

BALSA FOAM

by Bob Hodes

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A flying buddy, Sean McKinley, introduced me to a product generically known as balsa foam. I had never heard of it, but apparently, artists and industrial designers have been using it for some time.

The stuff can be used in applications where blue foam typically is used on our scale models. It seems to be as light as blue foam, but is more like balsa than the blue foam. It cuts easily, and can be sanded and painted like balsa. It comes in blocks and sheets.



I have found it at Michaels, plus there are a lot of suppliers to be found on-line.



As far as I know, there is no actual balsa used in the production of the foam. I think the “balsa” comes from its appearance, which is sort of balsa-like.

The foam, when cut to its final shape, is a little fragile, and will require a coating to toughen it up. I have found the Elmer’s wood glue works well — I just brush it on and then sand when dry. A second coat with sanding sealer is all that is necessary to get a smooth, tough finish. I am sure there are many other products that could be used to fill and coat the foam, but I have not experimented with anything besides the Elmer’s wood glue. I use regular balsa filler to cover any small holes or gouges in the surface.

A word of warning — a lot of dust is generated when sanding the foam. It is non-toxic, but you might want to use a mask.

I have used white glue, canopy glue, and Duco to glue the foam pieces to the aircraft structure. All work well. The foam will take dope. Also, acetone/thinner will not melt the foam.

The foam apparently is offered in two densities — a light density, which is the version I have used. There is also a heavier, denser version, which I have not tried. From what I have read on-line, the denser version is better for fine detail.

I have now used balsa foam in a couple of my FAC models, and I definitely like using it better than blue foam. I have attached a couple of photos showing the foam used at the rear of engine nacelles for a new twin. The other photo shows the foam used as a turret fairing for the same model.

