



## Achtung Panzer !

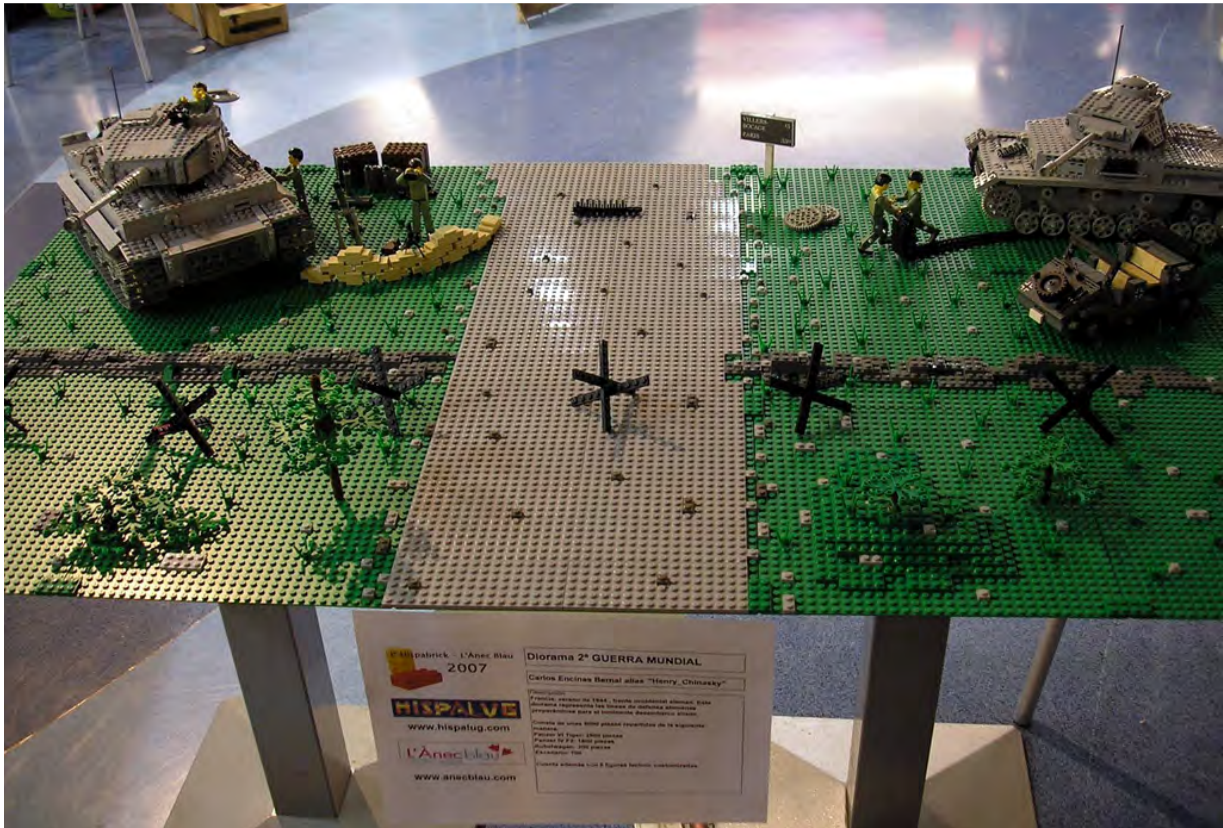
Even though there is no specific LEGO® theme, military vehicle building with LEGO pieces is a widespread practice throughout the AFOL community. Not only because of the spectacular results, but also because of the infinite possibilities LEGO pieces offer you.

Text & pictures: Legotron and Henry\_Chinasky

**H**ispabrick Magazine: Browsing the net, you can see that the amount of tanks, war ships and airplanes built by LEGO® fans is huge. During the last few months, in HispaLUG, we've had the opportunity to see a series of military vehicles that try to emulate well-known war machines from World War II, under the title "Achtung Panzer". This project has been carried by HispaLUG members Antonio Bellón (Legotron) and Carlos Encinas (Henry\_Chinasky).

**HM:** The first question is an obvious one: Why did you decide to start making tanks?

**CE:** In my case, it has been a long time hobby. As a kid I played with LEGO, but I also built many plastic models of different vehicles, including tanks. I thought this was a good way of combining two hobbies: Building some of the tank models I had (preferably from the WWII) with LEGO®.



Carlos Encinas' Diorama in Hispabrick 2007

**AB:** The same goes for me. After 20 years of building models, I've come to know and built practically all of the WWII vehicles. The idea of building them with LEGO has always been inside my head, I just needed that little push.

**HM:** How did you come up with the idea for this project?

**AB:** To tell you the truth, this idea started with the diorama Carlos showed at Hispabrick 2007. I just found it fantastic, full of details, and the tanks looked spectacular. So we started talking, and I mentioned I was a great fan of tank models, and he suggested the idea of making it a joined project. All that, and the chance to purchase some of the war themed LEGO compatible custom pieces, encouraged me to join the project. And here we are.

**HM:** Within the military theme, there are many armies and tanks. So why base it on German vehicles? Wouldn't you prefer making different ones?

**AB:** Hahaha... well, the first question is easy to answer. It is because those are our favourite ones. We could have started with something else, but probably they wouldn't have caught our attention as

much. I've built hundreds of models, and around 80% of them are German Vehicles, so in terms of aesthetics, those are the ones I like the best. About making different models, the amount of time and money we have available, restrict us when starting projects, but eventually we will.

**HM:** What do you consider more important, a design that is close to the real models or a functional design?

**CE:** I prefer a design as similar as possible to the original tanks, even if it means less playability. The proportions used when building also affect if a model ends up more playable or more realistic. For the minifig size, it is rather hard to come up with designs that are realistic and playable at the same time, but in bigger ones it's easier to manage both.

**AB:** I agree with Carlos. It's preferable to sacrifice some of the functional characteristics or moving elements to achieve a better look. In fact, one of the harder problems to solve is getting the perfect proportion. Due to the thickness of the pieces and the minifig size, the models have to be built bigger to get a final result that is as close as possible to the original vehicles. You have to keep in mind that the



Antonio Bellón's Panzer IV Ausf. H

thickness of the pieces and the shape of the minifigs limit their use and this doesn't allow us to build certain elements, like places to put the minifigs in. But we also try to go for the LEGO® look, so a model is we built and taken apart many times until we get something we are happy with. After all, that's the interesting part of all this.

**HM:** What inspires you when making the vehicles?

**AB:** Well... photos, books, models, etc. But the most inspirational thing are the incredible galleries of other vehicles built with LEGO what you can see on the net.

**HM:** What is the hardest part you've come across when building something like this?

**CE:** In my opinion, the hardest part is getting the pieces you need for every model. Sometimes you order something, and in the end it doesn't work, or you already had something else that ends up looking better. It never ends... hehe.

**HM:** When building the models, which one gave the most trouble?

**AB:** In my case, rather than a single model, the trouble came with certain parts of different models. I had a hard time with the design of the turret of the Panzer IV. There was no way to make it lower while

allowing the addition of a cannon that could move up and down. Also the angles of the sides kept driving me crazy. Since it was my second model, I lacked the expertise for making that sort of details, and I ended up trying it dozens of times before I ended up with something I liked.

**CE:** The model that gave me the hardest time was the Tiger 1 in a 1/20 scale. Not so much because I wanted to get a realistic model, but because of the complexity of motorizing all the functions, adding suspensions, etc. As a matter of fact, between waiting for Bricklink[1] orders, design changes and other things, it took me around 4 months to finish it. Due to the difficulties it presented me with, it ended up being one of my favourite models (I still keep it built in a shoe box, and take it out for a walk every now and then). I also like the other minifig sized Tiger. That was my first one in that scale and I think it ended up looking pretty good.

**HM:** Oh yeah Carlos, you've not only been building them in minifig size, but also bigger with remote controllers and motors. Could you tell us about it?

**CE:** At first the models didn't have motors, but checking around the net, I saw wonderful models filled with motorized functions (especially Jennifer Clark's site). And I thought, Why not? Back then the Power Functions weren't out, so I had to deal with the old motors and many cables and switches. Once



Carlos' Tiger I with Power Functions

Carlos' Minifig sized Tiger I



the Bulldozer appeared, I was able to finish the project and make a fully motorized RC tank out of it. I can't thank LEGO® enough for making those motors!  
**HM:** What details surprised you most when building your models?

**CE:** As a curious technique, maybe the one I used for the tyre in the minifig sized Tiger. Thinking about all the size stuff, I ended up finding out how the dented tyres and the 4L bars (as axes) could connect perfectly. Then, putting a dish as a hubcap made it look smoother, and thus closer to the real thing.

**AB:** The most curious thing for me was how easy it is to make different versions of the same tank once you build one of them. It's like a plague, once you design a model, many ideas start popping up for making different versions based on the real models. For example, for the SdKfz 251, after finishing the basic model, I already had in mind 4 or 5 variations for it. I kept building on top of the existing chassis many times and then I would finish those that I thought were good. I'm pretty sure that if I had the time and money to get all the pieces, I would have at least half a dozen different versions of the Panzer IV, hahaha...

**HM:** One thing that caught my attention about your constructions is that all the tanks you make are grey. What about the camouflage colours? Is there any reason you use grey exclusively?

**AB:** Well, that's an interesting question. There are many reasons, but the main one is the availability of pieces. First of all, the pieces we need for building the tanks exist in Light Bluish Grey: axles, wheels, gears, Technic pieces, and all sorts of other pieces. Other colours lack some of those pieces. But the main problem comes with the construction of the tracks. Light Bluish Grey is the only colour that has gears in all the sizes we need. Also, the first German tanks were dark grey, so it fits pretty well. Apart from that, grey is a colour you can link to military themes easily, and it looks pretty good on pictures.

**CE:** Well, to tell you the truth, the thing with grey is pretty simple. It is the colour I have the most of. I managed to come out of my Dark Ages thanks to LEGO® StarWars™, and the imperial ships are full of grey parts. I've been thinking about making a model with camouflage colours, or simply a Tiger in Tan, like those used in North Africa, but the lack of certain pieces in those colours, and most of all, the price kept me back. You can really see wonders using camouflage colours in Brickshelf[2] or MocPages[3] though. Maybe some day...

**HM:** Carlos, What would you highlight from Antonio's constructions?

**CE:** The best thing about Antonio's models is not only how he keeps a balance between realism and



playability, but the models he decides to build. It's really nice seeing less known models and not the ones people keep building. There you can see he really knows a lot about models and WWII history overall.

**HM:** And what about Carlos'?

**AB:** Well, in the first place, those 1/20 models that are not only fantastic reproductions, but are also motorized and can be used pretty much like an RC tank. They are awesome. About those minifig sized ones, I can see that his constructions are full of intricate techniques, and he manages to make the models perfectly identifiable with the original tanks.

**HM:** Apart from constructing military vehicles, Have you developed any other projects following the same theme?

**AB:** Uhhmm, well, we have started a blog called Panzerbricks[4], which I hope we can eventually fill with references to similar constructions from other people, and of course ours! A small guide to show what you can see on the net about the WWII vehicles built with LEGO®.

**HM:** And as a last question, what are your plans for the future?



Previous Page Above: Antonio Bellón's Einheits Diesel Kfz truck



Above: Antonio Bellón's Stug IV and Marder III Ausf. H

Previous Page Down: From left to right: SdKfz 251/1, SdKfz 251/9 and SdKfz 251/10

**AB:** Well, right now the preparations for Hispabrick 2008 keep me really busy, including a diorama we want to show therewith all our panzers. So nothing much until everything is over. After that we'll see what our next challenge is.

**CE:** The same goes for me. Actually, if I don't start building, I won't be able to finish the diorama we planned together, so imagine thinking about long term plans.

#### References:

- [1] Bricklink: Website with information, and for selling/buying LEGO® - <http://www.bricklink.com>
- [2] Brickshelf: Website with LEGO galleries - <http://www.brickshelf.com>
- [3] MocPages: Website with LEGO MOCs galleries - <http://www.mocpages.com/>
- [4] Panzerbricks: Blog about panzer building with LEGO - <http://panzerbricks.wordpress.com/> ■

