

M18 Hellcat – A Padder’s Plaything – WoTLabs Articles



American Tank Destroyers come in two flavors. The first is a slow, heavily armored bunker. Carrying heavy firepower with excellent gun handling, vehicles such as the T28, T95 and T110E3 are designed to ponderously assault enemy positions as a moving steel wall. These vehicles stem from the original American Tank Destroyer line, running through icons such as the Wolverine and Jackson through the T25AT, finishing with the 3 fortresses mentioned above. However, America also possesses a second line of tank destroyers. This second flavor turns standard Tank Destroyer Design on its head by including a turret. The endpoint of this line is the T110E4, a T110E5 hull which trades mobility and gun handling for a 155mm cannon. This line is characterized by high mobility (however it decreases as you move up tiers), good camouflage and a turret. However, you trade off gun handling and armor. The combination of mobility, camouflage, a turret and decent firepower is recognized by many as the trinity forming a recipe for mid tier stat padding. The epitome of this is the M18 Hellcat, the tier 6 Tank Destroyer of the turreted line.

Crouching Kitten, Hidden Destroyer

The M18 Hellcat represents a unique combination of medium level mobility and tank destroyer firepower. With a powerful 90mm cannon, fully rotating turret and the view range and camouflage to exercise vision control, the Hellcat allows skilled players to influence matches well above their battle tier.

The Gun



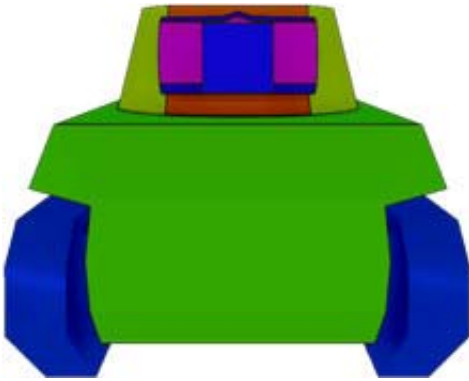
- + Good AP shell – enough to penetrate the Weak Spots on most Tier 8 Tanks.
- + Insane Railgun of Destruction when using APCR
- + Short Aim Time
- + Good Accuracy
- + Mounted on a Turret
- + -10 Gun Depression, same as T29/32/34
- Relatively low Damage Per Minute (1800)
- Low Alpha (240)
- Terrible Movement Dispersion
- Horrific Traverse Dispersion
- Rancid Turret Traverse Dispersion
- Poor Turret Traverse Speed (16 Degrees/Sec)

In tier, the Hellcat has only mediocre firepower. Russian Heavies and Tank Destroyers have more single shot damage (300-390), and most mediums and other Tank Destroyers have more Damage per Minute. Even the American M6 has a higher rate of fire with a similar gun. Where the Hellcat shines is firing APCR. 243 APCR penetration is enough to get through the front hull of any tank you will face – only the pike nose of the 110 or a heavily angled KT have a decent chance to bounce. The short aim time and good accuracy allow you to easily deal damage at long range – 400m shots are quite reliable and even with penetration loss will still cut through most hard targets.

The downside is the dispersion values. Like most turreted Tank Destroyers, WarGaming has the impression that the crew has no idea how to use the turret. Therefore, your reticule will explode if you so much as twitch. To make it worse, this tank can not mount a vertical stabilizer. Snap shots are difficult. You are great at firing from a fixed position, and flexing to another fixed position. However, this gun does not like it when you try to peek and snapshot. To minimize this, pre-aim your turret where you expect to shoot, and do not traverse your hull. Only move forward or backwards to get your shot. This eliminates two of the 3 sources of reticule bloom, greatly improving your chance to hit. Despite these drawbacks, the flexibility of the platform

and the extreme APCR penetration make the Hellcat's gun one of the best in tier.

The Tinfoil Tank

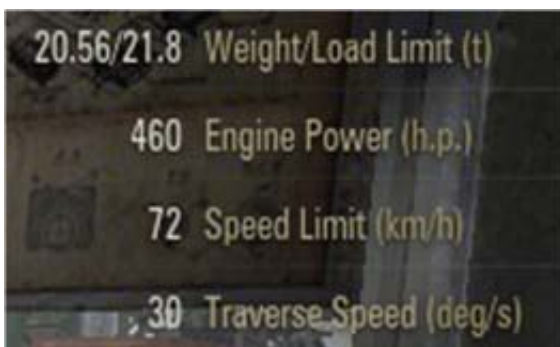


(Must have been a steel shortage)

If you ask what the effective hull armor of a Hellcat is, you will be met with either a quizzical expression or hysterical laughter. Long story short, it has NONE. Tier 1 autocannons will easily penetrate your hull. High Explosive will leave you a smoking wreck, unless you are lucky enough to hit spaced armor or the tracks. The turret is slightly stronger. The orange area is 75mm thick. The yellow-green surrounding it is all of 32mm. The angle will let some low caliber shells ricochet if they hit at a high enough angle. However, 100mm+ caliber rounds will overmatch and penetrate. The blue area on the mantlet edge is 32 + 38mm at a high angle. This combined with the edge of the 76mm purple area are the only spots which will bounce shells. The effective armor ranges from 114 to 205mm effective, increasing as you approach the edge of the blue area. The center of the purple mantlet is a flat 76mm. It won't bounce much, but it will stop most HE shells. Hull down is definitely a superior tactic. Despite the relatively weak turret, the spaced armor plus the small overall profile will reduce your susceptibility to enemy fire. Quick movements side to side (or back and forth) between hull down shots will often bait a miss, or deflect a centrally aimed shell into an area of spaced or angled armor.

Overall, treat the Hellcat like it has no armor. Your best defense is limiting exposure. Barring this, fire from a range or position where you will not be detected by the enemy. Unlike the Jackson, you can't rely on your hull armor to stop even the lowest penetration shells.

Time to Burn Treads



(Engage Hyperdrive!)

+Very High Top Speed (72 km/h)

- + High HP/Ton (~22, depends on loadout)
- Low Track Traverse (30 Degrees/Second)
- Bad Terrain Resistance

The primary advantage the Hellcat has is speed. Lots of speed. With over 22 HP/Ton and a 72 km/hr speed limit, the Hellcat is capable of reaching important scouting or flanking positions quicker than almost any medium, and even some light tanks. However, the track traverse is a low 30 degrees/second, and the terrain resistance is terrible. The Hellcat is very fast – in a straight line. It is nimble – on roads. On bad ground, you may find yourself wondering if you forgot to repair your engine. Avoid marshy ground, and do not jink unless you are under fire. Relocate using as straight a path as possible to make the most of your engine. When peeking to active scout, travel straight back and forth when possible. Ascending a hill at an angle lets you have both forward and sideways movement throw off enemy fire, while allowing you to peek and retreat without turning.

Scouting in a TD? Impossible!

The Hellcat possesses a unique combination of mobility and firepower. On top of this, it has a good (for its tier) view range and a tier 10 radio. This lets you both passive or active scout – something that no other TD can manage nearly so well. Your turret and high penetration gun lets you get off that quick side shot into a high tier heavy before repositioning. You are a scout with razor sharp teeth. Be wary of tier 7 and 8 tanks however, as many of the lights and mediums can out-spot you in the open. The Hellcat has very good static camouflage, so it is best to passive scout from cover in higher tier games. Active scouting is more viable in tier 6 matches, where you are likely to spot all enemy vehicles before they can detect you. Either way, you are capable of both detecting enemy vehicles and destroying them. This is a coveted duality which is essential to dominate games.

How Do I Hellcat?

Effective Hellcat play requires a deal with the devil. If this is not possible, begin by mounting the following equipment:

- A Gun Rammer is more or less essential for effective sniping. You need all the DPM you can get.
- Coated Optics are vital for active scouting. Unless you plan to sit in one place a lot, use these instead of binoculars.
- The final equipment spot is up to you. A camo net will help with passive scouting – camo net + binoculars will let you out-spot most vehicles even at tier 8. They are also demountable. However, they limit your flexibility. A Gun Laying Drive will help with snapshots and improve your overall gun handling. Pick whichever one best suits your play style. I currently use a Camo net, but will likely switch to a Gun Laying drive once my crew levels up.

Consumables are fairly standard – run Repair Kit, Medkit and a Fire Extinguisher. If you can afford it, run a gold repair kit instead of the extinguisher. You rarely catch fire, and you are not meant to take hits anyway. You will need the repair kit to fix tracks, your gun (from mantlet hits) or your ammo rack (which is easily damaged). However, a properly employed Hellcat won't take return fire very often, so you shouldn't need these a lot. Your HP is low enough (570) that many tanks will 2 shot you anyways. You are not meant to take hits, but to strike from the shadows.

Crew Skills:

1. 6th sense + camouflage: You want to know when you are spotted, and be harder to spot. As a sniper/scout/flex TD, you want to be able to close within 350m and still be able to fire undetected.
2. Gunnery + View Range + Safe Stowage: Anything that improves your reticule bloom, track traverse and view range. Your ammo rack is also weak, so SS is a must.
3. BIA: It helps everything a little bit. I would put it second, however you really need camo on your commander and many of the gunnery skills.
4. By now you are a Hellcat master (or a very persistent Hellcat Noob), so pick whatever your play-style dictates.

Hellcat: Stat Padding Style

The best way to pad stats is to win games. The Hellcat is effectively equipped to manage this, even when out-tiered. The goal is to find a way to deal damage. Barring this, find a way to help your teammates deal damage. Early positioning is vital. You have the speed to reach good scouting spots, and hopefully are geared to scout effectively. Determine where the enemy is going. Once you figure out where their main push is, you can use your camo, vision and speed to take up a position where you can begin to wear them down. You should not directly engage enemy tanks. I do poorly at this, as I am used to playing assault (insert tank here) as opposed to an attrition style. However, to maximize (not Maximize, that is different entirely) your effectiveness, you need to remain either unseen or out of any firing angles. You want to be at a 90 degree angle to their assault lane – I call it quadrature axis combat. Instead of steadily approaching you, the enemy vehicles stay out of their vision range and often expose their soft sides. This tactic also puts flanking pressure on them – many drivers will stall and hide when taking fire from a second angle. Better yet, they turn their front to you. Your teammates now have sideshots, and you switch to APCR and pen them anyways. Some people will even try to split the difference and fight at 45 degrees, which usually gives BOTH flanks effective sideshots.

A second tactic is mid range peek scouting. This is more for games where several heavy tank destroyers (your Ferdinands and their ilk) are already set up with firing lanes on the enemy. Your job is to poke over a ridgeline, spot them, and retreat before they can react to shoot you. Keep yourself just out of exposure, faking peeks to bait shots and moving in more fully when their turrets are turned away. The intention is to stall their push and give your support time to mop them up with heavy fire. Even slowing an IS-3 or T32 by 5 seconds may give something with a 400+ damage gun an extra shot on it, which can make a big difference later in the match. If they begin to attack you, retreat using your speed. Likely, your team has had time to take up a superior position and can mop up the enemy's disarrayed forces. In some cases, the enemy team will ignore you and try to engage your support at long range. You then get free sideshots while they reload.

The combination of camo, mobility and firepower also allows the Hellcat to make one of the most effective fighting retreats in the game. You can vision kite most heavy tanks, allowing you to slowly wear them down from out of vision range. Your APCR lets you pen their front armor easily, and your DPM is more than enough to destroy most enemy tanks before you run out of room. Your reverse speed is roughly 20 KM/H, high but not enough to indefinitely kite enemy tanks. This is where your lack of armor actually helps you. If you do not need a lot of depression, turn your side or rear towards them. You are not any more vulnerable, and can now

dart from bush to bush (or ridge to ridge, etc.) faster than any enemy force can advance. If you have campers waiting in a corner somewhere, you can slowly angle your retreat to set up your crossfire tactic when the enemy reaches your team. On urban maps, you can sit at a corner, shoot as soon as the enemy tank exposes, then retreat behind it before they can fire. You can then reach another corner before they can set up to shoot you, and repeat the process.

Basically, the Hellcat is a flexible, powerful Tank Destroyer combining the best attributes of a medium tank, light tank and more conventional Tank Destroyer. There are obvious trade offs, mainly in reticule bloom and terrain resistance. However, these are easily countered by minor tactical changes. Obviously, the Hellcat performs better on some maps than others, however there is no situation where it completely fails. It always has enough mobility, enough firepower, and just enough HP to get a few shots in, regardless of the quality of your team. The Hellcat has one of the highest skill ceilings of any mid tier tank, making it a favored choice of WN8 (damage), efficiency (mobility allows cap and defense) or win rate (basically a combination of everything) padders. It is not just good for padding however – it is fully capable of dominating both random and organized play using its combination of speed, vision and firepower. It has the unicum trinity. If it had armor, it would have the OP tetramer.

Hellcat: MaxL_1023 Style

To demonstrate both the pride and pitfall associated with the Hellcat, I picked a game where I did significant damage, greatly contributing to the win, however I went potato at the end and died when I did not necessarily need to. Anyone has the odd perfect game, however I want you to learn from my mistakes, so you never, ever play the way I do. It somehow works (most of the time) but nobody knows why, and I don't want everyone trying it and ruining my uniqueness.

The map is Redshire – a tier 8 game. As I am too scrubby to use any mods, I have no idea how skilled the enemy team is. However, to me it doesn't matter. I immediately set out to a central, flex style position which will allow firing lanes on the primarily enemy approaches. I decide to move up a little farther than I have to in order to try and spot anyone on the backside of the low ridge, however nothing shows up.

Another scout near that low ridge lights up a T29 and RHM trying to get early fire on anyone pushing 0 line. Note that the low ridge is a decent active scouting spot, but has limited cover and no real firing opportunities from this side. Good for a MT-25, not so much for a Hellcat. I focus my fire on the first thing that lights, then target the RHM whenever he is lit (or I am reasonably sure where he is). I deal a significant amount of damage (~50%) to the RHM, a little more to the T29, and both end up dead uselessly due to a combination of my fire and early scouting. This is one of their biggest guns, out of the right.

The enemy 0 line push is also lit up. I get shots where I can, however the enemy mostly stays hull down. The advantage to my position in this case is more flank cover than direct engagement. If the enemy tries to flank the hull down tanks on the 0 line, they have to pass through my firing field. Therefore, they are forced to engage front to front, which is always less advantageous than a flanking maneuver. I am basically lying in ambush at the moment, as I know that a lot of enemy tanks are not lit yet and they have to try something, if not on the 0

line then on the 1 line.

What do you know, free side shots on the 1 line! My gun depression, good camo and the terrain allow me to move back and forth to get the best possible shots on their 4502A and 112. If they want to engage my team defending from the south, they need to expose themselves to my 1800 DPM. It turns out that they really wanted to push that way, allowing me to exercise quadrature engagement and take them out. Notice how the 112 and 4502A stop advancing – the combination of my fire + hull down resistance leaves them in a position where they have no viable attack option. If I was not there, they could quickly rush south and overwhelm my defenses. I was positioned so that their optimal attack route was turned into a suicide rush. This is what makes the Hellcat great in these games – you can direct the battle without people even knowing exactly where you are.

At this point, the game is basically mop up duty. However, the enemy team still has enough tanks left to mount a defense against the victorious 0 line push. Note that even if 0 line was defeated, I could either fire on base or relocate back to the NE to catch their tanks in a vise between the south defenders and my gun. This flexibility is vital – you have to have an answer for anything the enemy can do. It is not always possible, but good players do it more often and elite players do it consistently. To assist the 0 line push, I move farther up the ridgeline. I get a couple shots into the T28P before it finishes retreating, then back over the ridge to begin the old shoot and scoot.

I use my depression and speed to peek the KV-1S, T28P and Hellcat sitting behind the ridge. Basically, I wait for them to be looking at my approaching team, then shoot them in the rear. If they look at me, they are not shooting anything and are exposing their turret rear to my approaching heavies. If they come over the ridge to shoot me, I lead them right into multiple 122mm guns and just circle around the ridge to flank from the other side. Basically, I can kite them into submission without anyone else needing to fire a shot – just being there is enough.

Here is where the pitfall shows. I don't really have any HP, so can't actually take enemy fire. I take a hit from the Hellcat (which looked suspiciously like pubbie RNG considering he didn't really aim) and have no real shots on the T28P. However, we have tanks in cap and another flanking medium approaching, so the game is at this point effectively won. I try to hull down peek the T28P, however the terrain also allowed the T28P to be well covered. I try to retreat out of range, but get snapshot in the turret and killed. However, I timed my attack so that even if the T28P shot me, he would be completely exposed to my flanking teammate. He is easily killed before he can get his turret around. I do class this as a mistake – I should have either tried to make a pass faster than his turret could rotate or let my ally take the first hit. However, the overall result was still successful – I just ended up being the bait for the trap instead of the trap itself. Hellcats make tasty bait, but don't last long on the line.

The last Hellcat is easily killed – he gets our M6, but is unable to do anything else. Overall, I finish the game with 3200 damage dealt. I effectively contributed to a win by neutralizing enemy strategies, combining the Hellcat's mobility and firepower to punch well above my weight. Despite mistakes made, the result was a solid win.

Hellcat for Pubbies

Overall, the Hellcat is the prototypical high ceiling, low floor vehicle. Poor decisions are costly, and you can't just blindly attack and expect to be successful. Proper Hellcat play requires the ability to quickly switch gears between hunter and tracker – know when to shoot, when to

scout, and when to reposition for superior opportunities later. The easily mistake to make (which I am not immune to) is holding a position too long, and being ran over. Know when to back away, and set up to fight from a superior position later on in the match. Use APCR to hit the heaviest targets you can find, and punch above your weight to influence the game. There really isn't another vehicle exactly like the Hellcat – the ELC is the closest comparison and that is even harder to master. To build up the individual skills which when combined equal Hellcat play, I would suggest the T49 (for the mobility) and the Jackson (same gun and slower, but more forgiving with armor and HP). The Hellcat is basically a blend between the two, and significantly more difficult to master. However, like the T49 before it and tanks such as the T-62A and Pershing, this is a high ceiling vehicle which richly rewards skillful play.

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