

R/C airplanes

Up, up in the sky whizzed a bright yellow plane that darted and spun and banked with little regard for gravity.

Behind it came a red-and-white-striped barnstormer, performing death spirals and loop-to-loops as it zoomed around the airfield of the Jayhawk Model Master Club. The club gathers when the weather cooperates to socialize and earnestly discuss the magic of radio-controlled (R/C) airplanes.

These are *bona fide* flying machines, with gasoline and glow engines that need to be fine-tuned. The ground around any airfield is littered with screwdrivers, spare parts and propellers that define the aficionados of R/C airplanes.

It only took 34 years after Orville and Wilbur Wright flew at Kitty Hawk for Ross Hull and Clinton DeSoto to fly a radio-controlled airplane in Detroit. Named "The Guff," the plane is now in the Smithsonian.

Today, there are kits that will have you up in the wild, blue yonder in 30 minutes. If you don't do any homework, though, you may have some expensive trouble. Flying R/C planes takes study, patience — and then more study. Then you actually have to learn to pilot the thing.

To keep your plane running smoothly, you must learn everything about them. This means a whole new vocabulary of terms such as ailerons, ele-

vators, pushrods, servos and vertical stabilizers (we'll define them later).

So where do you start? Hobby shops remain the best first stop, as they, seemingly without fail, have knowledgeable staff and are often hubs for the R/C community in your area. Don't be afraid to ask questions. To get started you will probably need to spend anywhere from \$200 to \$300 for a starter plane.

This outlay will get you a training plane, normally called an ARF (Almost Ready to Fly), that will take a couple of hours to construct — remember to read and follow the directions. You want to look for a High-Wing Trainer and a 4-channel transmitter, which will let you control the aileron (turns), elevator (climb and dive), throttle (speed) and rudder (side to side). As you advance, you can get higher-channel transmitters that will allow you to control more aspects of the plane.

Many R/C clubs will sponsor a beginner night where veterans will help you get into the air. Many of these

THESE ARE FLYING MACHINES THAT GIVE ENTHUSIASTS A CHANCE TO BE PILOTS WITHOUT LEAVING THE GROUND **BY MARK LUCE**

The Hangar 9 Alpha Trainer, which sells for nearly \$300, can be built and ready to fly in minutes.

instructors will use a device called a "buddy box," which lets them take over if you get out of control. Take advantage of others' expertise. Otherwise, your new hobby might be short-lived.

Now for the bad news. Many R/C airfields will not allow you to fly without insurance. The good news is that if you join the Academy of Model Aeronautics, the U.S.'s umbrella organization for R/C airplaning, insurance is included in its \$58 annual dues.

Is it an easy hobby to master? No. But to see the look on a youngster's face (as I did with my son Miles) as a plane takes off, all those hours of patient hands and minute adjustments makes the toil more than worth it.

Mark Luce is a freelancer in Lawrence, Kan., where he's in serious negotiations to take the R/C plunge.



HORIZON HOBBY

GOLFDOM (ISSN 1526-4270) is published monthly by Advanstar Communications Inc., 131 W First St., Duluth, MN 55802-2065. Subscription rates: One year \$30 (U.S. and possessions), \$49 (Canada and Mexico) and \$78 (all other countries). Air expedited service is available in countries outside the U.S. and Canada for an additional \$45 per year. Current issue single copies (prepaid only) \$5 (U.S. and possessions), \$7 (Canada and Mexico) and \$8 (all other countries). Back issues (if available, prepaid only) \$10 (U.S. and possessions), \$14 (Canada and Mexico) and \$16 (all other countries); add \$6.50 per order shipping and handling for both current and back issue purchases. Periodicals postage paid at Duluth MN 55806 and additional mailing offices.



POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to GOLFDOM, 131 W 1st St, Duluth, MN 55802-2065. Canadian G.S.T. Number: R-124213133R001, Publica-

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