

THE FIRST MESSER- SCHMITT: WILLY'S M.17 LEICHT- FLUGZEUG

BY DAVE LINSTRUM

Willy Messerschmitt was a senior in the Munich Technical University when he designed this simple, elegant two-place aircraft. In the ultralight tradition of the mid-20s, it was wood and fabric with a shiny aluminum cowl (the stick-and-tissue model, with silver cowl, is thus an honest replication). Willy crossed the English Channel to obtain the powerplant—a 32-horsepower Bristol Cherub.

There are those who suspect he found more on that trip than an internal combustion engine for his airplane. The fuselage (especially the wheels, cockpits and concave turtle deck) is almost a clone of the British 1924 Beardmore Wee Bee. However, the fin and scalloped trailing edge on that Lympne Trials winner are distinct from the M.17 lines.

Industrial espionage aside (no

one can prove these claims), the M.17 flew like a homesick angel—albeit an anorexic one on that tiny twin-banger! However, this modest propulsion did not deter Willy's pal, Theo Cronweiss, from winning an international prize for a flight from Munich to Rome across the Alps. Those were certainly the halcyon days of intrepid heroes—especially when the pilot had a big cowling in front of him and had to peer out sideways to see what mountain pass he was going to try to climb over!

Today a refurbished original M.17 airframe hangs in the Deutsches Museum in Munich. For scale documentation, we provide a photo and three-view. Colors are dark honey amber on the entire fuselage (except for the aluminum cowl) and forward part of all flying sur-



faces, with bleached white linen on the rest. Numerals, cowl combing and tires are black.

This should suffice to present to a scale judge. A mix of Pactra acrylic colors makes an acceptable hue—somewhat like mustard in an opaque finish. The full-size aircraft had an amber shellac on the fabric.

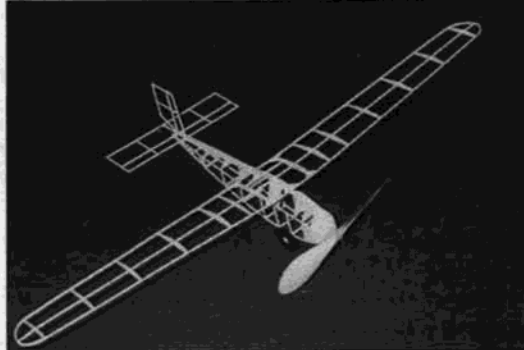
Use a silver felt-tip marker on the noseblock to simulate the aluminum cowl.

So you want to build this historic flier? First make two 11x17-inch copies of the plans at your local copy shop—one to build on (tape it to a soft surface like ceiling tile or foamcore and cover with wax paper) and the other to use for patterns. Read the callouts on the plans and assemble the requisite tools, balsa, tissue and paints.

We find this to be the minimal workshop inventory: X-acto knife with #11 blade or a broken double-edge razor blade, dressmaker's pins (we like the bead-head type), self-healing cutting board (use a scrap of artist's mat board if you are economy minded), glue applicator, artist's sable brush and needle-nose pliers. If you airbrush, do it on pre-shrunk white Japanese tissue on a frame, then cover the model—note the color break line on the plans for the flying surfaces. Be sure to build in an uncluttered work area with good light. We prefer listening to jazz while building—some say it enhances craftsmanship!

The skeleton photo shows all the major framework assembled and the plans are fully annotated, so we will not tell you how to "Glue Part A to Part B" here. You should not attempt the M.17 until you have some experience with stick-and-tissue construction—a Peck-Polymers Peanut like the Pietenpol Air Camper or Nesmith Cougar should teach you the tricks. These kits are available at hobby shops or by mail order—see Peck's ad in MB.

One word about covering—do not use color dope anywhere on this model! Acrylic paints and a silver felt-tip marker for coloration and thinned white glue for adhering tissue to the frame are perfect. They are both odorless and clean up with water. An India ink technical pen such as a #8 Micron Pigma is great for numerals (trace them on



Top & Above: The author's replica with and without its clothes on. The long, high aspect ratio wing gave the full-size aircraft outstanding performance on only 32 horsepower—the model is likewise an excellent flier. It's designed to take full advantage of the 9-inch fuselage rule, hence the greater-than-normal (for a Peanut) wingspan of 17-3/8 inches.



Only a few M.17s were ever built. This restored original is on display in the Deutsches Museum in Munich. Photo taken from *Flug Revue*, May 1984.

the tissue on a light table or sunlit window). The #5 size gives a finer line for control surface outlines and tiny lettering. The Micron ink is non-smear.

High-wing monoplanes like the M.17 seem to do better when trimmed to fly to the right under power—with Peanut Scale, the glide is a minor part of the flight. If you fly indoors, the power portion of the flight should last until touchdown. Be sure the C.G. is as shown on the plans; you may have to add some strip solder below the nose. We prefer solder, smashed flat with pliers, to bulky, messy clay. Using down and right thrust, and possibly a bit of right rudder, trim for a loose, right spiral climb.

We hope you enjoy this historical replication. Imagine flying over the Alps with it back in 1925. That should be a vicarious thrill! **MB**

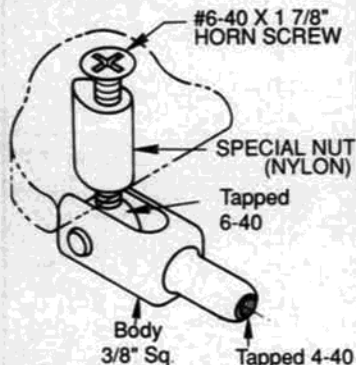
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