Stretching Sprue

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY WILL SELF

It's not as scary as you think!

What you need:

- Scraps of Sprue
- Tea Candle or other heat source
- A little patience & practice

In this modern age of modeling putty for every occasion you rarely see anyone using stretched sprue anymore. I confess that I too am a fan of the putty. But there are times and circumstances that being able to stretch a little sprue may be more advantageous than going for the jar or tube of putty, not to mention cost effective. Why use up some expensive putty when you can use plastic that you have already paid for once??? Hopefully this article will remind folks of how easy it is to use this technique, and show those that may be new to the hobby some of the "old school" techniques that, in my opinion, still have a place on the workbench.

Step 1: Necessary Equipment

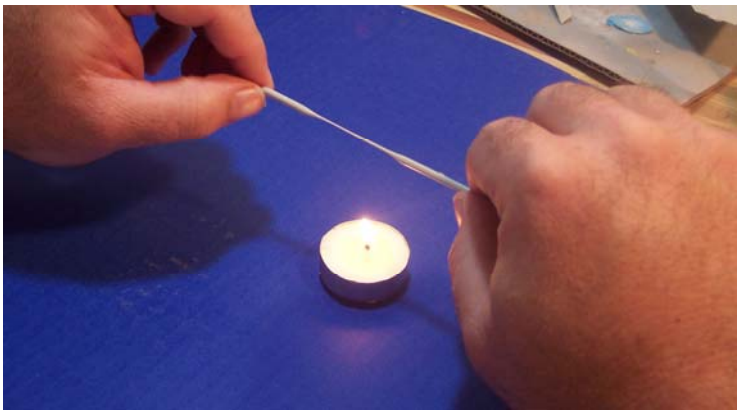
Well you're obviously going to need some sprue from a kit. I prefer a straight smooth piece that is a couple of inches long. The reason for the length will become apparent shortly. Now you need a heat source of some kind, I have stretched sprue using everything from a kitchen match to a light bulb, but I have found that these small "tea light" candles work the best. (picture #1) They are flat bottomed and will sit on the bench and are low profile so you don't have to worry about knocking them over while lit, and best of all they are cheap, I bought a pack of ten at a craft store for .99 cents.

Step 2: Melting Plastic!!!

In a nutshell that is all stretching sprue really is. You are using a heat source to heat the plastic up to the point that it becomes very pliable, I have found that there is a semi-fine line between pliable and puddle!!! I takes a little practice but once you get the hang of it it's a snap. You begin by selecting a piece of sprue. (picture #2).

Light the candle and let the flame stabilize, then holding the ends of the sprue between the thumb and fore finger of each hand hold the middle of the sprue over the flame, this is where the art part comes in. The thickness of the sprue you are stretching will determine how high above the flame to hold, the thicker the sprue the closer to the flame. You should never have to touch the sprue to the flame; it will actually catch on fire. I usually start off around a quarter of an inch above the flame (picture #3).

Once you have the sprue in position, very gently start pulling the ends of the sprue away from each other, at first you just need to hold a gentle pressure until you feel the sprue start moving, then you can move quicker. (picture #4) Once I get the sprue stretching, I usually start raising it slightly more above the flame to help it cool and keep it from going to that puddle stage!!!! Now if you don't move it quick enough or hold it to close to the flame then you can get a mess!



You can stretch it to any diameter that you need, length will just depend on you, the more you do it, the better you get and you'll be surprised what you can do with stretched sprue. The one thing to remember is that it takes a little practice (pic#5). The uses are limited to your imagination and ingenuity, but the two most common uses I have found is a seam or gap filler, radio aerials for aircraft and armor. I have included some images of a 1/48th Hasegawa F-18E that I used this technique to fill some of the gaps…just stretch some sprue, glue in place and a little wet sanding and your good to go!