

Dassault Mirage III

History: In the early 1950s the first truly supersonic fighters - MiG-19, F-100 and Super Mystere - were about to enter service and development of the following generation of fighters was under way. The next target were mach 2 fighters capable of reaching high altitudes very quickly and most nations found a different way to get there. They all had in common a powerful afterburning turbojet engines that was necessary to achieve such speeds, but the airframe design offered much more obvious differences. Out of this era came the thin swept wings of fighters such as the BAC Lightning, the stub winged F-104 and the compromise delta of MiG-21s and Su-7s. The other promising option was the pure delta wing platform that had been developed in Germany during the war. The delta wing offered many advantages and it was adopted by Convair in the United States for their F-102 and F-106 interceptors and B-58 supersonic bomber. In Europe the French company Dassault chose to use that wing shape for the replacement for its Mystere generation of fighters.

The first Dassault delta winged fighter was the MD.550 Mirage I (initially also bearing the Mystere name). It made its maiden flight on 25 June 1955 and reached mach 1.3 in December 1956. However the Mirage I was a very small aeroplane with a length of only 11.5 metres and lacked the potential for development. Instead Dassault designed the Mirage II with two 1500kg turbojets, but when those power plants were cancelled, it was redesigned with a single Atar engine and redesignated the Mirage III. In January 1957 the prototype Mirage III reached mach 1.8, a remarkable achievement for the time. However, to enable it to reach mach 2 some refinement was necessary and the wing was redesigned and a more powerful Atar engine installed. This new aeroplane was designated the Mirage IIIA and ten were ordered. The first one flew on 12 May 1958 and exceeded mach 2 in level flight on 24 October that year.

Most of the Mirage IIIs were used to test various aircraft systems including the airframe, engine and avionics and the final three were virtually identical to the first production version, the Mirage IIIC. The first production Mirage IIIC flew on 21 October 1959. The French government ordered the new fighter for the Armee de l'Air and ultimately 184 Mirage IIICs were produced, 95 for France, 72 for Israel, 16 for South Africa and one for Switzerland.



The Mirage IIIC was a dedicated interceptor. The next major design development was the Mirage IIIE to be a multi-role interceptor and all-weather ground-attack fighter. It was fitted with a more advanced radar and the fuselage was lengthened to increase the fuel capacity. The first Mirage IIIE flew on 5 April 1961 and 188 were ordered for the French air force. It quickly

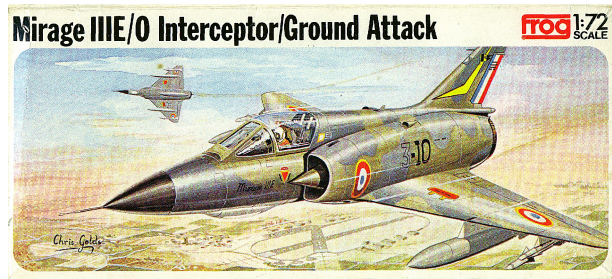
began to attract overseas interest and teams from interested buyers went to France to test the Mirage, including a team from Australia.

Data: single-seat fighter. *Engine* one SNECMA Atar 9C afterburning turbojet of 6000kg (3704 lb) thrust. *Wing span* 8.22m (27ft). *Length* 14.75m (48ft 5in). *Maximum take-off weight* 12,700kg (27,998lbs). *Maximum speed* 2112km/h (1320mph). *Range* 1200km (746miles). *Armament* two 30mm DEFA cannon and provision for two AIM-9 and one Matra 530 missile.

The kit: Frog 1:72

I'll be showing my age when I recall that I waited expectantly for the Airfix Mirage III kit to arrive in the shops. Mirage IIIs were just beginning to appear in Australian skies and here was my opportunity to make one for myself. But when it finally arrived I discovered it was the Mirage IIIC, and not a terribly good kit at that. Still, I was determined to make myself a Mirage IIIO and so I did what everyone who read the *Airfix Magazine* did, I got some balsa wood and made the conversion to a IIIO myself. The end result was not edifying, and my attempt to hand paint the kangaroo markings was dreadful. I wonder what happened to that model in the end?

A decade or so later Frog announced it would be releasing a Mirage III with alternative decals for a French Mirage IIIE or an Australian Mirage IIIO. I rushed to the shop, bought it and took it home to make. I still have it. The nose probe has long since gone, as has one of the Sidewinders and other bits and pieces. In retrospect it is not a great kit, but in the days before the Revell and Heller kits it was a good basic kit that did the job. It still is. Of course there is now the High Planes kit which is, if their earlier kits are anything to go by, really first class if a little challenging to put together.



Over the years there have also been a few decal sheets released with good decals for Australian Mirage IIIOs and I've picked them up when I've seen them. At one time there was also a resin set of bits and pieces to make the conversion from a IIIE to a IIIO complete, including a more than passable ejector seat, and I collected a few of them. To top off my collection of Mirage IIIO stuff I have four of the Frog kits that I bought up one day in the late 1970s when I heard Frog were going out of business. I bought a lot of other Frog stuff, some of it now quite rare, but I bought all the Mirage IIIs I could see in the newsagents (those were the days, when the newsagent around the corner had almost as many kits as Hearn's Hobbies). So, for the past 25 years or so I've been putting all this stuff together. Time now, I reckoned, to do something with it all. By using the four kits and restoring the already made model I should be able to make the three major schemes in which the Mirages flew in RAAF service, plus a couple more colourful versions.

A really serious modeller would buy five High Planes kits and do it properly, but the Frog kits are good honest no-nonsense kits. I'm using them because I've already got them and because, as everyone has probably found to their dismay, models made from kits produced by different manufacturers usually look different. As just one example, the Frog kit is 5mm longer behind the wings than it should be, while the Heller kit isn't, and you can imagine how that would look if the models were displayed together.

Logically, the first model would be the first scheme flown in Australia. The first Mirage IIIOs were flown in bare metal but that didn't last long and they were painted aluminium to control corrosion. So I pulled out the first kit and the appropriate set of Hawkeye decals and started. The model I ended up with was not what I had intended.

Find out what happened in the next exciting episode!