Streamliner!
Building Midlantic Models' Streamlined Birdcage
by Wayne E. Moyer

As difficult to believe as it is now, there was a time when old race cars - and especially old race cars that didn't run-- were almost worthless. In 1963 I was a co-operative education student at the University of Cincinnati,with alternating 8-week work/study periods at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. I was just starting to get interested in sports cars, and when I was assigned for a work period at the Flight Dynamics Laboratory, I learned that a young engineer only two years out of U.C. owned, and drove somewhat regularly, a Ferrari. It turned out to be an old Ferrari, a 166 Barchetta Coupe; the same car that later wound up in the collection of "Road & Track" editor John Bond. Ralph invited me over to his house to see his other sports car, which happened to be a Tipo 60 "Birdcage" Maserati with a blown engine. The stories of his problems (he spoke no Italian and whoever he was writing to at Maserati didn't understand much English) were hilarious; the first set of pistons he received had two of one size and two of another! The second set had four matching pistons - they just didn't fit his block. The third set was fine, except that there were no rings with them - and so on. I spent a number of evenings watching Ralph and a few of his friends - who would become my friends and co-workers - struggle with that Birdcage and was fascinated by its complexity. He eventually did get it running and I still have some grainy home movies of the car at a local hillclimb, but soon after that Ralph took a job with the then-new NASA and moved, taking both the Ferrari and Maserati with him.

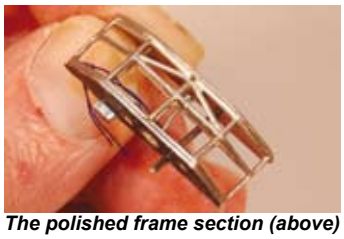
That Birdcage had a lasting effect on me, though; one of the first white-metal models I built was John Day's Moss/ Gurney Team Camoradi Nurburgring winner and I've built several others since.

As Joel Finn said in his excellent "Maserati; The Postwar Sportsracing Cars" the Tipo 60/61 Maseratis were all hand-built and literally no two were the same. One, however, was much different from the others. Maserati updated the very first 2-litre Tipo 60 with a new 2.9 engine and then fitted the strangest body ever seen on a Birdcage. Le Mans regulations for 1960 required a full-width windscreen of a specified height, and to meet that while minimizing drag, Maserati fitted a six-foot long Plexiglas windscreen that extended almost to the nose. The whole thing lifted up when the-hood (excuse me, bonnet!) was tilted forward. In keeping with low-drag theories of the time, the tail was extended, too. The "Streamlined Birdcage" went to Lloyd "Lucky" Casner's amoradi racing team for the 1960 Le Mans race and with Americans Chuck Daigh and Masten Gregory driving, quickly proved to be the fastest car, leading the 24-Hours until the first pit stop when the starter failed. After lengthy repairs the Streamliner was carving back up through the field when a piston failed; apparently that was a more-than-common occurrence with the Birdcage. Casner wasn't too impressed - the car was immediately sold to Frank Harrison, who had it flown to Road America where Jim Jeffords (a member of the Camoradi Le Mans team) drove it to win the July race while still wearing its full Camoradi livery. Crump's "Maserati Sports, Racing, & GT Cars" has an excellent photo of Jeffords driving the car later that season at Laguna Seca stripped to bare metal.

When I saw the Midlantic kit (MID083) of this most unusual Birdcage in FSW I emailed my order to GPM. Shortly thereafter the FBB arrived; opening it I found a very well engineered and cast relatively simple multi-media kit. Its 90 parts include only 1 resin casting, the streamlined body. There are 32 white-metal castings, including the baseplate with integral tube-frame detail and several more multi-tube sections. There are four good-looking assembled wire wheels with rubber tyres, 46 photo-etched parts (some of which aren't used), two jewelled headlights and the usual miscellaneous bits. The big windscreen is a thin clear vac-form, and there are decals to build at least 4 versions, although I've identified only the Le Mans #24 to date. The single instruction sheet has two colour photos, painting information, and an exploded view. There are no part numbers anywhere, and some of the tube-frame sections - and the order of assembly - take a little fit and try to figure out just where and how they fit.

Wayne's completed model. MID083 - Maserati T61 Riverside 1961

The resin body was exceptionally clean and literally took only a couple of minutes to get ready to wash. The panel lines, though, aren't as thin and crisp as other bodies I've seen recently. All those little tube-frame sections have tiny mould lines - almost flash, really - that are easily removed with modelling files but more care is needed to not bend them too badly during the required polishing process.



The polished frame section (above) test fitted to the body (below).

Test fit the upper part of the cage and firewall - it should be glued to the body, not the baseplate, and my sample needed a little cleanup in the corners of the body to get the firewall to fit flush against the resin.

The first coat of primer showed only one small pinhole which was quickly filled before several coats of white automotive lacquer were airbrushed on. The decals, after I'd sorted out which ones to use, went on easily and snugged down with only a mild solvent, Micro-Sol (MSSOL). They compare very well with the single Elkhart Lake photo I have, but there should be two lines of words above each rear fender. It's impossible to see what they are, though, which is probably why they aren't included. The inside of the nose inlet should also be blue and I found that Tamiya TS-50 Blue was a very good match. Spray a little into a paper cup and apply it with a brush.

Between coats of paint I built up the tube-frame assemblies and the chassis. It's not obvious from the instruction sheet, but the lower section of the firewall/dash assembly fits into the three holes in the firewall section, and the three small triple-tube pieces go between it and the top cage section. Since the back of the instrument panel is clearly visible I added some wiring and the mechanical tach drive cable. The side frame pieces are glued to the baseplate, and I found that with both in place the body wouldn't fit onto the chassis; leave the left (passenger) side off until the two are mated. Midlantic has added the flat top sections of the side pieces to the casting on this version, so you can polish them and omit the photo-etched parts if you wish. I used them, but be careful to line up the holes with those in the white-metal castings. Fortunately I test-fitted the wheels before attaching the body to the baseplate; the tyres didn't fit inside the body. Two things contributed to this; the inside of the fender opening curves outward a little, and the photo-etched brake disks hold the wheels out away from the body. I

Rear wheelarch area adjusted to clear tyre.

cut away the "bulge" in the casting and enlarged the holes in the brake disks so they fit over the wheel hubs and that allowed the tyres to tuck inside the fenders nicely. Photos in Finn's book show that the callipers go at the trailing edge of the disks, and were simply steel instead of being brightly painted as most are today. The long clear windscreen fits well (be sure to leave space for it when gluing the engine cover to the body). I couldn't tell if the tonneau cover was on the Streamliner at Elkhart Lake - it's definitely there at Le Mans and NOT on the car at Laguna Seca. It adds "something different", so I left it on, but I'd like to see more photos from Elkhart. That single photo does confirm that the number disk lights from Le Mans were still on the car. Don't use the photo-etched door hinges; this version of the Birdcage had the hinges faired over (the casting has them right) and painted with the body. One last tweak; the photo shows the mirror mounted well above the windscreen, probably to enable the driver to see over the long high tail. I mounted the kit's mirror on a piece of straight pin, but if I did it again I'd modify the windscreen support hoop for a better fit. I haven't found any dimensions for this one-off body but chassis dimensions check out to 1/43 scale well and the model's lines and proportions all match the photos I have of this unique Birdcage Maserati. All in all, this was a very easy build; being forewarned of the slight tweaks needed, FSW readers will have no troubles at all. The finished model is a most welcome addition to my still-growing collection of Birdcages.