

Airplane buffs get their thrills with radio control

BY BARBARA WILSON
SPECIAL WRITER

The clouds beckon, and here you stand — feet planted firmly on the ground — with neither a plane ticket nor pilot's license anywhere to be found.

It is the romance and the mechanics of flying that draw many people to planes, frustrated that it is cost prohibitive to go buy a plane.

Or is it?

Brent Martin satisfies his love of planes while standing on the ground at the controls of a model, radio-controlled aircraft.

"I'm a frustrated pilot at heart," said Martin, former manager of Rider's Hobby Shop in Canton and president of the Flying Pilgrims, a radio-controlled-plane club.

Radio-control flying is a soaring hobby, with clubs and competitions springing up all across the state. The Flying Pilgrims,

based in Canton, alone have 230 members, and there are about two dozen other clubs in the metro Detroit area. Martin said his group has doubled its membership in the past 18 months.

"It's mostly a male-dominated hobby," Martin said. "But you see a lot of families who come together to fly and watch the planes."

Martin had to do some convincing when he was 15 years old to get his dad to help him get started with the hobby.

Archie Adamisin, a two-time national flying champion from Taylor, has radio-control flying in his blood. His grandfather and father both enjoy radio-controlled planes, and his father is well-known in flying circles for designing a special type of engine.

"I started flying simple rubber-band planes when I was just 2, and I just gradually worked my way up," Adamisin said.

His hobby has kind of gone full circle. After years of competing in aerobatic competition and a recent fling with daring pylon races — in which four planes traveling at nearly 200 mph race around a three-pylon course — Adamisin is enjoying a return to the more relaxed flying of rubber-band planes and kites.

"I still fly the planes, but it's kind of nice to just watch a kite soar and study the concept of flight," he said. Adamisin also designs radio-control planes.

John Hoover of Keego Harbor learned to fly from his dad when he was about 12 years old.

"It was great. No matter what else was going on, flying was always the one thing we could agree on, no matter what," he said. "It was something we did together."

Now Hoover is teaching his two sons to fly.

A member of the Pontiac Flying Club on Scott Lake Road, Hoover said he still sees a lot of dad learning to fly alongside their sons so they can have a hobby together.

At a really young age, parents might start developing an interest for flying in their children by fly-

ing kites together or spending a couple of dollars on simple rubber-band planes, which are available in most hobby stores.

Hoover said model rockets also spark an interest in flight and keep the interest of small children because they can see the results right away.

There's kind of immediate gratification when you launch a rocket, although you've put some time into building it," he said. "A radio-control plane takes a long time to build and you're not going to go right out and fly it; there's a bit of a learning curve."

John Wojtowicz, a retiree, is quick to point out that flying is not just a kids' hobby either. When he was 5 years old, he used to steal balsa wood from his brother to build planes with, but it was much later in life that he became interested in flying radio-control planes and helicopters.

"It's a great hobby for tinkers, people who need to know how things work," he said.

Starting out requires a bit of an investment, but as your interest grows, portions of the initial package can still be used on more advanced aircraft, according to

Martin.

To start out with a radio-control glider — requiring a hand or rubber-band launch — it will cost at least \$200.

The minimum to start with a motorized radio-control plane is \$300.

"If you spend much less than that, you're not going to get much out of it," Martin said.

The airplane comes in a kit and requires assembly. Martin said you don't have to be a rocket scientist to put it together, but it does take some time, patience and even occasional guidance from the hobby shop. It will take about 40 hours to build.

For those not interested in the construction phase, there are ARPs — Almost Ready to Fly kits — which require minimal assembly, about 12 hours.

In addition to the plane kit, a radio set and motor are needed. The radio set will work in 95 percent of the aircraft available, so the same one will work in other planes you might buy later. The motor, a simple two-stroke "weed whacker" engine, can also be moved from one plane to another.

The planes require either a gas-

oline-oil mix or an alcohol-based fuel to fly.

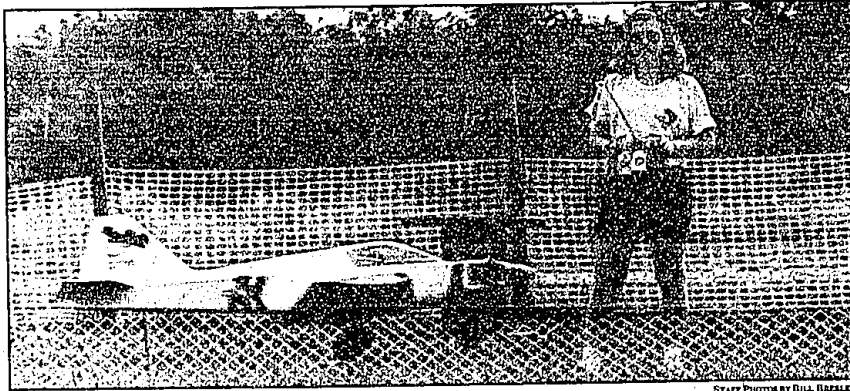
Once your plane is built, Martin and others involved in flying say membership in a club is a must. It will cost about \$50 to join, but will give you a place to fly, help in getting started, and some liability insurance should anything go wrong.

"You really need to join a club," Martin said. "It's almost impossible to teach yourself, and clubs offer free lessons."

Fliers remind those who are new to the sport that considerable damage can be done when you have a 50-pound plane going nearly 100 mph. Either someone on the ground, or your \$300 investment, could be mince-meat in no time.

Martin said most clubs will inspect your plane to make sure it was built properly and they might even send you home to make some repairs or adjustments before you're allowed to fly. The Pontiac Club even has a beginner's night at 6 p.m. Thursdays, Hoover said.

Next comes ground school, in which you learn the basic safety rules and guidelines.



Landing: It's unusual to see a young lady radio-control airplane pilot, but Christine Pink of Plymouth looks right at home as she executes a perfect landing.

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