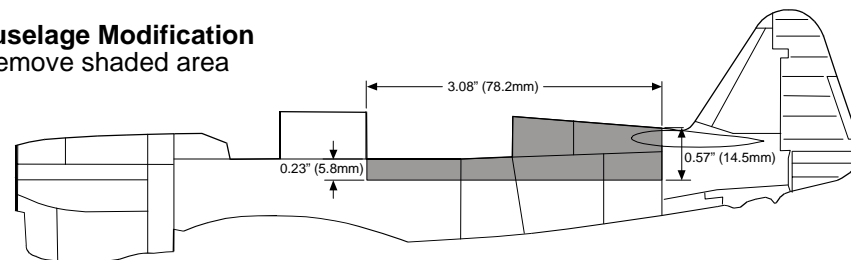
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Fuselage Modification

Remove shaded area



Fuselage Modifications

Tape the fuselage halves together and cut as shown above. The wierd dimensions put the cuts along panel lines. Do NOT glue them together yet.

Second Cockpit assembly

In a similar manner to what is shown in Step 5, assemble the second cockpit. Parts should be painted first; colours indicate black (use dark grey) interior structure, aluminum seat. Glue the rear bulkhead to the floor, and glue the sides to the floor and rear bulkhead. Check the fit, as this assembly should slide into the resin fuselage insert from below, the rear bulkhead just sitting in the recess. Mark where the sides end at the front. The resin instrument panel, once painted, is glued into the fuselage insert just ahead of where the side panels extend to. You'll note the side panels of the second cockpit are much simplified compared to the front cockpit.

Once the fuselage insert has the cockpit installed, it can be set into the cut fuselage. Returning to Step 9.

Step 9. Most of this step can be as per kit instructions, but note that the fuselage insert has small lips front, rear and bottom to firmly hold it in position. This does make it difficult to glue it all together as the lips fore and aft prevent you from snapping it into position with the fuselage glued together. I recommend gluing the tailwheel fork into one of the halves, then gluing all the stuff into the nose including the front cockpit, but not gluing the fuselage halves together aft of that. By carefully spreading the tails apart, you can drop the fuselage insert into place, then glue it in place and glue the rear fuselage and tail closed. Finally, glue part 24 into place in the fuselage bottom.

Steps 10-end. As per kit instructions, except ...

Most Firefly T.1s did NOT have guns, all T.2s did, so check your references and if necessary, bin the cannon fairings (part 37) and remove the mountings in the wing leading edges.

Obviously, this kit needs two canopies. I am including a vacuform canopy from Falcon in NZ, what I regard as the finest vacuform canopies in the world. However,

there will be a difference between the injection moulded canopy and the vacuform one. Here is my inelegant solution. If you have a second Firefly Mk 1 kit, rob the front canopy and windscreen from it and use them on this kit, then use the vacuform canopy as a replacement for your other single cockpit Firefly. Problem solved.

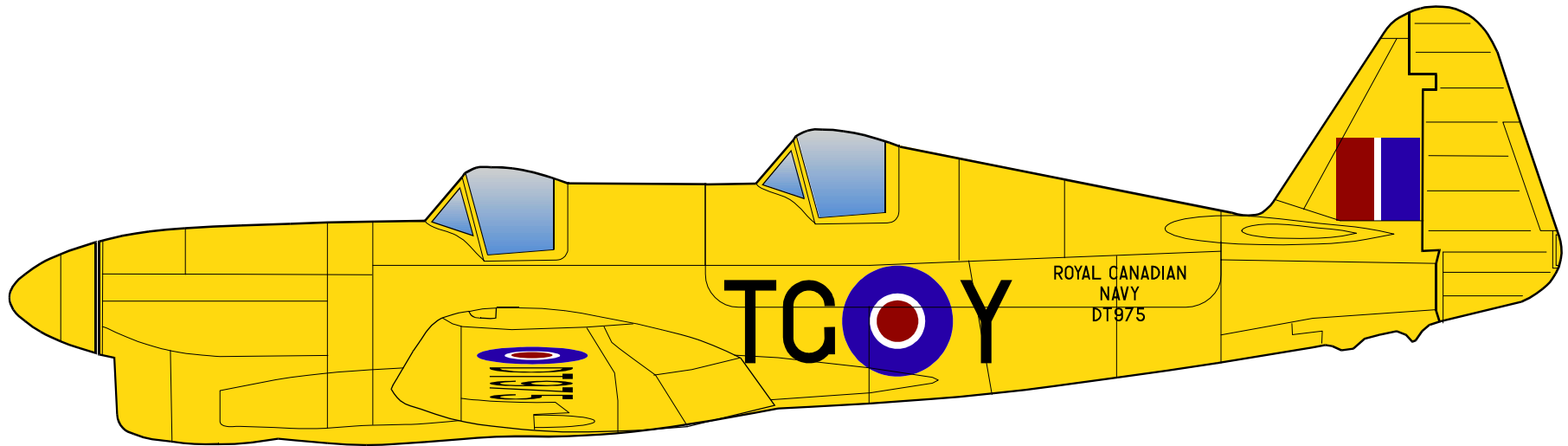
Finally, the Grand Phoenix / AZ Models kit holds up pretty well even though it has been out quite a while. However, I have to admit the wheels are not very accurate or good looking. The spinner is also too blunt. These two things really pop out at you when you look at the kit. Luckily for us all, there are excellent resin replacements for both available from Barracuda Studios (www.barracudacals.com), specifically set 48001 for the spinner and 48139 for the wheels. Highly recommended.

Painting / Markings

The first prototype (MB750) only flew as a Fairey demonstrator, painted overall aluminum lacquer with a dark blue fuselage top and the letters F1 on the rear fuselage. Most Firefly T.1s were painted overall yellow with C type roundels in four positions, including those in use in Canada. Dutch machines were similarly painted with of course Dutch roundels.

In the RCN, four UK built T.1s were purchased: TG-W (MB433), TG-X (MB443), TG-Y (DT975) and TG-Z (DK445). Apparently, two T.2s were built by Fairey Aviation in Canada: TG-W (original TG-W was wrecked, so MB694 was re-assigned as TG-W) and TG-V (PP408, not confirmed).

This conversion set includes decals for TG-Y, and roundels and fin flash can be found on Belcher Bits decals BD13.



Fairey Firefly T.1, Royal Canadian Navy, No. 1 OTU, 1948

Overall yellow, with 50" C Type roundels above and 32" C Type below wings and on fuselage sides. The fuselage codes were 24". Under the wings, inboard of the roundels are the 24" serial numbers. Under the port wing, this reads from behind while under the starboard wing, this reads from ahead.

Modeller's Challenge!

Not for the faint of heart. Paul Bradley's book on the Fairey Firefly F. Mk 1 to U. Mk.9 (SAM Publications) includes pictures of 2 Royal Australian Navy Firefly T.5s which apparently were two seat trainers made in-house by the Aussies on a Firefly F. Mk V airframe. No guarantee these parts will fit the Special Hobby kit of the Mk. V but with a bit of work, could be done!