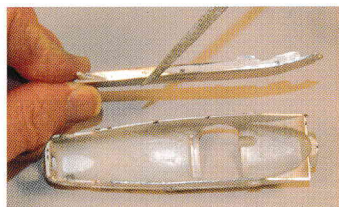


Streamliner! Building Tin Wizard's 1930 Mercedes SSKL by Wayne E. Moyer

By the end of the 1920's, Mercedes found themselves in the same situation Shelby-American would encounter 35 years later. The rugged, powerful, supercharged SSKL was a dominant force on the usual short, twisty sports-car courses but the squared-off, upright body put it at a disadvantage on high-speed venues. The solution, later followed by Shelby, was a new body. Aero engineer Reinhard von Koenig-Fachsenfeld designed a teardrop body which quickly became known as the "Zeppelin on Wheels", but it worked. Although Mercedes retired from racing (temporarily!!) in 1931, Manfred von Brauchitsch bought, or was given, the SSKL streamliner and entered it in the 1932 Avus race. He won with an average speed 5.5 mph faster than a stock-bodied SSKL. Being an aero engineer myself, a fan of streamlined vehicles and at least a semi-Mercedes nut, when I saw Tin Wizard's kit (TINM430360) of von Brauchitsch's streamliner listed in FSW I immediately sent off an order.

When the FBB arrive it immediately went to my workbench: opening it sent me back to the 1980's. Although well packed in a compartmented Styrofoam box, the kit contained only 52 parts and 20 of them were unassembled parts for the wire wheels, including spare photo-etched wires. Instructions consisted of a single small (really small!!) exploded drawing, with no colour information at all. I'd soon discover the reason for that. The 24 white-metal castings (10 are wheel parts) were much thinner and cleaner than anything from the '80's, though, with a very small mould line along the side of the chassis and some equally small feed tags on the bot-



Small mould lines and feed tags simply removed

tom of the body. I did have to clean the inside of the tail cone housing a bit with a Dremel Tool to get that to fit, but cleanup took less than 20 minutes.



Dremel used to clean joint for separate tail housing

After the usual warm water/detergent soak and scrub I glued the tailcone to the body and gave all the white-metal parts a coat of primer. That revealed a couple of pinholes under the nose and a rather large seam at the tailcone joint. There is a panel line there, but not that big so I filled the seam with putty, sanded that smooth, re-primed the area, and then re-scribed the panel line.

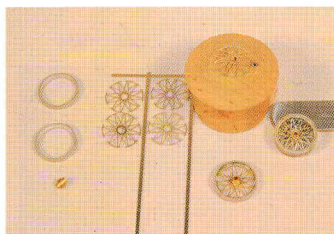


Joint for tail housing filled and re-scribed



The completed kit (TIN430360) finished as von Brauchitsch's 1932 Avus winner

While primer and paint were drying, I tackled the wire wheels, a job I usually botch badly. Years ago I made a cone-bending tool by sanding a wooden knob to a conical shape and inserting a toothpick in the centre so I could bend a set of spokes to a slight conical shape before dropping them into the wheel halves. Much to my surprise, Tin Wizard's wheels worked perfectly.



Home made wooden tool used for assembly of etched wire wheels

I "coned" an inner disk, glued the turned brass spacer to that, and glued it into the inside wheel half, cone down. An outer disk was coned, fitted over the spacer cone up and the outer wheel half was glued in place with SMALL drops of cyanoacrylate glue. Be sure to turn the outer disk slightly so the spokes don't line up. I didn't need any of the spare parts and assembly took less than a half hour. That's good engineering by Tin Wizard! The wheels were then stuck onto toothpicks and a thin coat of gloss black paint was airbrushed on.

Now to paint the body - but what colour? Photos on Tin Wizard's site show a bare metal finish while those on GPM's site show it white, which it transpires is a speed record version. Googling "SSKL streamliner" showed both, too. Then I googled "1932 Avus race" and found quite a few very clear black and white photos. The most useful showed the car alongside what was obviously a "Bugatti Blue" Type 35 and just ahead of an apparently white stock SSKL: it was a different shade than either. I sent the photo to a friend who spent a fair part of his USAF career as a photo analyst and he came back with "bare aluminium or a light-coloured metal", so I airbrushed on a couple of coats of Al-clad II "White Aluminium".



Al-clad 'white aluminium' chosen for main paint finish

Assembly is very simple - the rear wheels and dash fit into the body (don't forget the lever-action shocks) and the fronts attach to the chassis, then the two are mated with a bit of CA glue. Only one set of decals is used; mine were positioned as Avus photos showed. I scraped and polished the hood (OK, bonnet) latches and centre hinge for a bit of contrast, and photos clearly show that the exhaust pipe is not chrome-plated; I gave it a coat of Humbrol "Iron". I'd originally painted the dash black with the recessed instrument faces white, but just before installing it I found some black-on-clear instrument faces in my decal box and added those, which gave more life to the dash.



Ready for final assembly. Note - exhaust painted a dull 'iron'

My finished model matches photos very nicely, wheelbase is right on 1/43 scale, and when the axles are cut to 1/37 inches to give a 1/43 scale track, they also fit perfectly. This is a rather simple kit by current standards and I have no qualms about recommending it to a novice builder - or an experienced one who'd like a break from more complex kits! But if Tin Wizard really wants to sell kits, especially to less experienced modellers, they really need better instructions.



Tin Wizard kit TINM430360 contains 52 parts, 20 of which are for the wheels.