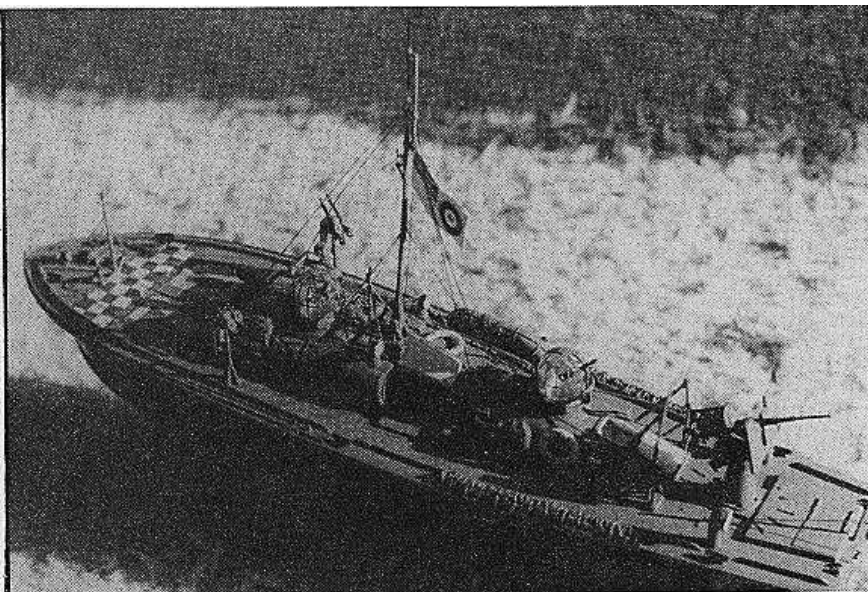


# Building the Airfix model RAF High Speed Launch



John Pritchard makes up the model as No 156 and gives extra detailing information useful for all boats



The picture immediately above shows the Airfix model finished as HSL 127 made directly from the kit. Study this picture in conjunction with the others to see the extent of the changes required to make a precise model of No 156, markings for which are also given in the kit. Top picture shows author's completed model with all detail changes needed to represent No 156 in all respects correct.

Having been associated with the production of the Airfix RAF rescue launch project since it was first considered by the company in 1970 it is a particularly fulfilling experience to see and build the finished product.

In saying that there are a few minor mistakes and omissions in this model I intend no criticism of Airfix for their efforts. With most projects it is possible to either obtain fairly detailed plans or examine the real thing. RAF marine craft must be one of the most difficult subjects of all to research for plans are almost non-existent and the real craft no longer exist in their original form, if at all. From my own research material however, I can state most confidently that in all essentials this kit makes up into an accurate model.

I have chosen to base my model upon HSL 156 altering or adding to the kit parts as needed to produce a more accurate rendering in the details. No 156 also has a special corner in my research files as I was privileged to meet her wartime commander and hear at first hand details of some of his rescues which led

to him receiving the Royal Navy DSC (but nothing from the RAF!).

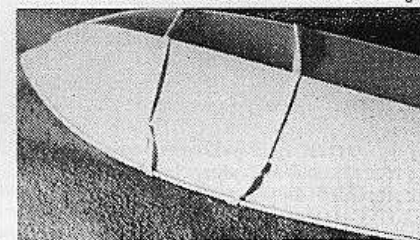
Turning to the kit itself, the underhang around the deck moulding is sufficiently deep to enable the whole hull to be built up as a 'dry-fit' with rubber bands. It is possible to cement the two hull sides together and keep the deck separate. Some extra finger pressure is needed under the front of the bow, known as the forefoot, for a few minutes. Care is needed when adding the transom as some fairing and filling is needed to achieve a good fit. The kit can be made up by following the clearly set out instruction sheet but if it is desired to put some interior detail in, the deck and superstructure can be kept separate from the hull. A simple arrangement based on the actual interior of the real craft is shown.

The wheelhouse bulkheads (items 20 and 32) need to be trimmed at the sides as they are rather oversize in width. I have modified this area by making up a fresh bulkhead (from 40 thou plastic card) which incorporates a door opening from the sick bay area into the

wheelhouse. This means that with floors and bulkheads formed from stiff card, or preferably plastic card, item 19 is not required and the wheel, 17, glued on to 18 is attached directly under the forward edge of the wheelhouse deck aperture. All internal transverse and inner fore and aft linings were of wood with natural varnish finish. All inner surfaces of the hull sides, wheelhouse, superstructure and engine room including deckheads (ceilings!) were all painted white. On leaving the boatyard even the engine rooms and bilges were also finished in gloss white. In my 'basic' internal arrangement I have left an access in the wheelhouse forward bulkhead which on the full-size craft would lead to the crew's quarters in the fo'c'sle. The floors were painted in a dark red-brown colour.

In an endeavour to add a bit of life to the wheelhouse I have added a compass in front of the wheel and to port a helm angle indicator. On the right of the wheel is the three throttle quadrant. These items are made out of clear spruce of the required diameter. The part of the deck which is enclosed by the wheelhouse should really be lowered by an eighth of an inch to be strictly accurate. On the rear of the wheelhouse front panel, item 33, I have placed the drive motors for the Kent clear-view screens and an instrument panel which slopes downwards at an angle and should have a natural metal finish. Having decided to concentrate on the building of the craft itself I have deliberately omitted any crew members from my model but if a helmsman is to be placed in the wheelhouse a small raised platform will be needed as was provided on the full-sized craft. It is also a good idea to cut away part of the port window so that the helmsman can be seen!

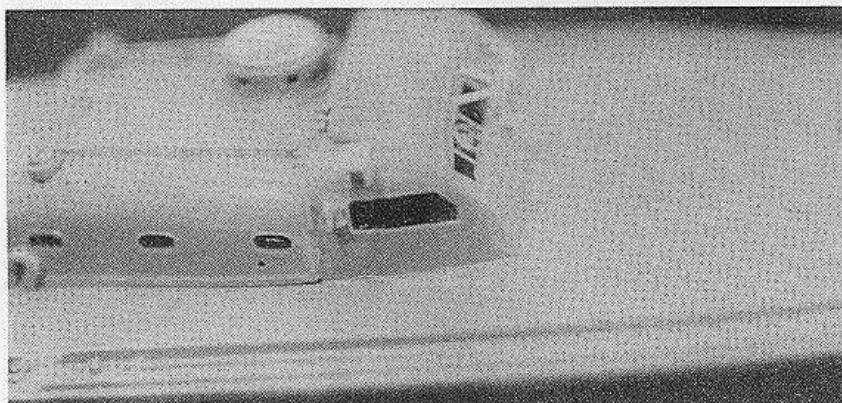
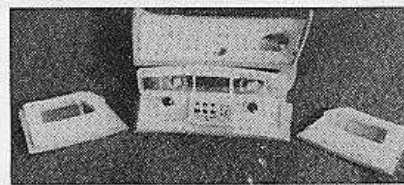
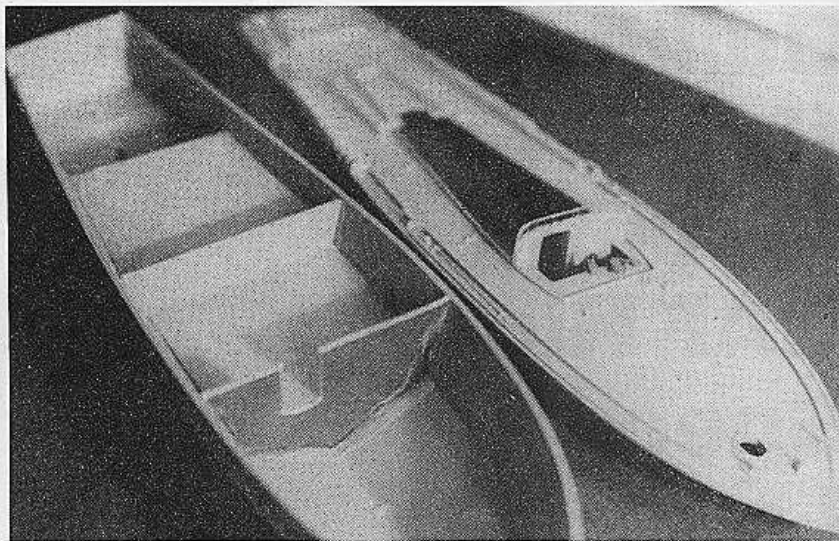
After gluing the wheelhouse pieces in place, making sure that the bottom edges sit on the deck with no gaps, carefully glue items 45, 52 and 53 together and fix in position on the hull sides and deck with rubber bands while the cement dries on hull sides only. Deck can then be removed for internal detailing.



the deck. Again make sure that all lower edges fit snugly on to the deck. If the deck has been fixed to the hull then the turrets need to be made up and windows fixed as per instruction sheet. Should the deck have been kept separate then these items can be added later. Note that the window shown on the port side hatch should be blanked off. From my completed model can be seen how this hatch can be arranged in the open position. The lower portion opened downwards while the upper curved section lifted up and was held in position with two stays. This hatch opened directly into the sick-bay.

The peculiar little 'stalks' sticking up from the deck represent mushroom vents. Unfortunately they have been over moulded and need to be shortened and the tops rounded; one has been omitted from the starboard side and is needed to balance the one on the port side of the bow. The two vents which appear in front of the wheelhouse need to be replaced in line with those in front of them and on the inside of the front of the little deck-light fittings.

On the model the skipper's conning hatch is too far forward and needs to be moved back so that the hinges come on the aft edge of the wheelhouse top. Fill the small gap which will be revealed in the front of the hatch with body filler. This hatch can be fixed in the open position if the skipper is required to be placed in this hatch. The cover should then lie at an angle down on to the anti-shrapnel matting or

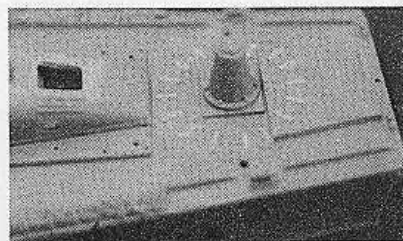


Stages of construction, all following precise procedures described in the text. **Top:** Internal bulkheads including door opening, and the compass and throttle quadrants. **Above, centre:** Wheelhouse interior, with instrument panel and drive motors for clear-view screens. **Above:** The modified wheelhouse with altered hatch position. **Below:** Engine room hatch changes, and treads added around Oerlikon gun position.

superstructure if the matting is omitted and obviously the hatch opening must be shaped to match with the original opening.

The oval hatches 36, 50 and 78 fit quite snugly but the engine room hatch, 51, needs trimming on each side slightly and the underneath cross braces trimmed down otherwise it will not fit into the gap. On my model I have left the hatch in the open position which was the usual practice. The cross braces have had to be deleted and substituted by two parallel straps as per full-size craft.

On HSL (High Speed Launch) 156 the searchlight was moved to a small platform on the side of the skipper's hatch. I have made this out of thin plastic card. The original position is smoothed over. Several craft were modified in like manner, and some even retained the original light, the modification providing a second searchlight! Another amendment to the wheelhouse is the addition of an aircraft type pear drop cover for the added Direction/Finding loop. Again thin plastic card and sprue were utilised. The actual D/F housing was shaped from a small bomb out of the 'odds' box.



Items 79 and 80 represent ammunition boxes and should be mounted close up against the anti-shrapnel padding. The twin gun mounts on each side of the wheelhouse make up with a little care needed in joining the guns. On 156 the matting was left off and the underlying metal shields only appear. These can be simply represented by sanding items 121 and 125 smooth and reducing the thickness as much as possible.

Before mounting the Oerlikon cannon smooth off the inner rear vent mounting positions and place treads made out of plastic card strip as shown in the photograph in a circle around the base of the gun mounting. I have

added a large blob of softened sprue under the Oerlikon to represent the canvas bag into which spent shell cases fell.

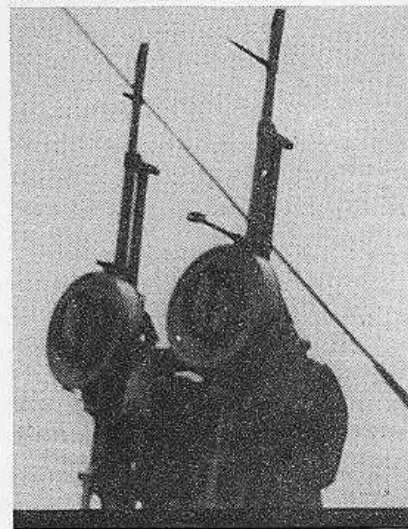
When adding the plastic padding make sure that the window openings in items 146 and 151 are filled in. The padding should cover all the wheelhouse top and also extend further along the sides than is shown in the kit.

The Carley float which on this craft is mounted upright on the starboard side has three retaining straps added, again made from thin plastic card into which the paddles, which are thinned down by sanding, are wedged.

Just beneath the mast cross tree is mounted the IFF aerial, a thin finger of sprue sticking up from the middle of a small rectangular platform supported by a stay. The aerial wires and mast stays themselves are made out of hair-line stretched sprue. I have kept them to single strands for my modelling skill falls short of producing the four-stranded type with circular separators which were such a noticeable feature on RAF rescue craft. Reference to my article in the August 1979 issue will show what I mean clearly in the heading photograph!

When painting note that the hull sides are glossy black but all other surfaces are either matt, the deck in particular, or semi-matt finish. For this work I used Humbrol paints;

**Below:** A close view of the actual twin Vickers mount on HSL 156 which provides a useful reference for improving the Airfix parts.

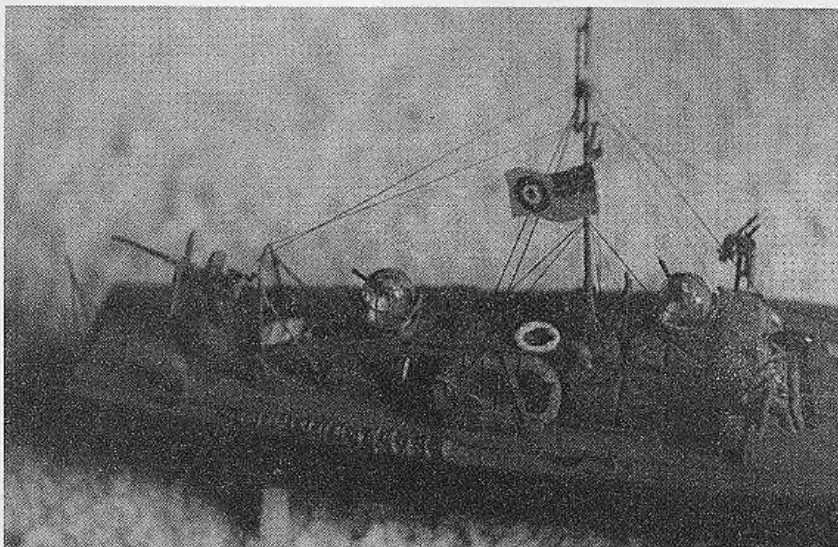
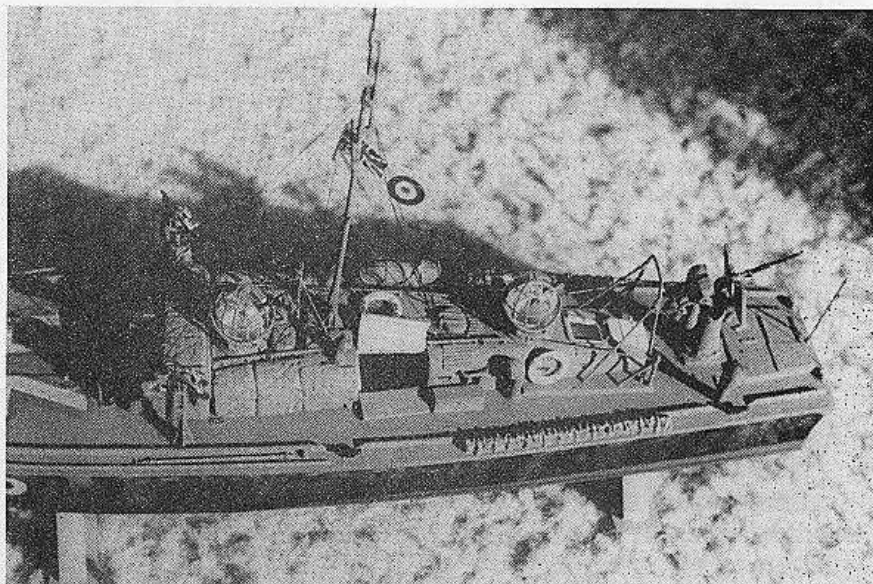




for the underside the nearest I could get to a true representation of red anti-fouling paint was to tone down by about 30% Humbrol matt red 60 with matt black 33. For the deck and superstructure I used matt grey 27 all over. The D/F loop housing and shoulder pads on the Oerlikon were painted a semi-matt sandy-brown.

The major problem about this kit from a purist point of view is the machine guns and the items 46 and 48. The machine guns appear to represent the stripped Lewis .303 whereas the actual guns mounted were invariably Vickers, the twin installations always being twin Vickers. As for the items surrounding the turrets, these are meant to represent the guide rails with weather aprons fitted. Craft are so seldom depicted with the weather aprons fitted that this greatly detracts from the look of the model. On my version I have carefully cut away as much of the apron as I have been able to, but my skill for this is

**Right and below:** Views of author's fine finished model shows open hatches, modified as in text, correct Carley float stowage and all detail changes noted in the text.



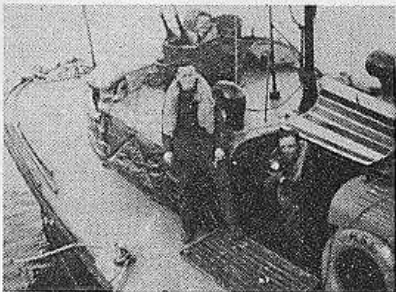
limited and it may be possible to fine down the rails even more. The position of the rails can be seen as vertical angles on the mouldings.

To my knowledge this is the first plastic kit to emerge of any RAF marine craft, a much neglected aspect of RAF history all round. With the recent release of the admirable kit of the Stranraer flying boat I can only hope that other manufacturers follow Airfix's lead for there were nine other types of rescue launch as well as innumerable other craft such as pinnaces, refuellers and bomb-scows without which it would have been impossible to efficiently operate the numerous squadrons of flying boats before, during and after World War 2. If any kit maker contemplates any other marine craft I'll be happy to help with research material from my extensive collection.

To show typical further variations, HSL 128 is depicted at Malta in 1942. This craft had yellow decks and top of deck house, with black sides, and a twin Vickers gun in an open turret, the Perspex having been previously shot away by enemy action.



**Above:** Flying Officer G. Lockwood and the crew of HSL 156 at Newhaven in 1943. The D/F loop is just behind the skipper's head. **Below:** Another boat, HSL 128, at Kalafrona, Malta, in 1942, showing sick bay hatch openings (photos via G. Lockwood and J. Houghton).



**Above:** There is a vast amount of information to be gleaned from this photograph of Flying Officer G. Lockwood, skipper of HSL 156 when based at Newhaven. The searchlight is shown on its small platform alongside the hatch. The skipper wears a duffel coat and an aircrew type flying helmet with earphones. He is talking here on R/T with base or an aircraft. On the coaming are small RAF roundels and USAAF stars to indicate successful recoveries.