John Cox reviews the Mountfleet Models Tug.

'Cruiser' was built by A. Hall of Aberdeen to the order of Steel & Bennie of Glasgow and was looked on by many as the last word in coastal tug development. She was in fact one of the last of the coal fired tugs to be built. Her appearance is the very essence of the British steam tug era.

She is still in service, but very much altered in appearance since her conversion to diesel power in 1963. At this time she was renamed 'Ardneil' and was purchased by Ardrosssan Harbour Co. Now based in North Wales she can still be seen working in that area with occasional visits to Birkenhead. This kit of 'Cruiser is of the tug as launched in 1993.

The Kit.

The kit and contents follows current practice of kit design and presentation. It comes contained in a large box, which is a daunting prospect at first sight. The 1100mm. long fibre glass hull is substantially moulded and finished in a flat grey colour. It is fully plated with a lot of detail work, such as mooring ports and rubbing strakes, moulded in.

The separate superstructure is also moulded in the same material, and to the same high standard. Again a lot of detail work such as riveting and plating is already created. Location points are also marked for items such as portholes and weather doors.

A prominent item is a fully moulded glass fibre funnel. Again some detail is already pre-moulded and neatly carried out. The remaining mouldings consist of two life boats which are another eye catching feature of the model.

Two cardboard boxes contain, between them, no less than 17 bags of white metal fittings. These bags are numbered consecutively. There are several sheets of pre marked plywood for such items as main decks etc. One sheet carries a screen print of cut outs that go to form the planked decks and wheel house etc. The printing is well carried out with no running of the ink into the grain.

The remainder of the construction material is a large selection of good quality strip timber of various sizes and profiles, together with various diameter metal rods and aluminium tube. A 250mm x 4mm prop shaft and tube is part of the hardware. A further bag contains sundry items such as chain, cordage, and printed dials for compass card and telegraphs. Perhaps a first in any kit, there is a lump of beeswax!

A full size plan is annotated with the respective positions of all the fittings using their part number. The plan also contains suitable profiles to construct a stand. The kit is completed with a building manual and four photographs of the prototype.

As is the norm, the builder will be required to provide his own adhesives, paints, and drive motor. Radio equipment is also the builder's responsibility This will depend very much on personal choice but I elected to go for two functions only.

Where To Begin?

While the most obvious starting point is the hull, I found it convenient to prepare the host of fittings (nearly a thousand) at the same time. Each bag of fittings was treated individually so that parts would not become mixed. The standard is as good as any on the market with very little flash. A certain amount of cleaning up with Swiss files is essential. This removes any mould marks or over spill in awkward areas. Once satisfied the fittings were washed in soapy water and rinsed. When dry they were mounted on scrap balsa and sprayed with white primer from a car aerosol. Most are painted either black or white as finished, but the primer suits both colours Two coats of Humbrol in the appropriate colour were applied by brush. When dry they were protected by three coats of polyurethane. For brass finish I used gold acrylic from the Rover range of aerosols and finished with a clear lacquer which gave a very good representation of the finished metal.

Once finished and the paint dry the fittings were re bagged awaiting use.

The Hull

The hull requires filling and smoothing on the inside of the bulwarks and this is best done before attempting any fitting out.. Car body filler is the accepted material for this task.

The first requirement is to fit the stern bracket and inwales. This action is fully covered in the manual and presented little difficulty although I did use several 10 BA nuts and bolts to assist security of the bracket. Inwales are a combination of 10mm square timber and plastic strip. The plastic is used at the curve of the stern and bow and simplifies the process. A separate plan with measurements gives the correct position of the inwales, plus the position of the deck support beams. The propshaft tube is installed at this stage so the type of motor selected should be to hand to assist in the alignment. No advice is given on the type of motor most suitable, but a Hectoperm or similar would appear appropriate, used in connection with a universal joint. All these items are available from advertisers within this magazine. I used a 12 volt motor from an old invalid carriage and home made universal joint. A car fan motor is an alternative suggestion.

The main deck comprises two sections cut from ply sheet and joined midships. Little trimming was needed to get an accurate fit. Once the coaming is installed access to the hull is still enormous and would make installation of steam propulsion an easy matter.

After the deck has been fitted, simulated deck plating is laid using the high quality art card supplied. On the original vessel, two sections of the deck, fore and aft, are tarmac covered. Plywood cut outs are supplied to simulate the effect. I deviated slightly from this approach by mixing Humbrol enamel to an appropriate colour and then added micro balloons, to give what I think is a better tarmac like effect.

With the hull decked over a start can be made on installing some of the white metal fittings. These are such items as bulwark stanchions and steering chains. One very pleasing item is the provision of angled and riveted strips that seal that always awkward area between bulwark and deck and also gives an authentic look at the same time.

The steering chains with their attendant pulleys and quadrant can now be fitted but are a fiddly job although they look very realistic once

Cruiser

fitted. Sadly a large portion of this feature is hidden from view under the stern grating.

The hull was prepared for painting by using wire wool used with care to avoid damaging the moulded detail. It was then washed and allowed to dry. A coat of white paint was sprayed in the area of the waterline and a 2.5mm masking tape (railway shops) applied. The underwater section was sprayed red oxide primer as was the inner bulwarks and deck (other than the tarmac area). The upper section was given two coats of matt black Humbrol using a high quality artists brush. When the water line masking tape was removed the whole hull was given three coats of matt polyurethane which affords protection as well as giving an authentic sheen to the finish. A yellow line is called for just above the rubbing strake. Although I dislike this method of finish I used car lining tape for the purpose and this was sealed with matt polyurethane.

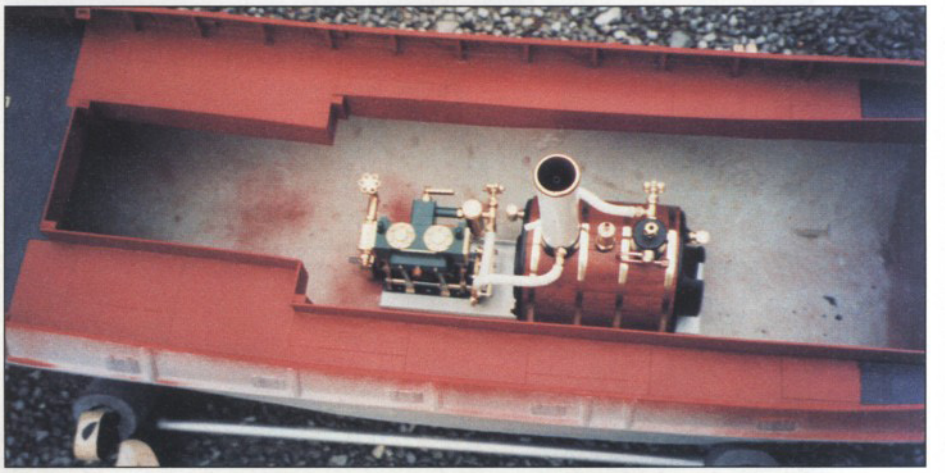
By now the vessel was taking shape and I was delighted with progress so far.

Superstructure

As stated this is a large one piece moulding with a lot of detail already moulded in. White metal beams are fitted which extends the boat deck to the full hull width. This decking is of plywood and art card plating. Some riveting detail has to be applied and the suggested method is P.V.A. glue and syringe. After a little practice the process is easy. Very little sanding was required to obtain the correct sheer of the superstructure relative to the deck. In any case white metal and riveted angle brackets are cyano'd to the upper works and make an adjustable and authentic join to the deck.

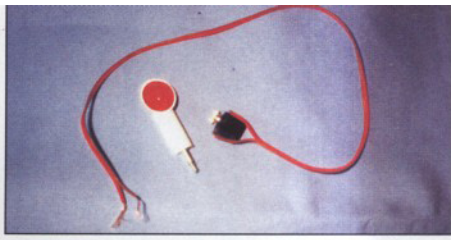
Certain cut outs have to made in the fibre glass for such items as engine room skylights or portholes. This presents no problem if patience and constant checks are applied. The moulding was prepared for painting in the same manner as the hull, but where fittings were to be glued, masking tape was applied at the appropriate point. When the tape is removed a firm, unpainted surface, is left ready to accept the adhesive. Suggestions are made within the instructions as to

Kit and contents. All the white metal fittings,(nearly a thousand) are contained in 17 numbered, plastic bags, contained in boxes 1 and 2.

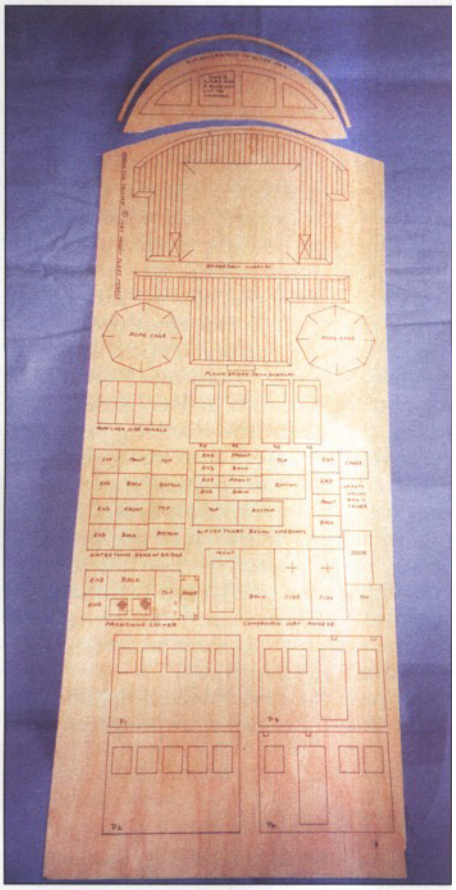


There would be plenty of room for a Cheddar 'Proteus' steam plant and ancillaries.

Bilge keels are cut from marked ply and secured with pins and two part epoxy.



ON/OFF switch to R.X. is a radio jack plug and socket. Plug shorted out and completes circuit when inserted into socket



Screen printed ply requires cutting out. All mated up accurately on assembly.

the correct colours which are mixed from Humbrol paints. Again this was brush painted and finished with polyurethane to the same specification as the hull. The fittings were then positioned using a slow set cyano which allows time for adjustment. The upper work fittings are many and varied, not least being the dominant towing hook and bracket

Wheelhouse and Flying Bridge.

These are made up mostly from the screen printed plywood sheets. Assembly is well covered in the instructions and present little problem. Both bridge deck and flying bridge have printed overlays for the planked decking. The flying bridge is open with metal railings surrounding it. The lower part of the rails have canvass screen 'spray dodgers' lashed on. These are made up from white 'Solartex' aircraft covering material. If done correctly it adds wonderful authenticity to the model. Wheel house and flying bridge are finished as varnished timber and once the metal fittings are in position the whole model starts to really come to life..

Masts and Rigging.

Round dowel is provided for the two masts. This has to be tapered to correct size. This was done using a 'David' plane, but finished off by rotating in an electric drill running at slow speed and using progressively finer grades of sandpaper. If the mast fittings are constantly offered up accuracy is achievable.

The rigging is quite extensive on this model and took the whole of one day to complete. All the lines should be run across the supplied beeswax to lay the strands. Technique is well covered within the text and again not difficult, although very fiddly. Excess cordage was trimmed off with nail clippers.

On The Water.

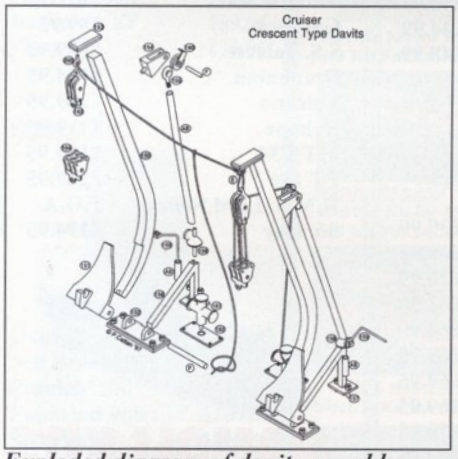
Suggested all up weight is in the area of 18kg. In fact with the two batteries installed it weighed in at 12.25kg leaving some 5.75kg. to be made up with lead ballast.

Sea trials were made on a canal basin. These were successful and gave an immense boost to morale. The obvious fault was far too much power and speed. By connecting the batteries in parallel the resulting six volts is quite adequate with the Astec E.S.C giving precise speed control, both forward and reverse.. Some two hours were spent on the water and when play stopped for the day the gel cells were still producing full power. People watching commented on the impressive visual aspect of model and equally flattering comments were made of the performance.

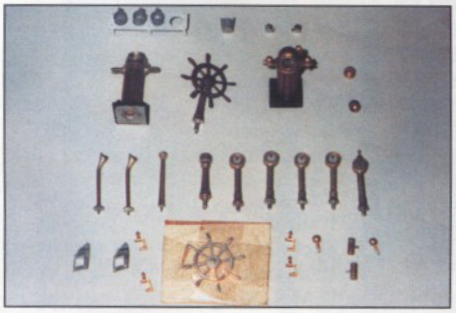
Propulsion by an ex invalid carriage drive motor. It is 5" in diameter and draws 1.75 amps off load but only slightly more on load. It is shown joined to the propshaft by a rigid joiner, Motor and shaft installed joined as a rigid unit. Joiner then removed and centre section cut out. It was then rejoined using a section of rubber gas pipe to form a flexible coupling.

The funnel is a dominant feature of the kit. Pre moulded in fibre glass it is seen being fitted with steps, made from wire and jig supplied.

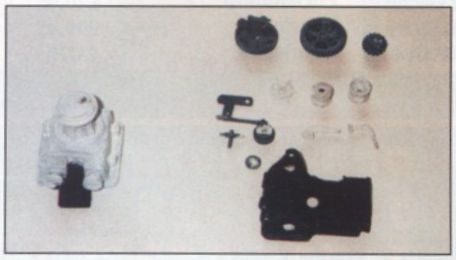
Davits with some parts already in position. These glue in position but I also used 12 B.A. nuts and bolts as additional security against possible knocks.



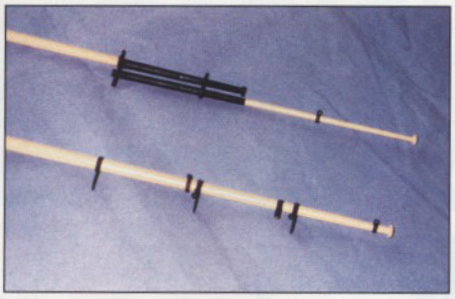
Exploded diagram of davit assembly. This is shown A 4 size in manual.



Binnacles and telegraphs plus other white metal fittings for bridge and flying bridge.



Winch and capstan during assembly.



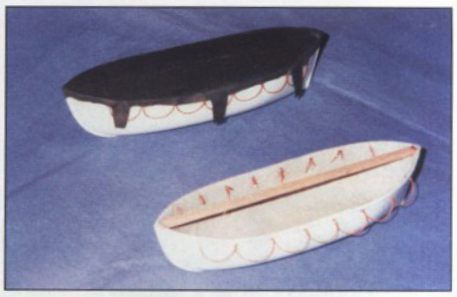
Mast during assembly. The main is almost of the Nelson era even in 1952.

Conclusions

This is a very good kit well presented. It is really for the more experienced builder but that said it is not beyond the ability of most people, providing time and patience is applied. Some builders might consider more detail such as weathering and adding deck paraphernalia. It is certainly a kit that would justify such attention.

Transport is not quite the problem one might think. The whole upper works complete with rigging lift off as one. The only exceptions are two fore stays that locate at a single point in the bow. To make attachment easy I fitted a short length of chain with a small fishing weight on the end. The chain passes up from under the deck through a ferrule where a small hook is then attached. The fore stays hook on to this and are kept in tension by the weight hanging beneath the deck. When transporting the model the upperworks live in the boot while the hull sits nicely on the rear seat of the car.

This has been a very rewarding and satisfying project and I look forward to more offerings from Mountfleet Models. In the meanwhile I am trying to justify a Cheddar slide valve steam engine to add a further dimension to 'Cruiser'.



Life boats of moulded fibreglass. No interior fitting required. Grab ropes of twisted wire. 'Solartex' is used to form canvass covers. 'Solartex' will heat-shrink to form a tight fit.

'Cruiser' well on here way to completion. The one piece detachable upperworks are really best worked on, off the model.