



Welcome to the “fly anywhere, anytime” club

wish I had a nickel for every time a non-modeling friend has asked me, “Chris, can’t you just fly one of your RC airplanes *here*?” as the inquiring buddy points to a softball field, an empty lot in the neighborhood, a large backyard or some other nearby open space. Tell you what, I’ve been doing this RC “thing” for three decades, and I surely would have collected enough nickels by now for the purchase of a Bob Violett F-16—with true turbine power! Disappointingly, the answer to that question was always, “No; I’m sorry; I can’t fly it here.” Happily, the answer today is “Yeah, sure. We can fly it here.” This simple switch from “No” to “Yes” when I answer this long-asked question has dramatically changed the face of RC airplane modeling forever—and for the better, in my humble opinion. It has also given rise to this new column, “Backyard Flyer,” to which I welcome you.

I know that for a time, there has been a niche “micro” market and that small groups of modelers have enjoyed this slow flyer/park flyer thing, but now all the big manufacturing names are into it, too. That means a wonderful diversity of available products at affordable prices. I’m talking dependable, easy to assemble, electric-powered mini-models with performance. Moreover, these models are designed to maximize the success of newcomers as never before. I think it’s great. Go ahead; call me silly, but the more of us there are having fun, the better I like it!



Yeah, that’s me—ball-field barnstorming somewhere between first and second base with my Kamikaze customized Merlin. Lots of fun.

This column will cover everything from picnic-table carrier landings with antique designs (Langley style!) to high-speed soccer-field pylon racing—and everything in between. One recurring topic will be flying sites—sites such as sports fields, parks, driveways, ponds (yes, a few ARF floatplanes are already available in this micro category), empty parking lots and even unused (or not so unused) shuffleboards. And then there’s fun stuff like portable runways. A “chaologist” (scientist of chaos) would have a field day studying this era of the “fly anywhere, anytime” tiny RC airplane. It’s just the beginning, and anything and everything can and will happen. If you guys (or ladies) have

any creative input that will enhance the fun, please email me at chris@airage.com, or write to me at Air Age Inc., 100 East Ridge, Ridgefield, CT 06877 USA.

Of course, all the latest support equipment that will facilitate your success and enjoyment within this new world of the micro RC model—things such as new kits, radios and geared and un-geared power systems—will be featured regularly here in “Backyard Flyer.”

Last, but certainly not least, comes safety. It’s true that many of these new models are far too light and slow to do any damage, but don’t even think about flying one next to a busy road because you might distract drivers and cause an accident. And don’t fly close to a designated RC flying field and interfere with other RC’ers’ radios—or have interference from theirs shoot down your beloved park flyer. The AMA recommends that you be three miles away from a flying field.

So, if you’re an experienced RC modeler who has a big backyard or a vacant lot across the street, or you want to take a cute scale model on your next vacation, this column is for you. On the other hand, if you happen to be someone who has always wanted to get into RC but never had a club or a designated flying site within an hour’s drive, again, I say join me in the backyard flyer experience. Whichever category you fall into, I guarantee we’ll have fun.

Remember, our motto is “Sure, we can fly it here!”

Megatech Merlin

As I see it, the contents of Megatech’s Merlin box are a recipe for RC success—a package of flying fun, if you will. Not only is everything you need included, except AA batteries for the transmitter, but the assembled model is an extremely docile flyer that’s also quite rugged; in fact, I believe it’s the most rugged of its type. There’s lots of carbon fiber and high-nylon-content plastic—the kind that doesn’t crack easily—incorporated in the Merlin’s structure. I’ve flown a number of Merlins and tried to break them all. After several attempts, I did eventually break one, but it wasn’t easy. I think it was the dive into a baseball backstop overhang that ultimately did the trick. But even at that, only the prop and one of the Merlin’s carbon-reinforced wings were crunched. Megatech



Dogfighting; what could be better? As editorial director Tom Atwood unsuspectingly flies the stock-finish Merlin, I close in from below for the “kill.”

includes an extra prop and prop shaft with the model, and all other parts are readily available at reasonable prices from Megatech. Some “vintage” slow flyers that have a similar appearance to the Merlin are notorious for breaking at the drop of a hat. The Merlin, however, is designed to survive in the real world, where unexpected “you-know-what” happens.

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The Merlin is truly a complete package. Everything except AA batteries is included—even a 6-cell NiMH battery pack and a specialized charger; a 7-cell NiMH is also available.



Enhancing this little model's resilient structure are two other features I like: a ball-bearing 5.6:1-ratio gear-drive system and nickel-metal-hydrate (NiMH) batteries with the appropriate charger. This battery/charger combo gives the Merlin upwards of a 10-minute flight duration; this is after a few charge/discharge cycles that bring these batteries up to their full potential. The gear reduction, which also helps to improve duration, allows a big, 12-inch-diameter prop to be swung. This large, relatively slow turning, efficient prop gives the Merlin lots of low-speed thrust—a welcome feature when barnstorming in tight spaces.

Barnstorming in tight spaces is a prerequisite for slow-flyer classification—and it's something the Merlin really excels at. With the control throws set in the

high position, this model will twist and dance around you like

a huge butterfly. Don't be concerned about the wing flexing; the Merlin can take it. I've even done full-bore tight stunting in slightly gusty conditions without a problem. With the controls set in the low position, the rank beginner can learn to fly with the gentle Merlin very quickly. That's also partly because he or she won't be taking time out to run back to the shop for repairs after minor, and even not so minor, mishaps. With the large, efficient prop and good-size wheels, the Merlin takes off, even from slightly rough surfaces, without a problem.

Building the Merlin takes less than an hour because it literally snaps together. One of the coolest things is how the decals are applied. They go on just like those removable tattoos kids love, except they're permanent. When applied, they look painted on and weigh nothing—totally ingenious. During the assembly process, I do recommend that you put a drop of thin CA where the stick fuselage end slips into the firewall and also on the pushrods where they go into the clevises. We did have one clevis come loose. As a result, the Merlin crashed from about 30 feet high, but it didn't sustain any damage, and I was up and flying within 10 minutes. I told you it's tough. And for \$199.99 for the total complete package, the Merlin is a winner and fun to own.



All onboard electronic equipment (servos, speed control and receiver) is already wired up and enclosed in this box, which comes mounted to the fuselage boom.



SNEAK PEEK



V-Max Probe pusher

This is the V-Max Probe pusher designed by Jerry Small. It's an all foam scale model of an experimental aircraft designed to break the world speed record. Powered by a GWS motor (7.2V 110mAh Ni-Cd battery) turning a 4:1 gear box and 7x6 prop, it's a great little flyer that tracks well and is, as you can see, very cute. Watch for the construction article—and other in-depth slow-flyer and park-flyer features—in our sister publication, *RC MicroFlight*.

GWS; distributed by Balsa Products Engineering, 122 Jansen Ave., Iselin, NJ 08830-2601; (732) 634-6131; www.balsapr.com; Global Hobby Distributors, 18480 Bandilier Cir., Fountain Valley, CA 92728-8610; (714) 964-0827; fax (714) 962-6452; Horizon Hobby Inc., 4105 Fieldstone, Champaign, IL 61822; (217) 355-9511; www.horizonhobby.com. Megatech; distributed by America's Hobby Center, P.O. Box 32 North Bergen, NJ 07047-0032; www.megatechrc.com. ♣