ATR 72

History: In the 1970s the regional airliner market became one of the most competitive areas for aeroplane manufacturers. It filled the gap between the major airline manufacturing companies such as Boeing and McDonnell Douglas and the light aircraft market. It also served the rapidly growing air transport market in which large airliners flew between major hubs and smaller aircraft carried passengers from outlying centres of population to those hubs. A new company formed in 1981 to compete in this market was ATR, a joint venture by the Italian Aeritalia and the French Aérospatiale. (The initials ATR stand for Aerei de Transporto Regionale or Avions de Transport Régional.) Production was organised with Aeritalia producing the fuselage and tail sections near Naples and Aérospatiale making the wings in Bordeaux before the aircraft were assembled and flight tested at Toulouse, also in France.

The first ATR aircraft was the ATR 42 that was announced when the company was formed in 1981. It could accommodate up to 50 passengers but its optimum seating was 42 passengers, as the name suggests. Two ATR 42 prototypes were manufactured and the first ATR 42 flew on 16 August 1984. The aircraft was granted Italian and French certificates of airworthiness in September 1985 and the first revenue ATR 42 flight occurred in December 1985 in France.

A larger capacity aircraft, called the ATR 72, was announced in 1986. It was basically the same at the ATR 42 but with a fuselage stretched by 4.5 metres, modified wings outboard of the engines, more powerful engines and greater fuel capacity. The first ATR 72 made its maiden flight on 17 October 1988 and they entered service with Finnair a year later. Plans were made to extend the basic airliner to create an ATR 82 but they were dropped in early 1996. Instead, the ATR 72 remains in production in several forms including the basic ATR 72-200 and an ATR 72-500 which has improved engines and six-bladed propellers for hot and high operations. A conversion kit enabled ATR 72s to be converted to freighter configuration with containers loaded through the front port door and about thirty aircraft were converted in this way.

ATR aircraft fly on most continents, mainly for regional airlines that are often linked to major airlines. The 700th ATR aircraft was delivered in September 2006 and there were 63 firm orders and another 25 options for 2007.

Brit Air was established in 1973 to provide services for business executives from western France. It started operations in 1975 and extended serviced to London Gatwick in 1979. In December 1995 Brit Air Signed a franchise agreement with Air France and became a wholly

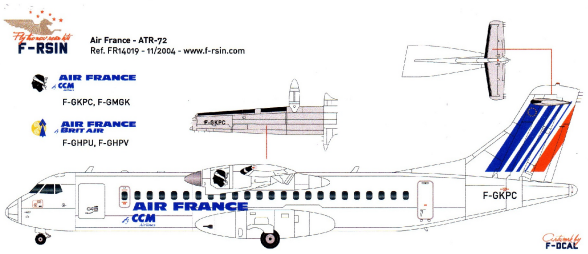
owned Air France subsidiary in October 2000. It operated a fleet of 17 ATR 42s between March 1986 and November 2005 and two ATR 72s between March 1991 and October 2003.

Data: *Engine* Two Pratt & Whitney Canada PW124 turboprop engines of 1610kW (2169shp) each. *Wing span* 27.05m (88ft 9in). *Length* 27.17m (89ft 2in). *Maximum take-off weight* 21,500kg (47,400lb). *Maximum cruising speed* 526km/h (284kt). *Range* 1195km (645miles). *Accommodation* 64-74 passengers.

The kit: F-RSIN 1/144

This is one of those kits that only nut cases will buy. First; you have to want to make models of obscure airliners. Secondly, you have to want to make models of obscure French airliners. Add to that, you have to be willing to run your credit card up to the limit to buy this kit and you have to be keen on all-white aircraft with all the difficulties that entails. That's not all. You have to want to make a kit that has tiny little pieces of ill formed resin and to do battle with difficult decals. If you fill the frame for all these selection criteria then this is the kit for you.

Okay, so I'm a sucker for punishment. F-RSIN is a little company in France, probably a one-man show, that offers a range of 1/144 airliners, most of them French. I've already done battle with a couple of F-RSIN inter-war French airliners and won, more or less, and kept my sanity so I thought I'd move on to this one. There's not much to it, a fuselage, a wing, a tail unit, some engines and tiny little pieces that turned out to be propellers and undercarriage wheels. As with previous kits from this source, the undercarriage legs are made from tiny bits of brass wire bent and cut to shape (the only problem is in working out which way they go). Fortunately the kit is for a standard ATR 72-200, I don't think I could have survived the stress of cutting six blade propellers out of their resin backing.



Assembly is easy. Fix the wing and tail to the fuselage, doing your best to make everything look as square as possible. Note that I didn't say 'square', I said, 'look square', which is the best you can hope for. A problem in achieving this is the wavy shape of the wing - if I walked out to get into an ATR 72 that had a wing looking like this I'd walk right back into the terminal again. I tried straightening it out by taping it to a piece of wood so it was nice and straight and then pouring boiling hot water onto it. It worked wonderfully, like plastic, but as it cooled down the kinks returned. The other adventurous thing I did was hollowed out the rear fuselage so it wouldn't be a tail sitter, using the good old Dremel. Tiny bits of resin went in all directions like a model snow storm, fortunately I'd put on my face mask and goggles for the job.

The decal sheet looks pretty good and offers two options each for two Air France subsidiaries. I went to the airliners.net website and hunted up photographs of the ATR 72s offered and found the best pictures were for F-GHPU, flown by Brit Air. The kit instructions, what there are of them, say that the wings should be painted grey but the photographs said otherwise. There were a couple of other anomalies in the instructions that were not too difficult to fix. Somewhere in an issue of *ModelArt Australia* I read an article that said a can of Tamiya Pure White was the way to go for painting airliners so I bought one and found it worked very nicely for this model. I'll be back for more, to see how it goes on bigger subjects.

On went the decals, pretty easily actually. The trouble was that they were too big, by about ten per cent I'd guess. Fortunately I'd scanned the decals incase I made a hideous mistake so off they came and I was able to print new decals on blank decal paper, suitably reduced so they fitted. Finally, the black de-icing boots on the wing and tail leading edges reduced the wavy appearance of the wings and the end result was a pleasing little model.