



# MODEL KIT Report

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## Fly Away with Me!

In Hobby Merchandiser's May 2002 issue, I reviewed an exciting wooden construction kit of Leonardo da Vinci's Airscrew from the Imagination Factory, Inc (IFI). For this July issue, I will revisit IFI, and share my rewarding experiences in building their overpowering presentation of da Vinci's visionary "Flying Machine."

First and foremost, you should understand that from the purely intellectual perspective, this kit represents a tour de force from the moment you pick up the box. When you open the kit box you will find much more than just an assortment of parts; here, there is clearly an expression of the artist's awe and fascination with da Vinci's genius, and his effort to bring the contemporary modeler into a closer and more personal association with this amazing man and his time.

Like the previously reviewed Airscrew, the presentation of the Flying Machine package is nothing less than superlative, starting with a sturdy, colorful cardboard container. Inside is a veritable cornucopia of wooden pieces, bags, leather, wire and rope, and the most artistic and detailed instruction manual I have ever seen.



*Construction incorporates numerous individual elements, including a wing attachment harness that the modeler laminates on a male form.*

Interviewing IFI president Kate McCrindle, and Robert Coyle, the artist who designed the kit, I learned of the intriguing turn of events that led to the appearance of this unique model in the hobby market.

Mr. Coyle explains why IFI chose to model da Vinci subjects. "The choice of da Vinci dates back to an art school challenge. A group of us were discussing models and noting the comparative absence of really fascinating objects available for modelers. Half in jest, I suggested that someone should create a da Vinci flying machine model kit. My friend said that it would be 'bloody impossible. Have you seen that flying machine? Have you seen those drawings?'"

For 10 years, notions of how to create a model of the machine had shared space in the artist's mind with other more pressing commercial endeavors. Even after the Flying Machine kit's eventual creation, it required the dedicated intervention of Kate McCrindle and IFI to finally bring the finished product to our collective door.

Customers will be intrigued by the Flying Machine's amazing box art, and are likely to ask you how big this smodel really is. You can tell them that the Flying Machine has a wingspan of approximately 42" and



*The finished model looks at home in its natural element. Chuck Davenport used a different mounting system from that supplied in the kit, electing to leave the wings bare to show off the beauty and complexity of the 42" wing structure.*

an overall length of 17". The box doesn't look quite large enough to hold a model of that size, but this is the point where you can explain that there are no prefabricated parts, save for the boxwood sheaves (part #23). You can quickly follow an explanation of the contents with a pitch for a basic set of modeling tools, a few good clamps, wood stain, and a tube of cyanoacrylate adhesive and a quality grade of five-minute epoxy. These items will give your customer all that is needed to complete the model.

Five-minute epoxy is indispensable to a successful construction experience with the Flying Machine. Although white glue is a satisfactory adhesive for the task, it takes too long to set and will severely increase the assembly time. Apart from wood stain, the only requisite item not included in the kit is a sheet of thin plywood, which is used to fabricate the three forms needed to create the wing ribs, and wing and tail harnesses. Show your customers your plywood display. They can laminate 1/16" or 1/8" parts to fabricate the required 3/8" thickness. Also, you don't have to send potential customers to the hardware store for

wood stain. Instead, you can keep the sales in your store by suggesting that they use thinned enamels, which will work just fine as a color wash.

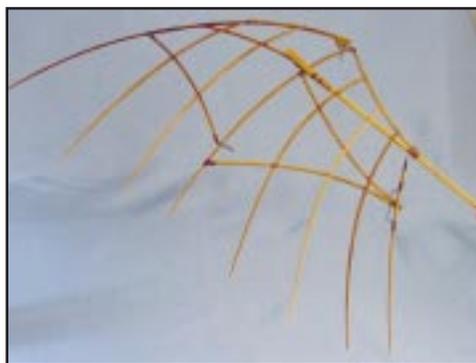
I invested approximately 40 hours in building all the components of the kit, and I am still pondering on how best to display the finished model. This model is definitely not any kind of an ARD (almost-ready-to-display) project. Leonardo da Vinci's Flying Machine kit

requires lots of patience, mixed with careful, devoted attention to the beautifully illustrated instruction manual. Fortunately, the skills of an artisan are not required; anyone capable of building a stick & tissue airplane or sailing ship model can easily handle the Flying Machine.

The building sequence begins with construction of the "fuselage," in all of its deliciously complex detail. I constantly referenced the instructions and parts log for accuracy as I removed the parts from the numbered and decorated parts bags. Subsequent releases will feature parts in see-through poly bags for easy identification, although I had no difficulty whatsoever in locating the parts for any specific construction sequence. Every one of the component parts in this model is of the highest quality, close-grained cedar for the main components, 3/32" thick, with pebbled calf leather being provided for the belts, boxwood

sheaves for the various pulleys, and nylon twine for the rigging and tie-downs.

The Flying Machine features a full-size, artistic da Vinci building plan for the wing structure. This glossy print is frameable after the model is complete, and will provide the perfect backdrop for displaying the completed model. Prior to construction, I took the print to Kinko's and made a full-size, single sheet copy for less than \$4.



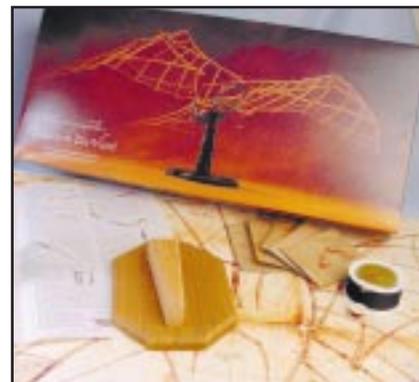
*Each rib is laminated cedar, shaped by the builder. The wing is pinned and strung together, much like builders in da Vinci's time might have done.*

After laminating some scrap cardboard and adhering the copy thereon, I was ready to build the wings. To save time, I laminated and finished individual ribs as I built the fuselage. Each rib — more than 30 in all — consisted of two pieces of cedar, which are laminated over a plywood form with five-minute epoxy. The actual process of building the wings was a matter of pinning them in place in accordance with the plan, similar to a stick and tissue model, adhering the ribs with five-minute epoxy, then reinforcing the structure with nylon thread. Prior to assembly onto the model, the two partially completed wings are a picture of beauty and grace. The empennage went together with equal ease, although a patient and attentive building approach is needed to yield a perfectly formed part, just as it is with the wings and fuselage. The only really intricate procedure was rigging the wings and fuselage.

In so many ways, building the da Vinci Flying Machine reminded me of building stick & tissue airplanes and wooden sailing ships. The model now awaits my final attention because I am in a dilemma as to how to display it. A fine cedar base is included with the kit, and IFI tells me that plans for a more detailed base are presently in the works. My dilemma is that planting something this delicate on a base seems anachronistic. Similarly, hanging it by a wire is far too trite. I am going to ruminate on this for awhile, as models of this quality and clarity of purpose do not come along that often.

You have a select clientele who will respond to the vision of the artist and the craftsmanship inherent in this model's design. Thoughts of a quick modeling fix will subside when you explain that pleasure does not reside solely in reaching the destination, but sometimes, in merely cherishing the journey. Cherish this one.

For more information about the Flying Machine and the other fine Leonardo da Vinci models from IFI, circle #304 on the Reader Service Card, see their ad page 50, or telephone Imagination Factory, Inc. at 519-739-3295. **HM**



*Components are packed into a visually enticing and compartmented box.*