

T28 Super Heavy Tank

by Eric Christianson,
IPMS # 42218

Scale: 1/35

Company: Dragon Models

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Summary

Dragon has released the first-ever rendition of the enormous American T28 Super Heavy Tank, and this kit is a beauty. The overall fit is nearly perfect, the detail exquisite, and for the first time in a long time, the instructions are virtually error-free – for the few spots where things go slightly sideways, Dragon has thoughtfully included an addendum. Building this kit, made up of a fantastic number of parts (over 1,700), seemed onerous at first, but assembly and painting were a breeze due to some savvy engineering and by optionally taking some shortcuts, if desired.

Background

Designated a Super Heavy Tank, this 95-ton monstrosity was designed to breach the defenses of the Siegfried Line during the latter part of WWII. The T28 featured a 105mm T5E1 gun fitted in a fixed casemate instead of a traditional turret.



The frontal armor was up to 305mm thick, sufficient to withstand the famed German 8.8cm cannon. To cope with the immense weight, the vehicle ran on four sets of tracks instead of the usual two. However, its 500hp engine was underpowered to handle such bulk, meaning the T28 was slow (a 13km/h top speed) and cumbersome (military bridges of the day could not bear its weight). It was to operate with a four-man crew.

What's in the box

The T28 comes shipped in an over-sized, corrugated cardboard box stuffed to the hilt with 27 soft, grey styrene sprues, eight lengths of yellow 'DS' track and a cardboard insert containing the ubiquitous 'Dragon

Goodies', including a small sheet of decals, a bag of 32 metal wire springs, a turned aluminum barrel, two sheets of photo-etch, and a loop of twisted steel wire for use in making optional tow cables. The upper and lower hulls are packaged separately.

Altogether, the kit contains some 1,720 parts, I am told, give or take. (I didn't count them). The vehicle can be built in either combat or travel mode, the latter with the two outer sections being towed behind using crossed cables.

Having just completed a build of Meng's Tortoise, I can say, without reserve, this is Another Big Tank.

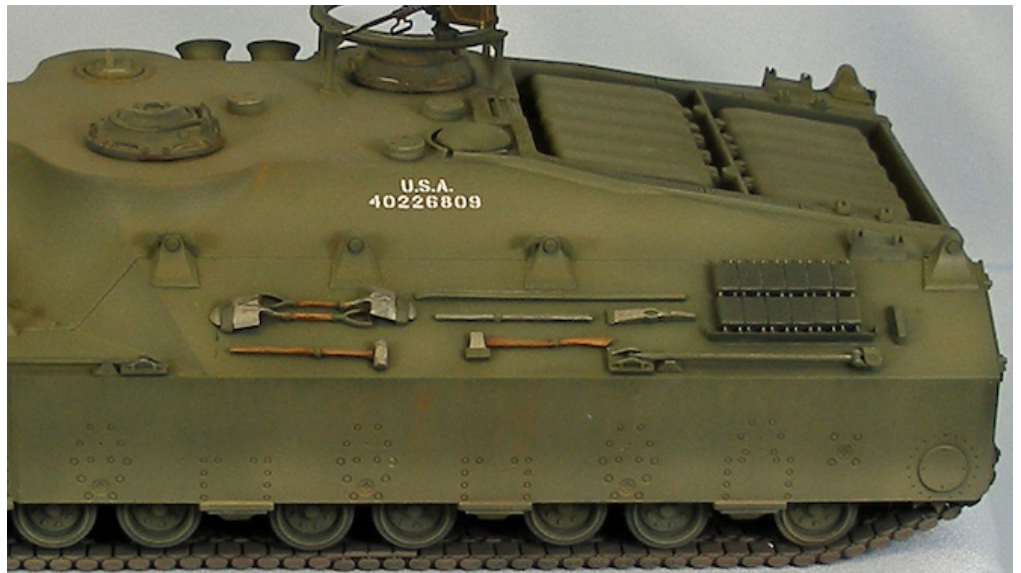
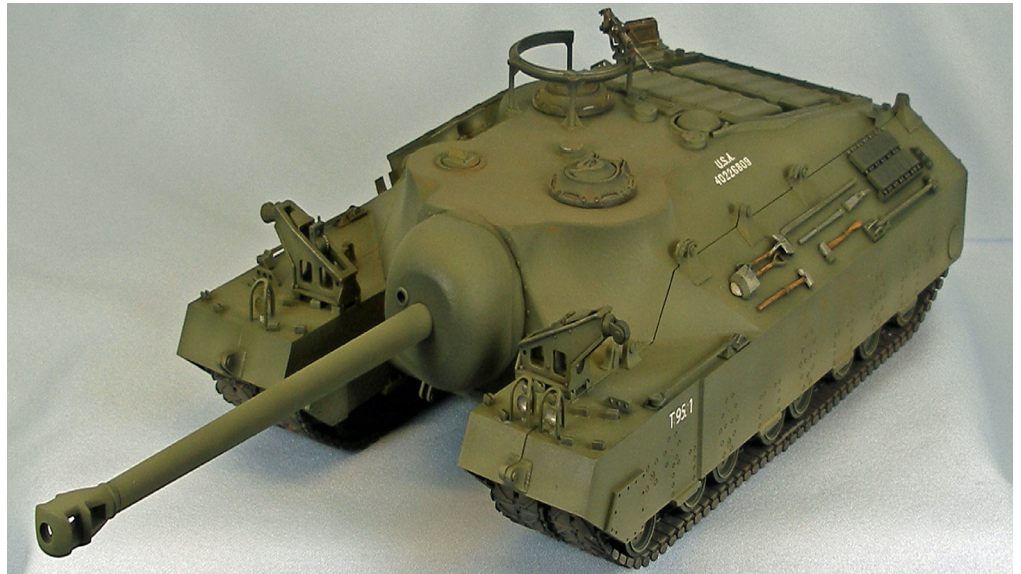
Up-Front Decisions

The two outer suspension sections can be built separate from the inner ones. Parts are included to tow these units behind the main vehicle. This decision will impact the amount of clean-up and painting you might have to do since the suspension on the inner sections will either be completely exposed or (nearly) completely hidden.

Clean-Up

With so many parts, clean-up represents a significant amount of time, especially if you intend to enter the kit in a contest. Dragon has done a good job of minimizing this task, but there are a lot of parts here. For example; there are 220 pieces that make up the inner suspension and bogies – mostly out of site unless you flip the model upside down and get real close with a flashlight. You can save yourself a lot of time by not cleaning these parts before assembly, if you wish. Otherwise, get yourself a small pile of sanding sticks and rent some movies – you're in for some work.

Once area that cannot be skipped, however, are the tires - this is because there is a piece of sprue spanning the inside of each tire that needs to be clipped, burred, sanded and cleaned in order to fit over the wheels.



So – no matter what your approach, there will still be plenty of up-front work to do. A Moto-tool is required for the inside of each wheel – borrow one if you do not already own one. There is also a seam line that you can remove from the outer surface of each tire (I didn't), but be forewarned - you will have to do it 72 times.

If you want to show a clean demarcation between tire and wheel after painting, you will need to adjust your assembly sequence accordingly so that you can slip the tires over the wheels after painting.

The Bogies

There are sixteen double-bogies on the T28, with each bogie consisting of 23 parts. Doing the math that's 368 parts covered in the first step alone. But there are shortcuts you can take if you want. First off, there are two metal springs that can be left off. The completed bogie looks and works the same with or without them installed; in fact, the assembly is a lot less fiddly with them left off. Next, only half the bogies can be seen on the completed model if you build it in combat mode.

I spent a lot of effort keeping the two types of 'sided' bogies separate all the way through assembly and painting; only to find out that they are nearly identical after you attach them



to the chassis since the overhanging side armor covers everything up. Ergo you can ignore the differences between 'B' type bogies and 'C' type bogies.

Another place you can save some time is leaving off the photo-etch mud scrapers – there are 42 of them, and they will be tough to see on the complete model as well.

Parts D10 and D11 don't appear to fit at first but they actually do – you can see the small 'step' in the fit in the illustration on Step 11.

Finally, ignore the 'G' callout in Step One – it is actually supposed to be 'C'. And that is the ONLY error I found in the

entire set of instructions. A sincere 'WELL DONE' Dragon!

The Photo-Etch (PE)

Dragon likes to include a lot of photo-etch with their models, and I like that about their kits. I usually have a choice between using the PE or using a plastic alternative. Not so with this kit, unfortunately. I did not use the mud scrapers but the two prominent stowage bins attached to the starboard side of the main hull have no plastic alternative. Considering the fact that the (square-box) bins show no scale thickness (thereby negating the need for thin PE), and that the kit already has so many parts, Dragon could have passed on making these out of PE. That said,

they go together without too much trouble and look nice once installed.

The Tracks

Much has been said on the internet about the accuracy of the track provided in this kit, both in scale width and pattern – a criticism which appears to be on target. Nonetheless, while the extra width may not be accurate, the side-by-side, double sets of track makes for an awesome looking armored vehicle, and I'm good with that. I guess if Dragon had to err, they erred on the good (wide) side. Either way, I am not sure how one would go about modifying the chassis to set things right.

With so many parts in the kit I was thankful that Dragon didn't go with Magic Track (individuals track links) here. Instead, the T28 sports eight sections of their 'DS' rubber-band style track which readily takes any type of modeling glue and paint (I used Tamiya 'Green Top' Thin Glue and Model Master paints

without any problems). And since the track is a bright yellow, it will certainly need take a lot of paint – I do not understand why these tracks can't be produced in a different color... say, track color??

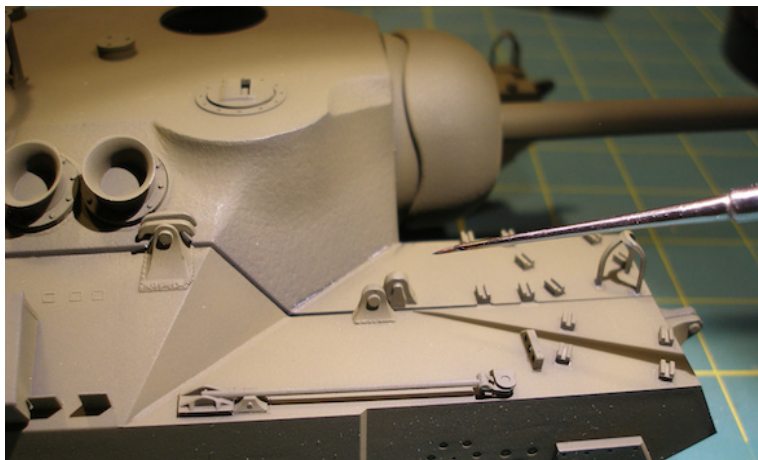
The detail, both inside and out, is excellent but there is a catch. The centerline track guides must be added one by one, and Dragon has included 432 of these for you to clip, clean and glue. You can however, minimize this task by attaching only those on the outside pair of tracks, since most of the guides will be hidden on the inside pair.

The fit of the track is not exactly tight either, and there is no way to tighten it during installation. The track tends to bow at the ends and sag slightly in the middle, although that ends up being covered by the side skirts if you assemble the tank in combat mode. Unfortunately, the rear drive sprockets do not provide enough support for the soft

rubber track and they tend to curve inwards once installed. If I were going to build this a second time, I would fashion some sort of solid core out of tubing or small pipe so the track has something to support it inside the drive sprockets.

Attaching the side sections for combat mode

If there was a single area where the fit was not exactly up to par, it would be where the two (outer) side sections are attached to the main hull. I believe this might have something to do with the width of the rubber track bumping into its 'neighbor, but I could never find exactly where it was happening. I used Testor's 'Black Bottle' liquid glue for this task since I needed a really strong bond. It was during this task that I found the only real engineering flaw in the kit. Near the front of the vehicle, right out in show-central, two of the attachment points do not line up. And I mean they really don't line up. At all. At this stage I could have pulled



everything apart, sawed off one of the bolts and reattached it where it was supposed to go... but I didn't. Too many parts, too much time – plus, as a review build I figured it might be useful to show exactly where the problem is. As far as I can tell, this was no assembly error or misunderstanding – bolts on both sides of the vehicle have the same problem (see image).

That single issue aside, the T28, with side sections attached, is one menacing-looking brute.

Painting

The T28 would be US. Army green so painting was pretty straight forward, if not a little out of sequence due to the separate black tires.

I started with laying down a primer coat over the areas containing photo-etch and the eight lengths of track using Gunze Mr. Surfacer 1200 thinned with Gunze Self-Leveling Thinner (SLT). Once dry, I airbrushed everything Tamiya XF-69 NATO Black. This included the tires, bogies, return rollers, hatches and cranes which had been mounted using tape on a piece of cardboard, as well as the upper and lower hulls and the two side sections. This coat provides the dark shadow that is needed in all the nooks and crannies.

I followed this with a base coat of Model Master Enamel Olive Drab, thinned with Testors' own airbrush thinner. I sprayed the track sections with rattle-can Krylon 'Rust Tough' Enamel Primer I picked up at an auto parts store.

I then continued with assembly except for the machine gun and hatches. These would need to wait (and be weathered separately).

The fit of the tires over the wheels on the bogies is very tight, helped somewhat by a little sanding of the inside of the tires. After assembling three bogies I decided to wait a little longer to allow the green paint to harden up a little more. The tight fit was rubbing off the green paint on the outer edge of the wheels.

Once the bogies were assembled they were attached to the inside of the two side sections. and set aside.

After attaching the side skirts, I spot painted any areas showing glue with Model Master Olive Drab, and then did a post-shading coat of Model Master Enamel Faded Olive Drab, working from the center of the panels outward.

I assembled the beautifully detailed 50cal machine gun and hand-painted it with a very thin coat of Model Master Enamel Flat Black, allowing some of the

grey styrene color to show through. Once dry this method looks pretty convincing – kind of a 'reverse dry-brush'.

I hand painted the shovels and whatnot using Vallejo Acrylics, and carefully airbrushed the (now black) track with Tamiya XF-10 Flat Brown.

I painted the three clear-plastic headlights Tamiya Flat Aluminum, followed by a detail coat of Model Master Olive Drab, leaving the two lenses clear.

With painting finished, I prepared the surface areas that would be receiving decals with two coats of Future floor polish applied by brush to give the decals a smooth surface to slide on to. I let this dry overnight.

Decals

Once the Future was dry I went about applying the decals. The few decals included in the kit are very thin and go on smoothly with just water. Once the decals were dry I airbrushed the entire surface area a heavy coat of Future to seal the decals and prepare the surface for weathering. I let this dry for 48 hours.

Weathering

I started weathering by adding a filter to the small exhaust manifold using several applications of Mig Abt060 Light Rust Brown, and used Paynes Gray for the crane wheels and extra track. Both of these colors were heavily thinned with Mona Lisa White Spirit.

Next I gave the vehicle a pin wash using Mig Shadow Brown 015 oils (aka Raw Umber). To give the flat upper surfaces and the side skirts more depth, I added dots of Mig Wash Brown, Mig Light Rust Brown and Mig Light Mud here and there and rubbed those down with an old cotton sock damp with Mona Lisa. I swirled the same colors in a circular motion on the top of the vehicle and rubbed them out as well to lighten that area up a little. I then added some oil stains using Tensocrom Oil. While the oil paints were drying, I brought out the detail by carefully dry-brushing all the protruding bits with Model Master Afrika

DunkelGrau RAL 7027 1942, an enamel. I usually use oils for dry-brushing, but I like using this Model Master color after looking at some of James Wechsler's great green-armor weathering examples.

I followed this with a 'road-dusting' coat of Vallejo Model Air Light Brown and then shot the whole vehicle with Vallejo Flat Varnish to kill any remaining shine.

I finished the vehicle with a light dusting of various Mig pigments, light earth tones for the body and wheels, dark rust and black for the track, and gun metal to the edges (applied with my finger) to give everything a look of heavy steel.

Conclusion

Number of parts aside, building this kit was a lot of fun. Dragon has really upped their game by producing an exciting, one-of-a-kind model kit, complete with accurate instructions to boot. My hat is off to their effort here.

The overall detail is excellent, with particular attention spent on the machine gun, hatches, cranes and other bits, not to mention the barely seen-bogies. There are some minor fit problems, but overall everything came together just fine.

I recommend this kit to anyone who likes to build and finish big armor. The build went very smoothly and the result is a real head-turner.

I would like to thank Dragon and Stevens International for providing this kit for review, and to Internet Modeler for giving me the opportunity to build it.