Boeing 747-200

History: It would be no exaggeration to say that Boeing's 747 revolutionised air transport. The huge airliner, designed to carry around 400 passengers, was more than double the capacity of the second generations of jet powered airliners such as the Boeing 707 and the Douglas DC-8. This high capacity offered new operational economies but also forced the airlines that flew them to fill even more seats, doing that by offering cheaper air fares that encouraged more passengers and created a huge international tourist market. When 747s became established on the world's airways tourism become one of the world's most important industries and it has become Australia's most important international exchange earner worth billion of dollars a year.

The 747 was basically an enlarged Boeing 707 and designed to be as similar to smaller Boeing designs as possible to ease crew familiarization and airport compatibility. The 747 design grew out of studies that Boeing conducted when competing for the US Air Force's proposal for a heavy cargo transport (won by Lockheed, leading to the C-5), development costs were very high but Boeing proceeded with the design when many airlines showed serious interest in adopting the big new airliner. The 747 project was launched in July 1996 and the first 747 flew on 9 February 1969. The basic 747-100 entered service in January 1970 and the higher capacity 747-200 was developed during roughly the same period with the first ones entering commercial service in 1971. The last 747-200 was delivered in 1991, Boeing making a total of 393 of them. Many remained in service until they were replaced by more efficient later 747 versions or by competing Airbus airliners and their disappearance from the world's skies was hastened by the collapse of the air transport market in 2001 although a fair number remain in service.

When Boeing announced plans for the new 747 airliner Qantas quickly decided to order them and, in November 1967, the government gave the airline (which was then government owned) approval to order four 747s at a cost of $12 million, with another $12 million to be spent on special hangars and equipment to service them. The government also spent around $23 million to extend the main runway at Sydney Airport to 13 000 feet so fully loaded 747s could fly direct to Singapore or Manilla. The first 747 arrived in Australia in October 1970, flown by Pan American and attracting a crowd of over 20 000 people to Sydney Airport to see it. The first Qantas 747 (VH-EBA) arrived at Sydney in August 1971 and they began passenger carrying services in September that year. By 1974 Qantas had eight 747-200s in its fleet and ordered more so that it became an all 747 fleet with its last 707s being phased out of service in the second half of 1978. Eventually Qantas had a fleet of 24 early model 747s. In 1983 Qantas began ordering

more advanced 747-300s and later 747-400s and, as these new models entered service, the older 747s were relegated to the less prestigious routes and taken out of service although Qantas still has a handful of them. The airline recently gave one of its last 747-200s to the Qantas Founders museum at Longreach.

Data: long range high capacity airliner. *Engines* four Pratt & Whitney JT9D-7 turbofan engines of 243,5kN (54 750lbs) thrust. *Wing span* 59.64m (195ft 8in). *Length* 70.66m (231ft 10in). *Maximum take-off weight* 3770840kg (200 000lb). *Maximum speed* 981km/h (530mph). *Range* 12 778kg (6900nm). *Maximum payload* 112 400kg (247 800lb), between 397 and 447 depending on seating layout. *Flight crew* 3.

The kit: MPC/Airfix 1:144

Airfix released its 747 kit in 1969 and so it has been around for a long time. At one stage Airfix had an arrangement with the United States company MPC that released their kits in America with revised boxes, decals and instructions so if the Airfix kit wasn't available then an MPC one was more or less exactly the same thing. Goodness knows when I acquired my MPC 747 kit, so long ago that I can't remember how I got it so I don't know who to blame.

I've been keen on making models of airliners that flew in Australia in the colours of Australian airlines and over the years I've scrounged a few decal sets for that purpose including a Microscale set for four or five 747s in 1/144 scale, which means that there is only the basic decals for any airline including Qantas. More recently I finally acquired the very good looking Hawkeye/Model Alliance decal set for the Qantas VH-EBA and so it was finally time to dust off the old MPC kit and get it together so I could apply the new decals.

I have to admit that I hadn't really looked at the contents of the kit, it was still in it's plastic bag so I obviously hadn't had a good look at it when I bought it or any time since then. To say that I was dismayed would be an understatement, I didn't think that Airfix had ever made a truly awful kit and I'd be tempted to think that this wasn't an Airfix kit if it had not been for the thirteen doors that had to be glued into the fuselage before anything else happened, an Airfix trademark. The moulding quality of the wings and engines was some of the most shocking plastic I'd seen in years, the engines had massive groves moulded into them that I've never seen on any real 747, the wings and tail fins were so thick...

You might remember that I was highly critical of that 747-300 kit I made a while back, but in comparison to this MPC kit that one was a masterpiece of the mould makers craft. Still, I'm not the smartest person when it comes to making models out of bad kits so I happily set about gluing all the wings, engine pods and tail fins together, put some weight in the nose of the fuselage, painted the interior black and stuck it together too. Then I started work on trying to get the wings to look something like the wings on a real 747 but the poor mouldings made it very difficult and their unrealistic thickness required a massive amount of reduction to achieve something that looked halfway decent. After a great deal of battling the wing began to look more like a real aerodynamically shaped wing and less like a barn door but there was also a lot of residue plastic starting to pile up. Even though Airfix had been generous with the plastic in their mouldings I doubted they had been generous enough to cope with the treatment I was giving them and, just as I expected, a big hole soon appeared on the leading edge in a couple of places. There are ways to get around that kind of problem (as I had done with the 747-300) but then there were the tailing edges, the tail and other places where the same thing was bound to happen again. I looked at the hole and thought about all the kits in my collection waiting to be made... Life is too short so I dropped the whole thing in the bin. It was a bit of a relief, actually.