

# Aggressive Lightning

Alan Kelley builds the 1:48 Tamiya F-35A in the colours of the 65th Aggressor Squadron

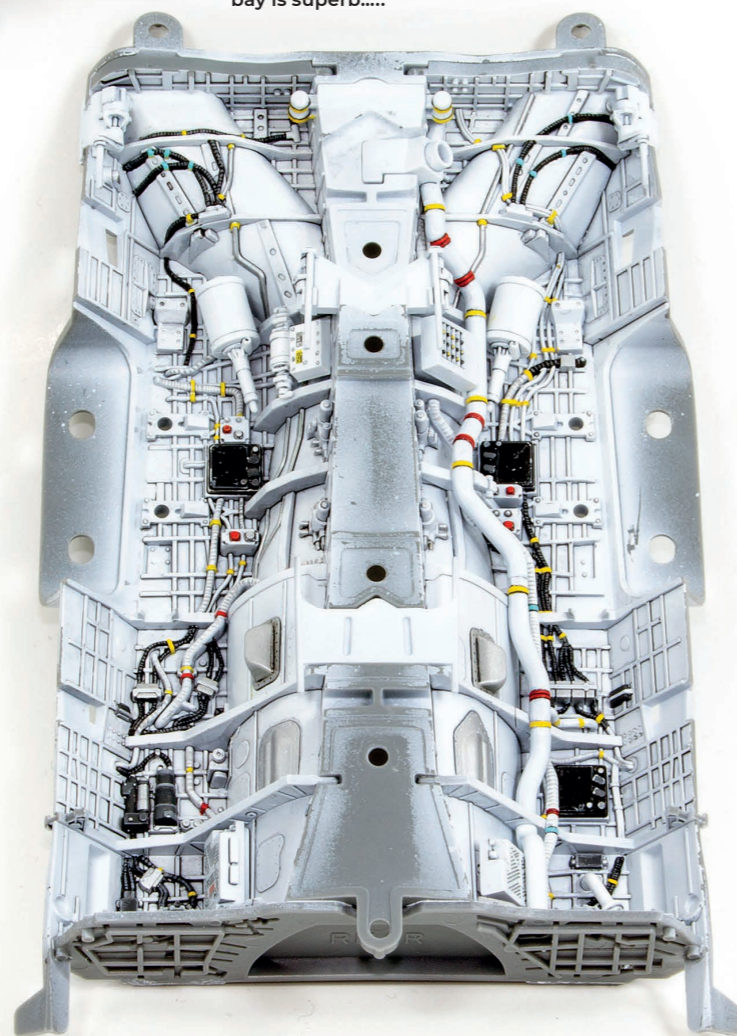


**LOCKHEED MARTIN F-35A**  
**MANUFACTURER:** Tamiya  
**SCALE:** 1:48  
**KIT TYPE:** Plastic injection moulded  
**KIT NUMBER:** 61124

The Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II is an American family of single-seat, single-engine, all-weather stealth multirole combat aircraft that is intended to perform both air superiority and strike missions, developed from the Joint Strike Fighter programme. It is principally used by the United States, but other operators include the UK, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Australia, Canada, Israel, and Japan. The aircraft has 3 variants- the land-based strike fighter A variant, VTOL B variant, used by the UK and USMC, and carrier-based C variant, that has significantly larger control surfaces and features foldable wings. The programme has been highly controversial over the years, due to its complexity, costs, and overruns in development, but the aircraft went operational in the B variant in 2016, followed by the A variant the next year. Its primarily a stealth fighter, although among its various guises, the aircraft also can be used in 'Beast Mode' with three external pylons being featured on each wing and supporting up to 22000 lb of ordnance.

In modelling terms, the aircraft has been released in 1:72 previously by Hasegawa and Orange Hobby, 1:48 by Kittyhawk, Meng-Model and Italeri, who have also released A and B variants in 1:32, but it came as quite a surprise in September 2022, when, at the All Japan Model and Hobby Show 2022, Tamiya

The detailing on the main bay is superb.....



....as is the nose gear bay



The main bay now installed in the lower fuselage

announced their release of the 1:48 F-35A variant, including markings for USAF, Norwegian, Danish, Royal Australian Air Force, Italian, Dutch, JASDF and Israeli aircraft. The kit itself comes with 296 injected moulded parts, across nine sprues, with a further ten clear parts. There are separate canopy frames to allow the modeller the choice the option of having it open and closed, rather than a definitive open or closed. The quality of the moulding is Tamiya's usual quality, but the level of detail included has been taken a step beyond. It is a real highlight of the kit to see the moulded in detail in the weapons bays and undercarriage areas- the weapons bay is a detail painter's dream, and I personally could not wait to get started into it.

Now, before I go any further, I am not a fan of Tamiya decals, this is a personal choice, which real shame as all the RAM panels on this aircraft are represented by an A4 sheet of decals for every individual panel. However, I was not too worried, as I chose to do my aircraft as one of the newly recommissioned 65th Aggressor Squadron aircraft. The 65th Aggressor Squadron were decommissioned in 2014, after nine years of flying F-15C/D, but were reactivated in June 2022, using early block F-35A's to replicate the Chinese threat, specifically the J-20 fighter, but could also receive bespoke software upgrades to tailor to different perceived threats.

Construction started with the cockpit. The kit cockpit is not a bad realisation of the real thing, although there are a few details missing from behind the seat. I chose not to use the supplied decals for the instruments with the exception of the all-glass instrument panel, as for me the decals looked more pixelated than I was happy with. So, I chose to paint these areas. Red Fox have now issued a replacement 3D printed set and other companies will no doubt follow suit. But for now, I was happy to paint the details. I followed the kit's paint call outs and painted the cockpit in XF-54 Dark Sea Grey. The panels were painted back along with the sills and upper deck behind the seat. I then dry brushed a light blue over the details to emphasise the detail.

Once the cockpit section was installed in the upper half of the forward fuselage, I then progressed onto the undercarriage bays, ladder housing and weapons bay. The detail in all these areas is a marked improvement from Tamiya, and these were all given a base coat of SMS Gloss White. Once cured, I gave

Adding the engine fan and intake trunking



The cockpit now installed and ready for some paint



Adding a primer coat.....



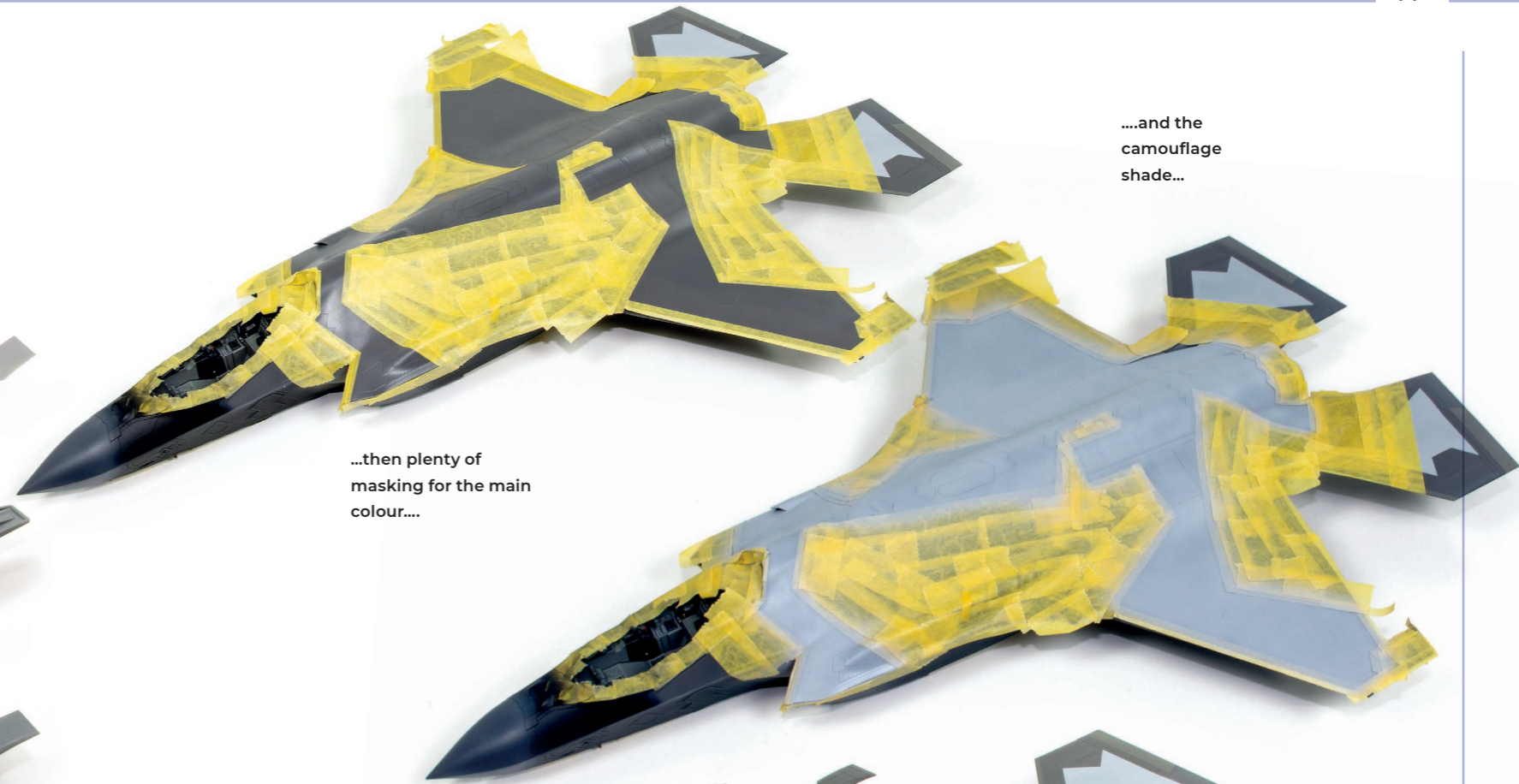
all the relief areas a black wash to bring out all the detail and add depth. For this I used Ammo by Mig Black Acrylic Filter. I then added all the fine details before gluing the parts in place. There are twenty-three parts alone in the construction of the weapons bay, a mini kit all by itself, and I honestly cannot see any need for future development of aftermarket parts for this area. Before I joined the fuselage sections together, I had to install the engine and intake areas. The engine was base coated in SMS Gloss Black, before painting the fan blades and compressors using a custom mix of Tamiya LP paints, to replicate the burnt exhaust colour. The exhaust areas were painted in LP-34 Light Grey and given a wash to emphasize the details.

The fit in this kit is what we have all come to expect from Tamiya, and most of the sections went together without any

real gaps or noticeable seams. Care must be taken around the intakes though to ensure they are all aligned correctly before gluing. Also, there are several sections that will require filling of seam lines. The flaps, vertical stabilisers and tailplanes all come in two sections with a very noticeable joint, even when flush fitted. I found this a little annoying and reminiscent of the Kittyhawk kit I had previously built.

I then built and painted all the gear doors, and there are quite a few sections making up the complex landing gear and weapons bay doors on this aircraft. The interior sections were all painted in SMS Gloss White before being given a wash. The same technique was used in the main weapons bays. The outer sections on the F-35 are meant to be painted in 'Have Glass Grey', but I find that every paint manufacturer has a different interpretation of what this colour actually looks like. The SMS colour is too pale, Hataka is very shiny, so I chose to go along with the instructions that ask you to mix various shades of Tamiya lacquer colours to achieve the correct shade. The closest match I was able to get was five-parts LP-14 Grey to one-part LP-59 Brown. I mixed up a large batch of this colour to enable

...and the camouflage shade...



...then plenty of masking for the main colour....

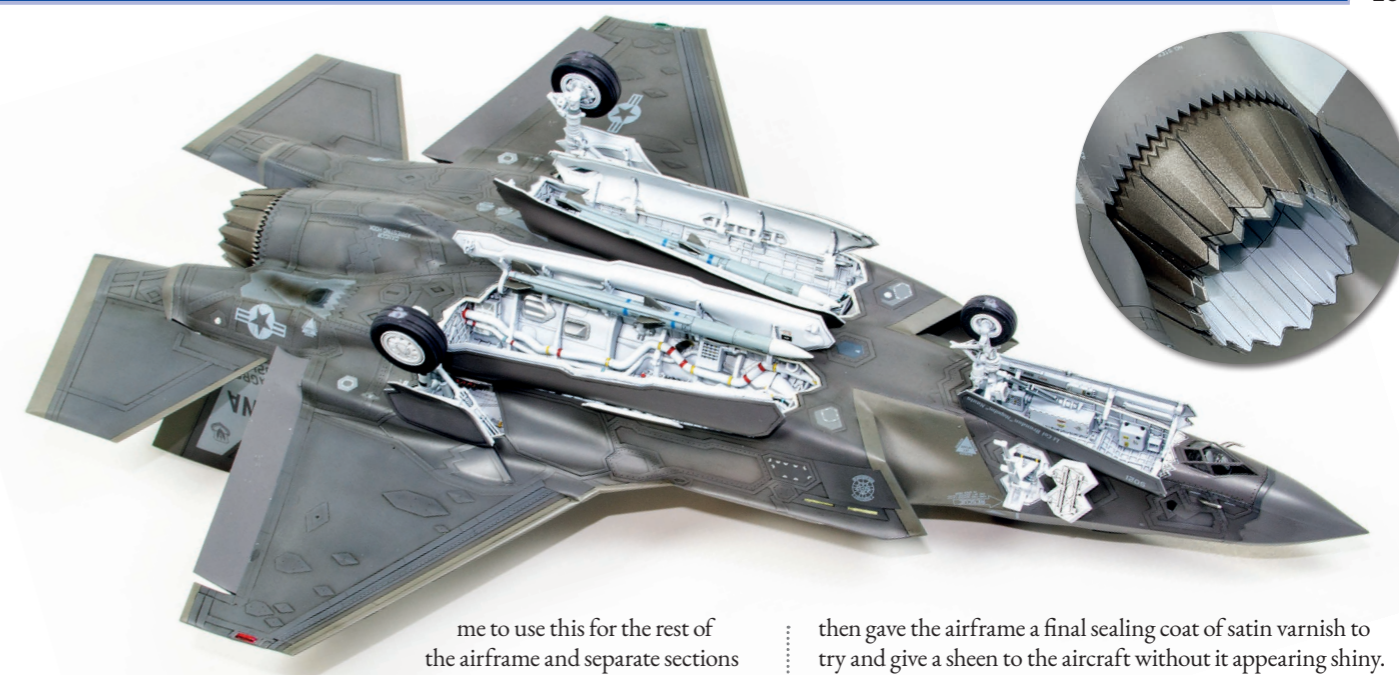


...and the result is quite striking

I used a Furball decal sheet, originally designed for the Meng-Model kit



Ready for final assembly



me to use this for the rest of the airframe and separate sections without any variance to colour or shade.

There are slight variations in shades on the aircraft caused by the RAM panels and also on the leading edges of the wings and rear edges on the horizontal stabilisers in the tail. Tamiya do supply decals for these areas, but I chose to mask and paint them. I added two extra parts of Tamiya LP-14 to the mix which lightened the colour and gave the correct shade. The front undercarriage doors were also painted in this shade.

Once all the main airframe sections were glued in place and any seams checked, the entire airframe was primed in thinned down Mr Finishing Surfacer Black 1500. The Aggressor scheme I was portraying has a camouflage pattern of FS36375 added over the Have Glass Grey, to replicate Chinese J-20 fighters. Once I had the base colour of the custom mix have Glass sprayed on, I masked off the areas that would have the lighter colour applied and sprayed a coat of SMS Medium Grey fs36375 to these areas. The entire airframe was given a gloss coat ready for decals. The Furball decal sheet I was using was designed for the Meng-Model F-35A kit, and some of the stencil decals, specifically around the refuelling ports on the spine of the aircraft do not fit correctly, so some slight modification was required in these sections. The decals went down perfectly without any silvering, then were sealed in with another gloss coat for weathering.

None of the F-35s that I have seen in service with the US Airforce appear to have significant weathering, so I chose to keep mine very subtle. I added a tiny bit of white to a thinned cup of the base coat and added this over the airframe in any area where there may be slight fading or rain run-off. I also added a wash around all the raised RAM panels to emphasize them more- by comparison with most of my models this seemed like practically no weathering. I

then gave the airframe a final sealing coat of satin varnish to try and give a sheen to the aircraft without it appearing shiny. With the aircraft being an aggressor, I know it would not carry a full payload, but would still carry some inert missiles, so I built and painted up two AIM-120s but gave them blue bands instead of the usual yellow and brown to show they were inert.

By this stage we were nearing the completion of the project, there were just a few areas left to complete. The F-35 canopy has a very noticeable detonation cord. Tamiya have chosen to represent this with decals, and I found these to be problematic to get in place without tearing or distortion. So, I thoroughly recommend using very fine masking tape to mask off the cord, as Tamiya have moulded in a line to demark its location and paint it. The supplied Martin Baker Mk.16 ejection seat is very well detailed, and I used Ammo by Mig Non-Slip paint on the seat cushions to replicate the texture of the cushions and also added some Eduard steel seat belts, instead of using the decals supplied in the kit. The final step was to add all the various gear doors, little details such as boarding ladder and the project was complete. For anyone who like the F-35A, this kit is wonderful and builds up nicely into an accurate representation of the real aircraft. Given the detail that Tamiya have managed to mould in, I am excited for what their new releases hold for us.

Our thanks to The Hobby Company for the build sample.

