

AFV Club M48H (CM-11) ROC Army Main Battle Tank

Having picked up the kit at a model show, I quickly found out that there's precious little information available on the real thing, other than mention of the conversion by the Taiwanese, so the following information comes from AFV's description in the construction manual. In order to modernize their MBTs the ROC developed the M48H in collaboration with General Dynamics Land Systems. The program started in 1984, resulting in two prototypes in 1988, and production from 1990 onwards. The tank is a hybrid, consisting of an M60A3 chassis with M48 road wheels, an M48A5 turret, and a fire control system similar to the one in the M1 Abrams. Weapons consist of a 105 mm main gun, a 7.62 mm coax, and both a 7.62 mm and a 12.7 mm for air defense, mounted at the loader's and commander's stations, respectively. The production has been completed, and 550 M48H MBTs are in service with the ROC Army.

The Kit

The kit, as released by AFV Club, is as much a hybrid as the real tank, consisting of sprues from Academy/Minicraft's M60A1 and M48A5, AFV Club's M88 (road wheels), along with two AFV Club sprues specifically for this kit, and their single link M60 tracks. Unfortunately, they decided to make one sprue with those parts coming from Academy/Minicraft sprues you'd only need one or two parts from, and made a number of errors in doing so. As a result of this "combination effort" you also end up with two "B" sprues in the box, which was rather confusing at times.

Construction

Construction starts of with the lower hull and the suspension, but before adding the suspension I installed the driver's hatch in the upper hull and added both this and the rear hull to the lower hull. Here you're already missing the tab that usually connects the rear and upper hull, and the poly cap for the front of the upper and lower hull; not a big issue, but still. The centre driver's episcopes in my kit was only partly molded, which I fixed with some glue and sanding. Biggest job while adding the road wheels is that, coming from AFV Club's M88, the holes are too small to accept the Academy/Minicraft axles, so you have to drill out all 14 sets. On the rear hull you're expected to use the M48 hinges on the M60 doors (!), so I made correct ones using the parts from my M60A1 as a template. The rear lifting hooks have ejection marks in them, which need careful filling and sanding. The mud flaps (Z34-35), are the wrong shape and need to be reworked or scratchbuilt. During the addition of detail parts to the upper hull I found out that there are ejector marks on the tops of the large toolbox lids and the brush guards, as well as sink marks on the AFV Club copies of the air filters, for which they also chose to change the construction, resulting in a rather bad fit. While adding the hull detail I like to start on the turret halves, not a big deal normally, but in this case the gun mantlet caused a fair amount of extra work. First of all, the interior cylinder has it's asymmetrically mounted pins the wrong way around; they need to be switched, and then lined up properly using the turret. Second, the part sticking out from the rear of the mantlet, supposed to be glued onto the cylinder, is sticking out about a cm, whereas the top should be even with the rear of the actual mantlet. You need to cut of this part, otherwise the mantlet sticks out too far. I used the M48A5 parts as guides for these changes, and the gun to make sure the two parts went together well after cutting of part of the mantlet rear (the gun looks pretty good, by the way). Also, don't forget to add some plasticard to

the interior of the upper turret half, behind the rectangular hole in front of the loader's hatch - you don't need this hole and it'll need filling. Turret details, turret details. There's a fair amount of (extra) work to be done on the turret, starting off with making sure you have the right parts. Part B14 should be Z12, B14 is the unidentified part of the turret ventilator above. There are only 2 parts Z12 in the kit, rather than the necessary 3, so I used C16 from the M60 sprue as a replacement for the forward mounted lifting eye (not quite the same shape, but it works). The smoke dischargers need lots of filling and sanding to get rid of sink holes and ejector marks; when mounted (don't forget to fill and sand the holes on the turret meant for the South Korean type smoke dischargers from the M48A5 kit), with solder wiring added, they look decent. I replaced the gunner's sight cover Z22 with D39 from Tamiya M60A3 leftovers, which has the same shape, but looks better. You can also add Z23 at this point, as it's the armoured cover for the sight, and can be slipped in between the sight and the sight cover Z22. You'll need part E10 from the Academy/Minicraft M48A5 (no problem if you have the kit and are planning to build the Korean version), which has to go in front of the loader's hatch as shown in the drawings in the instructions. Alternatively, it is relatively simple to scratchbuilt this part. It's very unclear as to where the rail for the loader's machinegun is supposed to go, I used Squadron/Signal's M48 book to get a bit of an idea. I couldn't find the handle for the commander's hatch, which wasn't indicated in the instructions either, so I used Z39, supposed to go on the inside of the loader's hatch, which I left closed anyway. The locating "rectangle" for the jerry can/water can need to be wedge-shaped, as otherwise the can'll sit too far off the turret at the top. Be very careful with the infantry bars, they're fragile and need a lot of cleaning, but look OK in the end. The smoke discharger grenade boxes need new mountings according to the instructions, it's not quite clear how you're supposed to add the new pins, but with some trial and errors it worked out for me (I assumed I'd need 4 pins, rather than the 3 indicated in the instructions, by the way). The turret basket is missing the two centre brackets, which AFV Club forgot to copy, so I made new ones from plasticard using the M48A5 ones as template. AFV Club also substituted cable ends and nylon wire for the plastic tow cables from the Academy/Minicraft kit, but forgot to include new mounting hooks for under the turret basket, which I added from lead foil. I used pieces of guitar string for antennas. As for the machineguns, they've got two ugly ejector marks each, which is a pity, because other than that they look nice. Be careful with the cradle for the M60, it's quite fragile. The ammo box for the M60 seems to have to go onto the cradle, instead of the M60, as indicated in the instructions, as it won't sit properly otherwise. After all this was done I just had the tracks left. "Just", right! This was my first experience with these single link tracks, it took me 5-6 hours to put them together, and then I still wasn't careful enough with them afterwards, so I have some broken links on the tracks, and cracks in connectors. Here the last problem showed up, they wouldn't fit AFV Club's own (new) sprockets very well, which also contributed to the state of my tracks, of course.

Finishing

This is quite straightforward, the whole tank's olive green, with the details painted according to the instructions, after which I added the decals for one of the two ROC Army options, followed by a wash and a drybrush, and mounting on a simple base.

Conclusions

The kit leaves something to be desired, most of which could've been prevented if AFV Club had done better research, mainly to make sure all necessary parts would be there. I can understand why not all companies do as DML, adding a sprue for a single part, but if you're going to make a sprue for that collection of parts, make sure everything's on it. Other than that, they could've put some more thought into where you can and cannot afford to have ejector marks. Having said that, I did enjoy building the kit, and I'm quite pleased with the result, as I guess were the judges at AMPS98, who awarded me a bronze medal in Intermediate for it. I'd recommend it for Patton fans and modern armour fans in general, but not at the MSRP, I'm afraid.