



Getting Started in R/C Model Aircraft

The successful flying of model aircraft is not easy; it takes some time and effort to become even moderately proficient, but is in the end very satisfying. Younger pupils invariably find it much easier than some of us more mature types and some basic familiarity with engineering is a great help, but can be picked up with effort. This document is based upon recent experiences of some mainly, 'mature' pupils and is designed to guide and help newcomers, being based upon lessons learned, mainly the hard way. Safety is a big issue: carelessness has resulted in accidents causing injury mostly to the operator, but tragically there have been two deaths of bystanders in the last ten years – not acceptable. The first part is **do's** and **don'ts** concerning how to go about it followed by suggestions designed to smooth your way.

DO:

Join the British Model Flying Association (BMFA) to obtain essential safety advice and Insurance against 3rd party risks plus valuable help, especially your free copy of 'Up and Away' – the approved flying training manual for R/C power flying and the quarterly newsletter.

Join a BMFA affiliated club to obtain advice and essential flying instruction leading to an 'A' certificate which is almost universally required for unsupervised flying.

Start taking a model magazine, say 'RCM&E' or 'R/C Model World' or, for the nostalgic, 'Aviation Modeller International', which includes the old 'Aeromodeller'.

Buy a package of radio equipment, engine and an Almost Ready to Fly (ARFT) trainer plus support equipment as recommended people in the club you have joined. Put it all together very carefully strictly according to the instructions and any additional advice from those who've made one.

Get your instructor to examine, check, test fly and trim until it all operates smoothly; then he will start to show you basic flying and pass control over to you from his master transmitter (Tx) to your 'slave Tx' using a 'buddy lead'.

Do understand that bad landings do damage and worse, models do get written off through simple mistakes: live with it, or don't start at all; it's all part of the business though, and the best instructor cannot save certain situations and will not accept any liability for damage!

Do accept that helicopters are far more expensive to buy and maintain and much more difficult to fly.

If you buy through an advert or at an auction do be sure someone is guiding your purchases; there's plenty of worn out or unsuitable 'bargains'.

Do appreciate the freely given advice and training at club level. If not, there could be no more good will!

DON'T:

Scale models are what attract many to model flying, but they are significantly more difficult to fly and are not for beginners; no, not even a semi-scale Piper Cub. Attempts to go this route invariably end in tears followed by reversion to a proper, well sorted, trainer, some of which do have a resemblance to common light A/C anyway. Don't expect training to be available just when you are there; the instructor likes to fly their models too and everybody will be expecting their turn on a fine weekend.

Don't expect that 'buddy- box training will prevent crashes; even write-offs can happen if you end up in an impossible position and instruction is always given on the understanding that there is no reimbursement.

Learning to fly:

You can learn to fly through the help obtainable from joining a club. This can be done relatively quickly given reasonable pupil aptitude, good flying weather and mutual availability of you and your instructor. These conditions are not quite so easy to find, not least because of the pressures upon peoples' time and the winter is often a write off too.

You will find it more difficult that you had imagined and after 15 minutes you will find the level of concentration makes you wish for a break, but the fuel is due to run out anyway, so he will take over and land! For these initial few sessions, you will do high level circuits; any serious mistakes can hopefully be prevented by the instructor taking over. This safeguard does not apply when learning to take off or, more difficult, land. If you find that you are not making enough progress in obtaining your 'A' certificate due to interruptions through weather and availability of instruction, you can go to one of several schools who will train and certify you at around £ 20 to £25 per hour. Many now do this because of the difficulties in finding enough club instructors to match the number of pupils all clamoring for instruction! They may provide their school trainer, but it is much better to learn on your own A/C; you will be much more comfortable afterwards and the learning process never stops! The weather in the winter is unreliable and the lay-off doesn't help, so even experienced flyers retain a basic model just to get the thumbs working smoothly again. A computer-based simulator does help but it is not the same: the behaviour of the simulated models are different to your own, and simulated crashes don't cost any money, so there is no adrenalin flow as disaster looms. Assuming you do choose to have professional training, bear in mind the following: Two solid hours of instruction will leave you mentally exhausted and you may feel you are beginning to go backwards through the strain. But if you share slots with a friend, you can relax while it is his/her turn and pick up things through listening in on their session.

Here is an actual, typical story of eventual triumph once the proper path was chosen: To start with time was limited, then weather intervened, instructor was busy with others and most important – stubborn refusal to opt for a proper ARTF trainer of 60 inch/1.6 metre span with 40 size engine and a radio system compatible with 'buddy box' tuition. The model was 48 inch span and more difficult to fly in typical wind conditions and initially the radio couldn't be 'buddied'. Passing the Tx from pupil to instructor takes too long for serious mistakes to be corrected. Crashes cause down-time. Some improvements after moving to a new radio system, but unsuitable model and interruptions to the learning process because of the spasmodic nature of availability left frustrations. Change to a recommended trainer and engine combination brought immediate improvement, but the decision was to have a concentrated period at a school and get it done. Two 5 hour, consecutive afternoons did the business; came back with a BMFA 'A' certificate, knackered but happy!