

ARMOUR MODELLING 101

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE
1/35 SCALE MODELLING WORLD



So You Want to Build a 1/35 Armour Kit ...

STEP 1: CHOOSE A KIT, BUT NOT JUST ANY KIT

Armour kits run the gamut of quality and complexity. Everybody will have their favourites, but here are some good choices for kits to introduce yourself to 1/35 scale armour modelling with:

- Academy M4A2 Marine Sherman
- AFV Club M3A3 Stuart
- DML/Dragon IS/ISU series
- DML/Dragon T-34 series
- Skybow/AFV Club Dodge WC series
- Skybow/AFV Club M38A1 Jeep
- Tamiya Cromwell
- Tamiya MB Jeep
- Tamiya Leopard 2A5/2A6
- Tamiya Panzer III Ausf. L
- Tamiya T-55
- Trumpeter KV series

STEP 2: CONSTRUCTION – SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF

- One of the most important, yet simple, rules when constructing armour (particularly tracked vehicles) is to make sure that all of the wheels are level. Have a flat surface (such as a pane of glass) handy while gluing suspension arms and wheels in place.
- Don't forget vertical alignment as well. Use a metal ruler or other straight edge to align the roadwheels as you look down the side of the vehicle.
- You may wish to hold off on attaching wheels until after painting. Many kits have poly parts that get trapped within the wheels, allowing them to be removed after fitting and alignment.

STEP 3: CONSTRUCTION - MAKING TRACKS

There are three basic kit track types: vinyl/plastic rubber band tracks; injection-moulded link and length tracks, and injection-moulded individual link tracks.

- Rubber band tracks are the easiest to work with, but there are still pitfalls. Only some of the newer tracks will glue together with plastic cement; on most, more drastic measures are needed, such as melting them together with a heated screwdriver. For vehicles that have a natural sag in their tracks, rubber band tracks can provide challenges; to get them to sit correctly, one must either glue, tie, or pin them to the top of the roadwheels.
- Link and length tracks generally look better than rubber band tracks, but create complications with construction and painting of the vehicle. Careful planning is required.
- Individual link tracks are generally tedious to cut out and assemble (sometimes 100+links per side), but usually look best when installed. They also have the advantage of being fully posable (and sometimes even workable), so you can get the amount of track sag you want or can model a vehicle with a broken track.

STEP 4: CONSTRUCTION – MAJOR ASSEMBLY

- There are generally several major components to assemble to make the hull and turret of a tank. It is important to align these parts correctly (as it is with any model, of course). The particular challenge that often arises with armour models, however, is the need to preserve (or create) surface detail (e.g., cast steel texture, weld seams) while assembling the major components. We won't touch zimmerit here; that deserves its own seminar.
- Cast texture can be replicated in a variety of ways, from using Mr. Surfacer, liquid glue or two-part epoxy putty applied to the part to attacking the part with a Dremel tool with a round burr

(or any combination of the above). Look closely at photos of the type of vehicle you're building before you start replicating texture, since not all castings are created equal.

- Weld seams can be replicated in a number of ways, including rolling a thin strip of epoxy putty and laying it along the seam or careful application of filler. Again, consult references before starting to make weld seams; many on models are grossly exaggerated.
- Casting numbers on parts are an interesting surface detail that can be found particularly on components of American vehicles. They can be replicated using either photoetched or injection-moulded numbers or by cutting part numbers from sprues.

STEP 5: FINISHING TOUCHES – BARREL SEAMS AND THE LIKE

- One of the most visible seams on any type of model is the long lengthwise seam that runs down the centre of a two-part gun barrel on an armoured vehicle. Great care is needed to properly sand this seam down, or you could create flat spots on the barrel that will be very noticeable. Seams inside the muzzle brake are also tough.
- Other highly visible seams or mould lines show up on roadwheels and on-vehicle tools. Pay particular attention to those areas.
- Drill out machine gun barrels, exhausts, etc. A little effort here makes a big difference.

STEP 6: PAINT SHOP

There are two basic schools of armour painting: “paint before final assembly” vs. “glue it all together and paint.” It's pretty much a matter of taste.

- Painting components separately (i.e., turret, upper hull, lower hull, roadwheels, tracks, etc.) makes it much easier to get into nooks and crannies with paint, but there are risks of damaging the paint finish as one assembles the model.
- Painting the assembled model means that there won't be potential issues where components meet, but it can be challenging spraying in the nooks and crannies (especially behind roadwheels).
- Multicoloured camouflages on tanks can be very challenging to mask; Silly Putty works well as a masking agent over complex surfaces.
- Note that some rubber band tracks do not take paint well.
- Weathering is its own seminar! Realistic weathering is crucial on armour models.

STEP 7: DECALS AND MARKINGS

- Dry transfers are popular amongst armour modellers, as are painted markings using either photoetched or self-adhesive masks.
- Markings can either be painted on before or after the rest of the vehicle (self-adhesive masks give you both options). These look great, but can be challenging to apply over complex surface details and there is a limited selection.
- Waterslide decals can be a complication, since one has to apply a gloss coat to the areas where the decals go (there can be difficulties reintegrating the finish).

STEP 8: ALL THOSE EXTRAS

- Replacing plastic grab handles with ones formed from bent wire is an easy upgrade that helps a model significantly (makes it more durable as well).
- External stowage can really make an armour model interesting. If you're adding stowage, think about where the pieces would logically go on a vehicle and how they would be secured.
- Headlights are often drilled out and replaced with MV lenses.
- Periscopes can be replicated in a number of ways (drill out holes and fill with Krystal Klear, cut strips of film negative and glue over the glass portion, use semigloss black paint, etc.).
- Tow cables can be replaced with braided picture-hanging wire or an equivalent.