

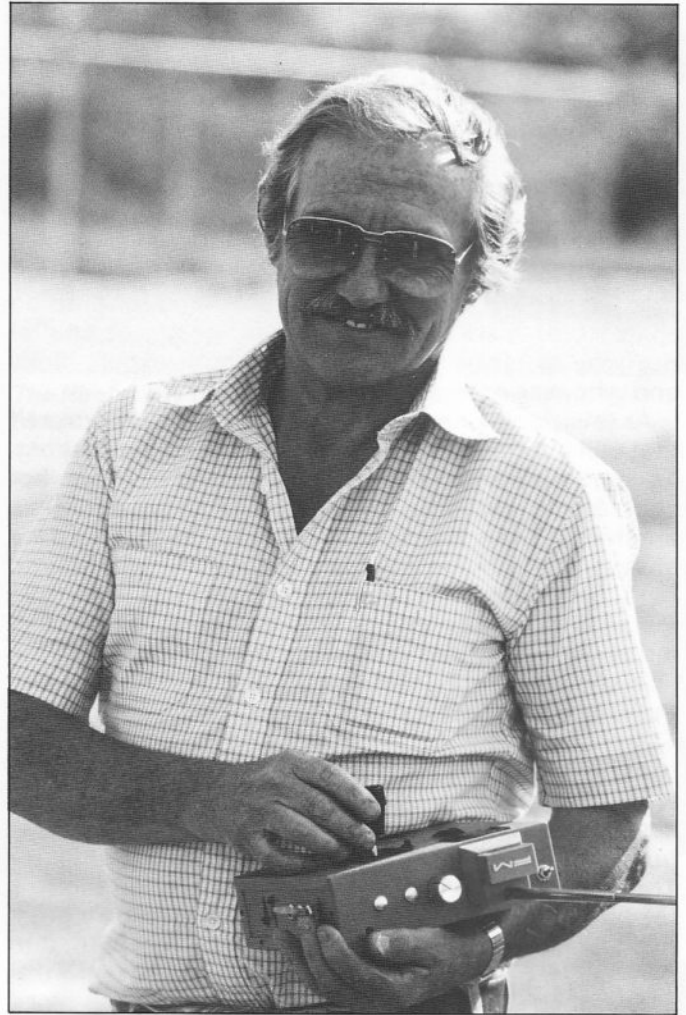
# My Love of Helicopters

by Walt Schoonard

How many of you are aware of the history of R/C helicopters? I am going to try to relate a little of this in this article that may hopefully help you to enjoy this great sport a little better.

In 1962 I entered the AMA Nationals at Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, and had the chance to see my first R/C helicopter. It was an elaborate rendition of a cargo helicopter which was designed to straddle its cargo load, pick it up by an on-board crane system and then fly with it to wherever it was supposed to go. Believe me when I tell you that this machine commanded a great deal of attention, to say the least. Several hundred people and I watched in great anticipation as they fired it up in one of the hangars the night before it was scheduled to fly. It had open bearings and shafts that turned at engine speed with predictable results – overheated galled bearings, nuts, and bolts falling off, the engine overheating, and you name it!! Its builders confidently, however, predicted that it would fly at its appointed time the next day. They were greeted by a very large crowd anxiously waiting to see this machine fly. The builders waited for their turn to fly and then carried their creation onto the runway with a great deal of fanfare, which included a pit crew, a little wagon for starter, battery, and other tools. This was in the days when the Nats were altogether in one place at the same time so you can see the drama that was taking place. In fact, in those days, officials would stop everything and give you practically any time that you might need to get your flight going especially if you had an unusual aircraft, and this helicopter was unusual, unique, and unheard of at least. With the builders, the designers, and the pit crew working at full tilt, they never did get the thing started! After about a half an hour of this frantic pace, I discovered that they didn't have the glow plug hooked up; and when I so notified them, it was easy to see that they had purposely left it unhooked and had never intended to fly it – only get a lot of publicity! Even though I did not get to see it fly, it sparked a fire in me that has never died to this day.

In subsequent years at Toledo, I saw several beautiful machines and over-engineered helicopter mechanics on display, which only added fuel to my love for helicopters. Then, in 1971, on a very cold winter morning with at least a foot of snow on the ground, a man known as Dieter Schluter from West Germany showed up with a scale Huey-Cobra gunship that was about 6 feet long, painted olive drab, and inside was a set of mechanics so simple that I was sure it would never fly. Toledo is famous for its very large crowds and also for new and innovative modelling firsts; and when the public address system blared out that Dieter Schluter was going to fly that beautiful machine, the auditorium emptied *en masse* onto the football field behind the building. The day was very bright and very cold with a lot of snow on the ground. It took a little while to start the engine because of the cold weather, but it did start and soon the rotor was turning. What a beautiful sight it was! Then, without fanfare, Dieter lifted it out of the snow and brought it into a steady hover. The roar of the crowd was fantastic! Dieter flew around in gentle



right and left turns, figure of eights, and then he softly landed it right where he had taken it off. He took off again and again doing beautiful translational flights and even vertical stall turns. On the return of one of these flights, the Cobra suddenly shuddered and crashed into the ground. It broke the blades and bent the fly bar, but nothing else was broken. They determined that a signal from a radio-controlled garage door had done it in.

I have never seen a crowd so entranced with a flight demonstration as they were that day and so terribly shocked when it crashed. But they were even more shocked when he flew the same machine an hour later. He did even more smooth maneuvers and also landed about 20 yards away into the outstretched arms of Jersey Jim Martin! That day's performance fuelled my fire even more and changed my life forever. It also began a great friendship.

Needless to say, after seeing Dieter Schluter fly the Bell Huey-Cobra, I had to have one right away. This is how I met this great man. At the time, Dieter was a bit shy because he felt that he did not have a good command of the English language. Actually he speaks very good English, but he doesn't think he does. I tried to buy the Cobra that he flew, but to no avail no matter what, so I then ordered two of them from Midwest Model Supply. Too many months later to

even recall, they arrived around Christmas time. In the meantime, I had talked a friend into taking the second Cobra, and we built them simultaneously. We had many hours of collaboration as to engine, muffler, radio, color schemes, cockpit details, and on and on.

The directions in English were simple enough so that we got all the parts into the construction and mostly in the right places; however, by doing them together, we also made some identical mistakes on both machines. But ignorance is bliss so we pressed on – not knowing the difference. Even though these Cobras were very large, they went together quite rapidly, and my friend and I planned to have a grand entrance at the next Remote Control Association of Central Florida club meeting. You must remember that we had no spare bolts or nuts – and for sure no spare rotor blades, blade mounts, gears, or shafts! But why to worry when we were both expert fliers, and who was going to need spares?

At this point I need to tell you a little about myself that will later make for some very interesting reading. To start with, most R/C clubs have one or more 'hot shot' pilots who can fly anything, and I do mean anything. Their scenario goes like this: They are always at the flying field, always willing and able to help someone with any flying machine, they can instantly tune any engine and so get to fly a lot of airplanes – thus accumulating vast hours of flying skill and along with that an ego that is hard to fit into the world's largest hat. You know the type, I'm sure. They also go to a lot of contests and make it a habit to bring home all of the first place trophies. So is this type going to ask anyone for help, or even if they did, are they going to let anyone know about it, or are they going to take any advice – no matter how good it is? The answer to these questions is most certainly a resounding 'no'. This eventually proved to be a great mistake and continues to be in many 'hot shots' to this day. More about this later. Oh, yes, I fit into this scenario, too!

The night of the grand entrance at the club meeting finally came, and we were ready! All of the controls

had been moved a thousand times, and the paint finishes (while both different) were immaculate with all the decals in place and everything shined to perfection, including our indomitable egos. We planned to be respectfully late in order to get the undivided attention of all present. Of course, we had discreetly leaked out the fact that this was to be a great unveiling! Everything worked perfectly – we were about ten minutes late, and everyone was in their place when we carried our greatest creations in. Before going into the club meeting, my friend and I flipped a coin to see who would get to go in first – even though it meant only a few seconds difference. Guess who won the flip? You're right – I did! What an entrance we made. Everyone had to turn around to be able to see us and our machines, and they were exclaiming, "Wow, look at that. Wow, isn't that neat" and so on as we carried the Cobras into the display area and placed them on the tables. Yes, I said tables because these giant choppers took up a table each.

When things quietened down, we were asked to "show and tell". We told all about them as to how much they cost, where they came from, and how they were built, what engines they had, and what radio, and what each function did what and why. Then to top it all off, we even told them (with absolute confidence) that come the next weekend we were going to go out and fly the new choppers. We even invited them all to come out and see this great event and bring their friends. This was going to be Kitty Hawk all over again. Actually, no one doubted that we wouldn't fly them on the first attempt. After all, we fit right into the scenario of being able to fly anything!

Those early Cobras came with a very effective training gear which included shock-absorbing wide-stance gear with wheels. But who needs all of this cumbersome and awkward gear to clutter up the beautiful Cobras? We certainly did not so these parts were left in the boxes untouched. Some real surprises were in store.

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***To be continued in next issue***

