

Desert Hawks R/C Club

Instructors Info.

Beginners Page

If you are interested in purchasing a plane and learning to fly RC then this page is for you.

Joining a club

Flying an RC airplane is not difficult, but it is almost impossible to learn without experienced help. Remember it is not a computer game and there is no "reset button". Crashes can do a tremendous amount of damage and even totally destroy the plane! And it takes a very large area to fly safely. The best way to get started is to find a local club and join the AMA. The AMA provides the additional insurance that is required at most R/C Fields. In addition to providing instruction and a safe place to fly, club members will recommend equipment and provide valuable advice. And its always more fun when there are others with the same interest to help each other out!

Free instruction is provided to beginners interested in joining the Desert Hawks R/C Club. Arrangements can also be made for anyone that would like to "give it a try or Demo Flight" before they purchase a plane. And club membership is not necessary to get started!

Other clubs in the area also provide instruction but policies and practices vary so you need to check with them for details.

By the way the Desert Hawks R/C Club hosts the regional Float Fly on Lake Havasu in November each year.

We also host several Fun fly events during the winter months, and invite others in the southwest to bring their planes and come have fun with us!



Flight Instruction

In the old days, the RC instructor and student passed the control transmitter back and forth while the plane was flying. For obvious reasons crashes were quite common.

But now the standard training method is to use a "buddy cord". The buddy cord allows the instructor to connect his transmitter to the student's transmitter. As long as the instructor pushes the "instruct" button on his transmitter, the student has control of the plane. When the instructor releases the button, control is immediately transferred to the instructor's transmitter. Using this system, it is very rare for a plane to crash during "new pilot" training.

The Desert Hawks R/C club has several members that are very experienced at instruction using this method.



OK, What to Buy...

It is strongly recommended that the beginner come out to the field and talk to experienced club members before buying an airplane. There are many "beginner packages" on the market and some are much better than others. And advice you may get in a hobby shop may not be the best- remember many of the folks working in the stores have never flown a plane before! Make sure that you get good advice before spending several hundred dollars on an airplane that is inappropriate or unreliable.

A beginner needs a good airplane with a high-quality motor and functional radio gear in order to get started. There are several ways to accomplish this.

1. Purchase the airplane, motor and radio separately. If you are handy and like to build, you can purchase a full-build airplane kit. But most folks these days opt for ARF's (Almost Ready to Fly) that only take a few hours to assemble. The obvious advantage to purchasing everything separately is that you can get the airplane that you want with the motor and radio that you want. It takes a little effort to piece the various components together but the end result can be a great combination.
2. Purchase an RTF (Ready To Fly) package that includes a plane, motor and radio. This is the easiest way to go since everything is "pre-matched" for

assembly. However quality of some of the components can be poor, so be careful.

3. Get a "package deal". Some packages ARF (Almost Ready to Fly) come with the airplane and the motor, and the radio is purchased separately. This allows you to select the brand and model of radio that you want. This is common option offered by Internet and mail-order hobby retailers.

Here is my advice on what is needed, and strongly endorsed by the instructors at Desert Hawks:

Trainer Airplane

Start with a 40-size or 60-size high-wing trainer!!! Most beginners are very surprised at how fast and powerful "trainers" really are. And a good trainer is very capable of basic aerobatics- loops, rolls, inverted flight, etc. Sport planes are too much for beginners and will only extend the learning curve (and they can be hard on an instructor's heart!)

Most high-wing trainers on the market are good-flying airplanes. Desert Hawk Instructors favorites are the LT-40 by SIG and the Nexstar by Hobbico. According to Bill (one of our instructors) the Tower Trainer is another very good option. If you must go with an RTF, the Nexstar package is outstanding, and well worth the extra cost compared to the cheaper packages. The LT-40 and Tower Trainer can be purchased as full-build kits or ARFs. These planes are better flyers than the Nexstar but will take more time to prepare for the first flight.

You may or may not find these planes in stock at the local hobby shops. But they can be special-ordered by the local shops, or purchased over the Internet, or by mail-order. The Tower trainer is sold exclusively by Tower Hobbies, which is an excellent on-line source for RC gear. Tower regularly markets "package deals" on all three of these planes. The local hobby shops regularly stock other trainer packages and some are better than others. Again, getting advice from a club member before spending money is highly recommended.

Motor

Buy a good glow engine!!! This is the biggest problem area with some of the cheaper trainer packages. There are some motors on the market that won't keep running no matter what you do, or just don't have adequate power for the plane. These just cause endless frustration! We have found all too often that cheap motors must be replaced with more reliable ones just to get through instruction. In the end this costs more money than purchasing a good motor to start with!

By the way size of the motor is not a good indicator of how reliable or "powerful" it will be. High quality motors come with ball bearings.

Cheaper motors use bushings instead and the power loss can be very significant. And there are other design details that can make a big difference in performance. Also don't be impressed by 3-blade propellers. This is just a marketing gimmick, as 3-blade props are much less efficient than 2-blade props on trainer-size glow engines. This doesn't mean that RTF packages that come with a 3-blade prop are bad, but you will probably find yourself buying a good 2-blade prop and spinner after the first few flights.

The hands-down Desert Hawks Instructors favorite motor for a 40-size trainer is the OS 46FX (or the new OS 46AX which is essentially the same). Reliability is unsurpassed and power is excellent. They are worth every extra penny that they cost. By the way this is the motor that comes with the Nexstar trainer package. It is also a perfect match for the SIG LT-40, which is my favorite trainer combo. And the best part is that this motor is excellent for sport planes, so it can be used on your next airplane when you decide to retire the trainer.

If cost is a major consideration, then the OS 40LA or 46LA are acceptable alternatives. They are fairly reliable however power output is much lower than the FX/AX motors.

There are many other motors that will work well, but it is strongly recommended that you talk to a club member before purchasing a plane with a motor that is not listed above!

Radio (Control Transmitter)

Most of the Desert Hawk club members use Hitec, Futaba, JR, or Airtronics radios. Starting with Hitec at the Desert Hawks club is the best option because all of the instructors have Hitec-compatible buddy cords and transmitters. However we are also capable of setting up a buddy-cord on Futaba and compatible equipment, so the brand of radio is not necessarily critical. And all of the major-brand FM radios will work fine for a trainer.

Most beginners will start with a 4-channel FM system because it is the cheapest option and is included with the trainer packages. A six-channel computer radio with dual rates is a much better option because this allows adjustment of the control surface travel while flying. While not entirely necessary for a trainer this is a very useful feature which is almost a requirement for sport planes.

Questions?... Then contact us!

Anyone interested is welcome to drive out to Sterling Field and introduce themselves! There are almost always folks out at the field

flying on nice, calm days. But since this is a hit and miss method, why not call a club member, or send an email message instead.

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