

GETTING STARTED IN RC FLIGHT

Several times we have had folks stop by the club and ask us how they should get started in RC models and what are some tips that they could have to succeed in this hobby, as well as how to get started with the least cost possible.

(1) CHECKING OUT A CLUB

One of the best ways to start out with RC flight is to check out a club. If you are around the Franklin County area of Massachusetts, be sure to check out our club. The excitement builds when you can see real RC planes flying and talk to the folks who already have them and have been flying for years, some for decades! You can learn a lot about what types of models to try, different flight simulators to practice on, why you should join a club, etc. The guys at these clubs are normally extremely friendly because ultimately **WE ARE AT A CLUB TO ENJOY EACH OTHERS COMPANY AND HAVE FUN WITH OUR PLANES AND HELICOPTERS!!** So find a club on the AMA (Academy of Model Aeronautics (<http://www.modelaircraft.org/>)). Under the "membership" section you can choose the "find a club" option.

Flight clubs also have the advantage of having two VERY important things (1) If they are AMA sanctioned (always choose an AMA sanctioned club!!!!) then you have 2.5 million dollars of insurance if something went horribly wrong with your model and smacked someone or something (car, house, cow, chicken, etc). (2) People there often have training systems and can **HELP YOU FLY** the first time so while your heart is pounding in your chest on your first flight, you can say to the person next to you "hey can you take over" and they fly your model for you (FCRCC has started having this!!)

(2) THE FLIGHT SIMULATOR

I cannot stress how important a flight simulator is to general learning and how quickly you can learn by practicing on the computer. I might also add, how inexpensive it is to crashing so many models (You'll see once you start practicing... Crash plane after plane (some worth 8000 dollars or more in real life)) and then just hit the reset button!

If you want the best to learn on, generally speaking you would go with RealFlight. The latest version as of this writing is version 5.0. **THERE ARE TWO VERSIONS.** The first is called "Realflight basic" and is a basic flight simulator to help you get started. It is 99 dollars. Then there is a much more advanced version with more flying fields and more planes for 200 dollars. But both have amazing graphics. It comes with a controller and all of the software you need to

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get started. JUST BEWARE, that if you have an older computer the software may not run very fast. The pro to this software is that it is probably the best currently on the market with the best graphics and the best flight realism.

Buy Realflight Basic by clicking [here](#) .

Buy Realflight Full by clicking [here](#) .

If you want to get started but don't want to break the bank, you can start for a mere 20 dollars by buying a much cheaper version that will get you some general practice about flying RC planes. Its called ESKY and is available for 20 dollars with the software and controllers. PLEASE NOTE: this software will not work with any computer after Windows XP. So windows Vista and Windows 7 users will have to use Realflight.

Buy ESKY from [here](#) or buy it off of ebay (just search for ESKY)

(3) CHOOSING A MODEL

First of all, when you are starting off, SIZE DOES MATTER. Lemme tell ya, when you first try landing your 10 foot wingspan 46% scale biplane, it is INTIMIDATING. But if you fly a small plane with a 1 foot wingspan, you are much less intimidated. Also remember that different planes fly in different ways. A trainer will be much more forgiving then a Ultimate biplane (designed for extreme flight). Trainers will traditionally recover themselves if there is a problem, so just let go of the controls and allow it to fix itself (not always depending on how close to the ground you are!! :-P)

So lets say you are interested, but don't want to break the bank..... so lets talk about cheap beginner models.

(4) BEGINNERS CHEAP MODELS

For someone who just wants to spend no more than 100 dollars and have something to fly in their backyard, look no further than your local hobby store. The one we generally recommend is

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Pioneer Valley Hobbies, located in West Springfield, MA. These stores carry smaller models that come ready to fly. Take a few rubber bands and strap on the wings and take them out back. They normally only have 2 or 3 controls, meaning that the most you get is a throttle control, elevator, and rudder. You normally don't get ailerons. They are very light, but fly slow and are forgiving if you smack them into something. Normal flight times run about 10 minutes.

One that I have personally flown and have had fun with is called the "Playmate". You can read a review on it [here](#).

There are also helicopters that fall into this same category. Normally the blades of this micro heli are no more than 6 inches across. They are great to annoy your cat with or to fly around the room inside of your house. BUT don't fly outside in the wind or it will surely blow away!

(5) MORE ADVANCED MODELS

When I began flying RC planes, my first plane was an electric 3D stunt plane. Not exactly what most people should start with though, but I had practiced for hours on the simulator before I even attempted to fly this model. Most people would generally recommend that you start with a "trainer". A trainer can be glow fuel or electric, and generally has between a 3 to 7 foot wingspan. Electric has the advantage of having no cleanup afterward and you are limited only by the number of batteries that you bring to the field to fly. Glow has the disadvantage of being messy, but has the advantage of being able to fly larger planes more easily than buying big battery packs for electric planes.

Here is one trainer that I have flown personally, it is called an Alpha. It flies well and predictably. Click [here](#) for details about it.

(6) WHERE DO I GET MODELS FROM?

I know with the economy that you are like the rest of us and that you don't have a lot of money. The best place I have found to buy discount hobby things is the web site, www.towerhobbies.com. They offer pretty good discounts if you are a "tower member" -- typically about 20% off of already good prices with free shipping over 150 dollars. (No I get nothing out of this, I just like doing business with them).

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HOWEVER, let me share some secrets with you.

Secret 1: If you want new things cheap, buy them from www.hobbyking.com. They have brand new stuff for about 1/4 of the price that you can buy it in the USA. Their shipping generally takes 1.5 to 3 weeks to come to you, but for the price, its worth the wait.

Secret 2: Buy USED planes. Now, this is a catch 22. Generally all used planes are HALF the price of a new plane. With that in mind, you need to understand the VALUE of the plane. So this is generally the place to go once you understand the value of models. I once bought a Pitts Monster biplane and overpaid for it, but I learned my lesson. Next time I'd know enough to walk away. What is the value of a plane? Find what it would cost new on say towerhobbies.com or horizonhobby.com and then divide it in half. Make sure to ask if it has been crashed and if so, what kind of repairs were done. GENERALLY RC people are honest.

I find the best places for used planes is on these two web sites:

- www.flyinggiants.com
- www.rcuniverse.com

(7) OK I HAVE MY MODEL NOW WHAT?!?

Return to the top of the page and read suggestion (1) which is to join a club!!! Again the reasons is that you'll have a place to fly, be insured, and have help with your model.

Let me start off with saying that if you are joining an AMA sanctioned field, you first need to be an active member in the AMA. To do that, go to their primary web site, <http://www.modelaircraft.org>, and sign up. As of this writing it is 58 dollars a year. But buy having this membership you can fly at any AMA sanction field in the USA and have that 2.5 million dollar umbrella policy saving your booty in the case of a freak accident.

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If you are new to flying, go to the club and ask a member if they can help you or if one of the members is willing to help you. As you can see in the pictures from our club, we help each other out. Generally if you have been visiting you already know some of the frequent flyers by name and we know you, so we'll just help you out with your first flight.

Get a good night rest before your flight, it will help with your nerves :-). Generally you'd want a calmer day to fly on rather than a windy one, since that will give you some added anxiety. Go on a day when someone else is going to be there and ask them for help if you need it. Sometimes having them standing next to you can be comforting.

(8) FIRST FLIGHT

Rule #1 of flying planes is "KEEP YOUR MODEL 2 MISTAKES HIGH", meaning that you need it high enough in the air to recover it if you do something that jeopardizes its health. Ideally its high enough so you can screw up twice and still save it. If the person helping you says that your model is too low, then generally you should not get insulted, just take it higher. Its for safety and your model's sake.

Rule #2 of flying model planes is "CUT YOUR THROTTLE". I've seen it time and time again, people put the throttle all the way forward and then the plane takes off and flies almost uncontrollably. Genenerally you need full throttle to take off and then you bring it back to about half throttle to fly.

Rule #3 of flying model planes is "LITTLE STICK MOVEMENTS". You don't want to move your sticks a lot when you are flying. If you do, you will roll too far or do too many loops and end up in trouble. Gently move the sticks and you'll have a lot more success.

(8) DON'T GIVE UP IF FIRST YOU CRASH..... TRY AGAIN!

What typically happens is that someone gets a trainer, they race down to the field, they put some fuel in it and take off expecting miracles. They crash. They pick up the pieces, swear at themselves for trying, and then sell off their equipment cheap. WE DON'T WANT THIS TO BE YOU. So do what we suggest which is to train on the computer, seek console and help from a club, and enjoy flying. WE HAVE ALL CRASHED. My second plane which I adored (super sportster), I put nose first into the ground. But I rebuilt it, waited a year until I was skilled

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enough, and have enjoyed flying it ever since. So just remember that and don't give up. Maybe go back to the simulator and try some more. You can fly. It is like everything else -- it just takes time and practice.