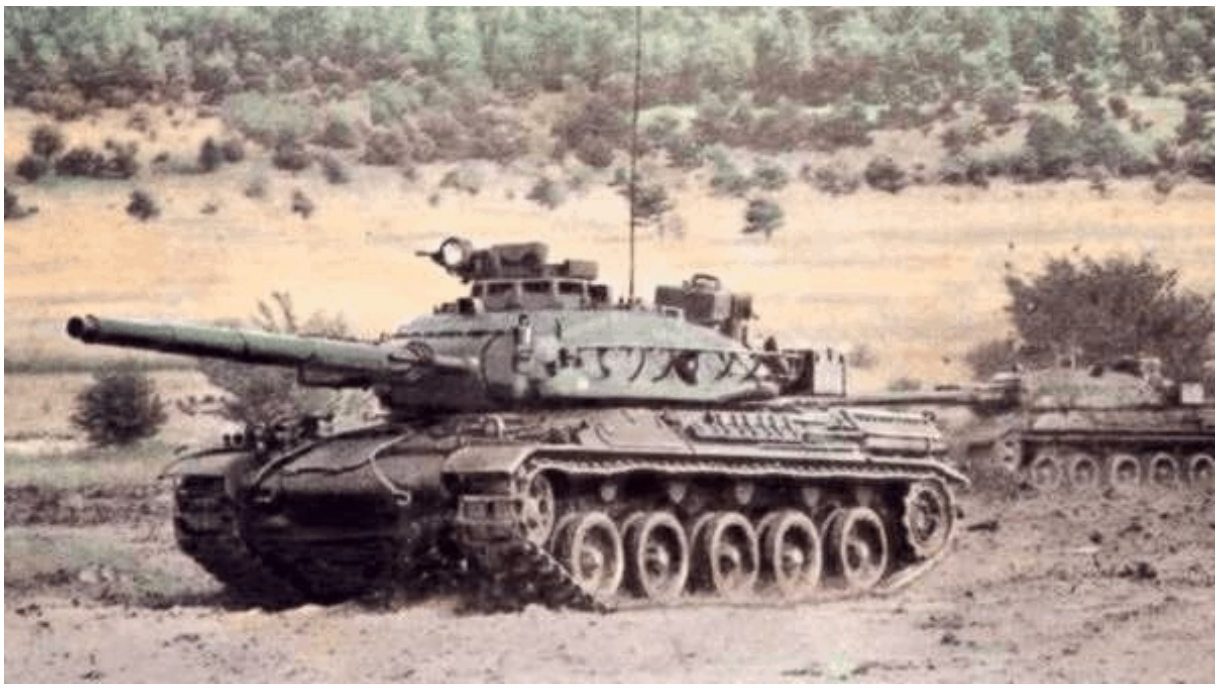
AMX-30

History: After World War II France developed several armoured vehicles including the AMX-50 as its main battle tank. However the project was dropped when a large number of US M47 tanks became available as military aid to Europe. In the 1950s several nations including the United States, Germany and France began a joint project to develop a new main battle tank and the MBT70 was the outcome. However it satisfied nobody and the project was abandoned. The Americans favoured firepower, mobility and protection in that order while the French and Germans preferred mobility, firepower and protection. The American philosophy led to production of the M60. The French and Germans disagreed on how much weight to give each attribute and so the Germans developed the Leopard while the French developed the AMX-30.

Design of the AMX-30 was undertaken by the Atelier de Construction d'Issy-les-Moulineaux, the only major tank factory in France. The first prototypes were completed in 1960 with another seven prototypes following. The French Army adopted the AMX-30 as its main battle tank and production commenced in 1966 with the first one entering service in 1967. Production finished in 1993. The design reflected the French philosophy of tank design with its focus on mobility and firepower. Although the tank is of traditional design its armour is lighter than either the Leopard and the M60 with a combat weight of 36 tonnes. Despite sloped armour its protection is not designed to resist anti-tank weapons because the French believed the striking power of anti-armour weapons would always outperform armour protection. Instead the best protection lay in speed and the ability to fire the first shot. The result was a tank with superior mobility but limited protection unable to resist contemporary main battle tank weapons.



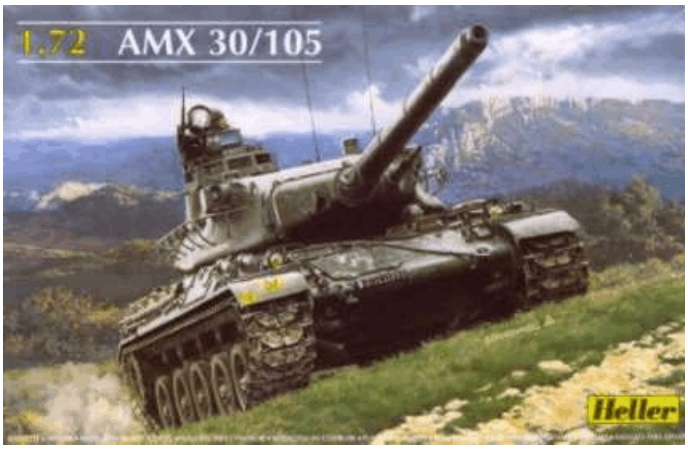
In the opinion of many critics the AMX-30 is one of the worst tanks ever put into service. However, more than 2000 were produced and over 1000 chassis were used as the basis for other derivatives. A number of countries used the AMX-30 including France (1700), Saudi Arabia (572), Spain (327), Bosnia, Greece and several others. The design has been supplanted in France by the Leclerc but it saw some service in Desert Storm in the 1990s and was credit with many kills against T72s.

Data: *Engine* one Hispano-Suiza HS-110 engine producing 680hp. *Hull width* 3.1m. *Hull length* 6.59m. *Height* 2.29m. *Combat weight* 36,000kg. *Maximum speed* 65km/h. *Maximum range* up to 600km. *Armament* 105mm CN-105-F1 smoothbore gun, one 20mm coaxial cannon and one 7.62 machine gun mounted on the turret roof. *Crew* 4.

The kit: Heller 1:72

Heller make several kits of French tanks. They are now quite old so they lack some of the features and details of the more modern smaller scale tank kits. Still, they are all that is available so we do the best we can with them.

I picked up this kit for under $10 and was quite happy to get it. Then I opened the box and had a look at the parts. Most of the kit is quite reasonable but the first time I saw the tracks I almost fainted from shock. How can anyone make tracks so bad? It must take a special skill to design, manufacture and sell to the public pieces of plastic that have no earthly use, apart from taking up space in a rubbish bin. Fortunately, I'd already discussed this problem with one of the world's experts on 1/72 tank models (Zim) who suggested that parts cannibalized from the Airfix Leopard I kit would make suitable replacements. He also happened to have a spare Leopard I kit that he parted with for slightly more than the cost of the AMX-30 kit. The kit also supplies some very odd looking bits of plastic that go on the rear turret. A look at useful photos shows they are supposed to be smoke grenade dispensers but, like the tracks, they bear no resemblance to the real thing.



Well, what's there to say about putting tank kits together? Especially if you make them straight from the box. An evening is more than enough time to get everything together. To make life a little more interesting I decided to open up all the little periscopes in the turret so they would look a bit more realistic than just painting them black. Even this fiddly little exercise only added an hour or two to the construction time.

Even replacing the kit drive sprockets and tracks with parts from the Leopard I kit should have been simple. All it involved was assembling the sprockets, drilling a couple of holes in the rear hull for a new axle and then gluing it all together. Then I confronted a problem that most modellers will not have to deal with. I left the sprockets on the table to set while I went to do some household chores. When I returned they had disappeared. I looked everywhere, I crawled around on the floor, I peered in every corner or box where I might have put them in a fit of absent-mindedness. Nothing! Instead of panicking I calmly went through the process. Again, nothing! Panicking, I repeated the process again. Once more, nothing! I tried finding another Leopard I kit on a trip to Melbourne. Nothing!. I was stymied. I put the almost completed model in a box with the intention of coming back to it again when I found the sprockets or another Leopard I kit.

Three weeks later I was crawling around on the floor again, fiddling with the mess of wiring that accumulates behind computers. There, hiding where it was invisible, was one of the sprockets. Missing most of its teeth, to be sure. Reassured that a cat had knocked the sprockets onto the floor and played with them, I had a hunt in the dust and muck in the vacuum cleaner and found the other sprocket, also minus most of its teeth. It was the work of only a few minutes to complete the project. A quick coat of Hunbrol 86, a touch of griming up, dark grey on the running wheels and on with the decals. The end result is far from the results achieved by master tank model makers, but it looks pretty enough to me.