Apollo 11 Lunar Approach
Dragon, 1/72

I built this kit as a late tribute to the Apollo 11 50th anniversary in 2019. I had both the Apollo 11 “Lunar Approach” and Apollo 17 versions and decided to do Apollo 11. The Apollo 17 will be saved for later as a landed diorama as it has a nice little rover, but otherwise they are pretty much the same kit. Note that the Apollo 11 kit comes with parts for the legs in an unfolded, landing configuration, so you could model an LM on the lunar surface.

This kit has a number of well-known problems, but it also features very nicely molded details and the parts fit together well. It is very unfortunate that it has so many inaccuracies. Here is a list of issues:

- The Descent Stage of the Lunar Module (LM) is too short by a couple of millimeters. Figure 1 shows the Dragon kit compared to the Airfix kit.

Fig. 1. The Dragon and Airfix Descent Stages compared.

- The folded landing cross braces glue directly to underside of the Descent Stage using non-existent attach points.
- The fold of the cross pieces has a wide flat feature at the hinge which is non-existent.
- The attach point between the leg cross braces to the main leg has a huge block of some sort which is not anywhere close to accurate. See Figure 2.

Fig. 2. The cross braces have an over-sized attach point.

- The tiny lock roller truss parts are all wrong for folded legs so I left them off.
- The surface contact probes are included but have the wrong shape for the stowed configuration. They are too thick but are the correct length and shape for deployed legs but need to be modified for stowed legs. The instructions show them as not used, but they should be there, only stowed. So I made new ones from 0.8 mm brass rod covered in foil.
- The contact probes have tabs that determine how they attach to the bottom of the landing pads. These tabs are designed backwards. If you attach the probes with legs deployed, they are backwards.
- The descent engine has this weird rectangular block (where it attaches to the sprue) which needs to be sawed off, Figure 3. Not sure why it is even there as it does not fit into the Descent Stage.

Fig. 3. I removed this chunk at the engine attach point.

- There is a part B23 on the sprue but is not shown on the diagram of the parts tree nor mentioned in the instructions. It shows up on the Apollo 17 kit diagram but is not called out in the instructions.
- The placement instructions for the decals, of which there are many, are on the bottom of the box. Since I was using the box to hold the parts and subassemblies, I did not spot that until the kit was nearly completed. I was able to make a cross reference from SIM 6. This (surprisingly) showed that the kit decals included all the markings that were indicated in the SIM 6 illustrations.

Solutions

- I added lengths of styrene strip at the top of the descent stage to correct the height, Figure 4. Then I attached the thruster shields and filled all the gaps with Acryl Blue putty.
- The legs now needed to be longer so I replaced the primary leg struts with 3/32 styrene rod. I applied foil, using actual Kapton tape for details, before attaching them to the model, Figure 5.
- Since I increased the descent stage height, the outrigger struts kit parts were too short. Those were replaced with 1/16th inch styrene rod (0.062”). The top outrigger truss elements are molded with the descent stage upper deck, so I left those as is.
- Small rectangular tabs of styrene were glued to the bottom of the descent stage where the deployment (crossed beams) truss hinges down. The corrected folded legs will be tacked on here instead of the original kit design approach. I did not attempt to accurately replicate the leg lock-down features.