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Getting Started with Radio Controlled Park Flyers

By Paul Hartley, Former TCWS President



www.parkflyer.org

What is Considered a Park Flyer?

The Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) defines a “park flyer” as an electric powered, remotely controlled, model aircraft, incapable of exceeding speeds of 60 mph, with a total flying weight of less than 2lbs. For many individuals, these park flyer aircraft are a quick & inexpensive way to get into the RC aircraft hobby.

The AMA just recently introduced their **Park Pilot Program (PPP)**. This new program enables park flyer pilots to join the AMA at a reduced cost, compared to the full AMA membership fee. This Park Pilot membership in the AMA gives you liability insurance while flying your park flyer, and you will receive a quarterly magazine devoted to park flyers. Go to www.parkflyer.org to get more info on this program.

Where can I fly a Park Flyer?

As the name implies, park flyers are small enough to fly at a local field or park. However, great care should be taken to ensure that your aircraft does not cause injury or property damage, especially when you are first learning to fly! Here’s a brief list of safety rules for park flyer pilots:

- *Inspect your model before every flight to be certain it is airworthy*
- *Be aware of any other radio frequency user that may present an interference problem*
- *Always be courteous and respectful of other users of your selected flight area*
- *Choose an area clear of obstacles and large enough to safely accommodate your flying activity*
- *Make certain this area is clear of friends and spectators prior to launching your aircraft*
- *Be aware of other activities in the vicinity of your flight path that could cause potential conflict*
- *Carefully plan your flight path prior to launch*
- *Abide by any and all established AMA National Model Aircraft Safety Code*

Beginners will need a larger flight area than more experienced pilots, so it’s important to choose as large an area as possible when you first start out.

Tri-County Wing Snappers (TCWS) is one of the first (and possibly the only) RC aircraft club in the area that welcomes park flyers to our airfield, *and* offers a discounted club membership to park flyer pilots. If you want a safe place to learn to fly your park flyer, without worrying about the safety of children and other spectators that are commonly found at local fields and parks, check out our website (www.tcws.org), and then come out and visit our flying field! Our instructors would be glad to help you get started, and you might have a chance to see some of the larger nitro and gasoline powered aircraft that are regularly flown at our club.

Your First Park Flyer

One of the best ways to start out with a park flyer is to purchase a complete, “**ready-to-fly**” (RTF) package. These RTF packages include everything you need to get your aircraft into the air. Most RTF park flyer packages include a prebuilt park flyer aircraft (with only a few minutes of assembly required), at least one battery pack, a battery charger, a complete radio system and power system (transmitter, receiver, servos, speed controller, and electric motor).

It is very important to start with a good beginner or “trainer” aircraft. Unfortunately, many of the “cool” looking scale and aerobatic aircraft are quite difficult for beginners to learn on, so resist the urge to start with a model that is too advanced for your skills!

Beginner planes or trainers are high-wing airplanes with some dihedral in the wing. This makes the plane more stable, and gives it some self-righting characteristics, making it much easier and more forgiving for a beginner to learn on. At the end of this article, there is a listing of beginner and intermediate/advanced park flyers that are currently available.

While beginner RTF planes typically come with brushed motors and NiMH battery packs to keep your initial cost low, be sure to look for brushless motors and lithium-polymer (LiPo) battery packs in the advanced RTF and PNP (plug and play) park flyer packages. The brushless/LiPo power setups will give you amazing flight performance and longer flight times than the brushed/NiMH power setups.

Learning to Fly

When learning to fly larger RC aircraft, you typically start out on a “buddy-box” or “trainer-box”. With this setup, an instructor flies the aircraft with the radio transmitter, and passes control to the student (using a trainer box connected to the transmitter) for short periods of time. This allows the student to fly his/her aircraft, while having an instructor ready to take control if necessary. Unfortunately, most RTF park flyers do not come with a radio systems that are capable of using such a trainer box setup!

However, most RTF park flyers for beginners are quite durable, easy to learn on, and easy to repair if damaged. The rear-facing pusher prop planes have a distinct advantage over the traditional front-mounted prop planes. If you nose the plane into the ground, the rear-mounted pusher prop plane is likely to remain undamaged, while the front-mounted prop setup will likely cause the prop to break, and possibly damage the motor and its mount/gearbox.

RC flight simulators are invaluable when learning to fly. The better simulators, such as Real Flight and FS One, can be purchased at your local hobby shop. For the more budget conscious, a free simulator, called FMS, can be found at this web address: www.flying-model-simulator.com.

RTF Park Flyers for Beginners

Hobbyzone Firebird Phantom:



180 direct drive brushed motor, NiMH battery pack, 3-channel control. Rear mounted pusher prop with V-tail. Has “anti-crash” electronics.

Hobbyzone Aerobird 3:



380 direct drive brushed motor, NiMH battery pack, 3-channel control. Rear mounted pusher prop with V-tail.

Hobbyzone Super Cub:



480 brushed motor with gearbox, NiMH battery pack, 3-channel control. Front mounted prop and rudder/elevator control. Has “anti-crash” electronics.

Eflite Blade CX2:



A micro-electric RTF coaxial rotor heli. Dual brushed motors, LiPo battery pack and charger. Extremely stable and easy to learn on, relative to other micro helicopter types. Includes a 2.4GHz spread spectrum radio system!

Intermediate/Advanced Park Flyers

Parkzone Typhoon 2 3D:



400 brushless motor with gearbox, LiPo battery pack, 4-channel control. RTF and PNP (plug & play) versions available.

Parkzone Mustang P-51D EP:



480 brushed motor with gearbox, NiMH battery pack, RTF, 3-channel control (aileron-elevator).

Great Planes Synapse:



400 brushless motor with ducted fan. 3-channels (elevons), ARF (almost ready to fly) or RxR (receiver ready) versions available. (Watch the 60mph speed limit with this one!)

Great Planes Seawind Seaplane EP:



4-channel control, ARF, brushless outrunner motor required. Hand launch & belly land on the ground, or take-off & land on the water!

Eflite Blade 400 3D RTF:



A micro-electric RTF collective pitch heli. 400 brushless motor, LiPo battery, 6-channel 2.4GHz spread spectrum radio system!

Check out our upcoming RC Aircraft events for 2008! (see our website for more details):

May 17th, July 19th, & Sept 14th: Learn to fly a nitro powered RC trainer plane at TCWS! Ages 8-80 are welcome to come to our training days. We'll give you some flight simulator experience, and let you fly one of our club trainer planes on a buddy-box with our instructors! See club website for details! www.tcws.org

August 22nd - 24th: TCWS/Farview Giant Scale Fun Fly. Come out to Farview's airfield to see large (25% scale and larger) RC airplanes fly! Check out the club websites for details: www.tcws.org and www.farviewflyers.net

October 10th - 12th: Hamburg Jet Jamboree! Hosted by Farview Flyers and TCWS, held at Farview's airfield. Come see large RC model jet planes, powered by real turbine engines! Speeds can hit 180-200+mph! Check out the club websites for more details:

www.tcws.org and www.farviewflyers.net