1/48th P-51H Mustang Kits  
A History

As most people will agree, the sleek, sexy, killer look of the P-51D Mustang went out the window when North American Aviation’s designers came up with its replacement, the P-51H. To me, it’s always looked like a pregnant P-51D with its enlarged fuselage and taller tail assembly. The P-51H was the final aircraft built in a series of “Light Weight Mustangs” that included the XP-51F, XP-51G, XP-51J, and finally the P-51H. These came about via a set of Royal Air Force specs which called for an aircraft that could roll with the Focke-Wulf 190 and also take on the Mitsubishi Zero in the Pacific, as well as an extended range Mustang. But, by the time the P-51H went into production (1946), the war was over and the RAF had no interest in the airplane.

A single example was allocated to the RAF (serial no. KN987) and rumored to have been painted in Olive Drab and Dark Green over Neutral Gray, but records show that it never went overseas and the airplane was eventually flown to McDill Field in Florida to await it’s disposition. There is currently a P-51H warbird painted in similar markings, but I believe these markings were conceptualized and not actually applied to the single airplane the RAF purchased.

The P-51H had a vastly improved Merlin engine, so it was faster and its climb rate was much superior to that of the P-51D, but it still did not have the range needed because no fuselage internal fuel tanks were incorporated in the design. 2000 P-51Hs were initially ordered, to be made up of 555 NA-126s and 1445 NA-129s with minor differences. All of these planes were to be built at North American’s Inglewood factory. An additional 1629 examples were ordered from NAAs Dallas plant under the charging number of NA-124, these being designated P-51M by the USAAF. The P-51M differed primarily in having the V-1650-9A engine. But, by the end of its production run, only the 555 P-51H NA-126 models were produced used by the USAF, ANG, SAC, All-Weather Flying Service, and two airframes ended up with the USN doing work with the Grumman F10F-1 Jaguar testing program and carrier qualification tests. The last P-51H rolled off the production line in 1946. No P-51M’s were ever produced. Currently, there are four known survivors, two in flyable condition and two are on static display in museums, one of which is at Lackland AFB in San Antonio, though in pretty poor shape after being outside in the weather for the past 50 years.

Per Scalemates, the first 1/48th scale P-51H ever produced was by Premier Model Company, an all plastic kit, though John Burn’s book has it listed as 1/49th scale.
It was produced in 1958-1959 era and a very crude kit, only slightly resembling a P-51H Mustang. This kit was one of 6 or 7 1/48\textsuperscript{th} to 1/54\textsuperscript{th} scale aircraft kits this company made. Premier also made a few car kits and I have been told they were very crude as well. There was speculation that Aurora based their kit from these molds, but this is NOT the case.

The next 1/48\textsuperscript{th} scale P-51H I could find information on was done by Hawk, also produced in the mid to late 1950’s. It too is an all plastic kit with decals, but that is all I know about it. This model is not to be confused with their popular P-51D Mustang kit that was first released in 1962 as an all new tool and which was rereleased multiple times by Hawk and Testors over the years.

Probably the most well known kit is the Aurora 1/48\textsuperscript{th} P-51H which was marketed only as a P-51 Mustang, though the box top had it shooting down a Focke-Wulf 190 seemingly to represent a P-51D. It was first released in 1958 in very thick, hard, silver plastic with the markings imprinted into the plastic. It could also double as a hand axe. Although not very well detailed, it was fairly accurate in basic shape and the best of those produced in the late 1950’s. I always thought the box art was pretty cool, especially for a 11 or 12 year old and it was the first Mustang model I ever built.
This kit originally came out in 1957, but was released three times, in 1958, 1965, and 1968, each one having different box art and labeling. The one shown above is the 1968 release.

We'll now fast forward a few years and in the late 1970's, a vacuform company named Eagles Talon produced a 1/48th kit of the P-51H Mustang, limited run and distributed via mail order only. Eagles Talon was eventually absorbed into Wings 48th owned by Don Bennett of Don's Model Works, a company that produced a large line of very high quality 1/48th scale vacuforms. After Mr. Bennett died in 2011, the company fell into the hands of his son, Chuck Bennett, who elected to close the business. A post on Hyperscale indicates that Don Bennett did not rerelease the P-51H under the Wings 48th label which he may have been retooling upon his death.

The next 1/48th scale P-51H seems to be a bit more progressive produced by Historic Plastic Models (kit 48-005), more commonly known simply as HiPM. The kit comes on three trees of dark grey plastic, with two injection-molded canopies - one open, one closed - a fret of photo-etch brass for detail parts, and Propagteam decals for two aircraft of the 67th Fighter Group in Alaska in 1946-47, and two aircraft of the Massachusetts Air National Guard, one from the "Irish" and one from the "Polish"
squadrons. By today’s standards, this kit was pretty crude and has a very thin wing cord that is totally unacceptable. It would take a great deal of work to finish this kit in a form which somewhat looks like a P-51H. Definitely not recommended. HiPM is a Czech Republic company and this kit was primarily sold in Europe, though it could be found in some specialty shops that imported kits like this to unsuspecting U.S. customers.

In 1996, Collect-Aire produced a 1/48th scale resin kit of the F-51H whose masters may have been done by LF Models and cast here in the U.S. by Loon Models. It was not a bad kit and the shape was fairly accurate, but it had a lot of fit problems, more than it should have for the price (about $75 in 1996). I tried to build this kit and it almost drove me to giving up the hobby. It was my first attempt at building full resin kit and the whole experience was not good. I ended up keeping the nice decal sheet that came in the kit and throwing the rest of it away. 3 months of time and energy down the tubes. It now resides somewhere in one of Fort Bend County’s land fill’s, probably doing more good there than in my stash of Mustang kits.

In 1994, Classic Airframes Resin company was born and one of their first full plastic kits was a 1/48th scale P-51H released in the late 90’s. It was probably the first, really decent kit of this airplane in this scale. It came with a resin cockpit which was highly detailed and may have had a resin wheel well, can’t remember. I built this kit in about 2005 without too much difficulty, though the fit of the parts was pretty bad. I think they either used resin or copper molds, because there was a lot of trash on the surface of the parts, all of which were given a good wet sanding prior to painting. I elected to build a P-51H from the 111th FIS that had been stationed at Ellington Field in the mid-1950’s. This model now resides in the U.S.S. Lexington Model Museum in Corpus Christi.
Now we fast forward to 2019 when a Ukrainian model company, Modelsvit, announces and then releases an all new, state of the art, P-51H Mustang. Imported by Sprue Brothers ($48), their first shipment of these kits sold out in less than a day. It wasn’t until February 2020 that I was able to finally obtain one via Freetime Hobbies. To say I was immediately impressed would have been an understatement. It has nine trees of medium gray parts, very fine surface detail, inscribed panel lines, and every bit as good as the new Eduard P-51D Mustangs. It also has a tree of clear parts containing a two part open canopy and a one part closed canopy, your choice. Also included is a small fret of photo etched parts and a clear parts mask set. The decal sheet has markings for four aircraft, three ANG airplanes (Texas, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts) and a RAF camouflaged P-51H, KN987, that was purchased by the U.K. but never delivered. This kit has a complete and very well detailed cockpit and set of wheel wells, a set of underwing auxiliary fuel tanks and rockets, and separated ailerons, main flaps, control surfaces, and rudder. Overall, this is a truly excellent P-51H Mustang kit. Modelsvit has also announced an all new 1/48th F-82 Twin Mustang for release in 2020 or 2021. If it is as good as the P-51H, then it should be an outstanding kit.

![P-51H Mustang Kit](image1)

Although not a 1/48th scale plastic kit, I wanted to make mention of another very early P-51H (3/8" scale) produced by Jetco Models in the very early 50’s, a wooden control line model. In this ad, it appears that one of these models won a series of national championships in the mid-50’s. I wonder why Jetco decided to base their kit on the P-51H and not the P-51D which would have been as well known and a much better looking Mustang?
In summary, it appears that there have now been eight 1/48th P-51H Mustang kits produced in plastic, far more than I would have realized when I set out to write this review. I might mention that Caracal Decals is about to release a 1/48th scale sheet of decals for the P-51H, evidently as a result of how popular the Modelsvit kit has become.

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CARACAL MODELS CD48167
F-51H MUSTANG