

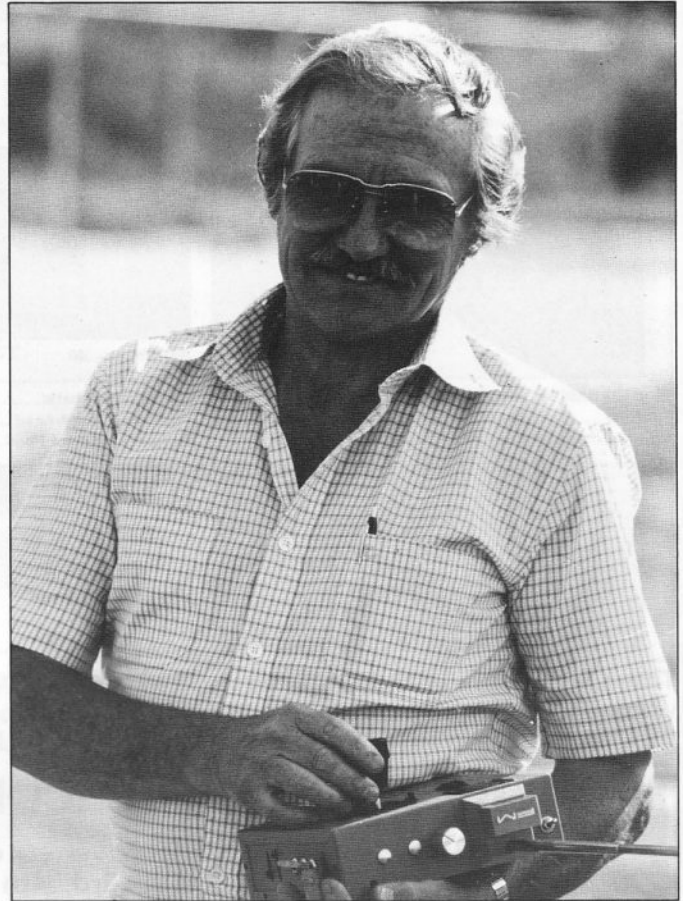
My Love of Helicopters Part III

by Walt Schoonard

Those night flying sessions soon became an obsession that was occupying my mind during all of my waking hours. While at work, I would plan my day to get away a little earlier and sneak in some practice outside of my auto body shop. This was, of course, kept secret from my friend so that I could show up at night and shock him with my flying abilities. I was sure that I had come upon a really unique plan that would soon catapult me into rapid success. Each night, after our flying session, I would go home and carefully check my Cobra over to make sure that it was in good flying order, and then I would put it on charge. I would leave home a little earlier in order to get in some flying before work while the air was calm and then put it on charge again to fly after work. Then, as if nothing had been going on, I would show up at the parking lot for our night session. Needless to say, all of this practice was beginning to show, and I was getting to be very comfortable with the Cobra. I was able to do tight close-in flight and rock-steady hovering, followed by very precise landings. However, as my skill climbed so did my friend's skill. This was really bothering me because my friend had a very tight work schedule, and I could see no way that he should be progressing so rapidly. After all, practice makes perfect, and I was really putting in about all the hours that my batteries could stand – and yet, his skill was matching mine day after day. In order to stretch my batteries use, I acquired a car charger so as to charge the batteries while in transit. So now my Cobra could be charging while on the road, while I was at breakfast, and during my work hours. I then got to flying at lunchtime about a half an hour each day. I was now practicing morning, noon, evening, and night – and still my friend's flying skill seemed to match mine, almost movement for movement. About the only thing left was to get an extra battery pack and start taking off work. Now you can see why I called this an obsession! All of this practice was beginning to rob me of sleep and was also wearing out my Cobra. Plus the fact that even though my flying skill was certainly getting better, it should have by now had my friend congratulating me all over the place!

One day, while flying at noon, my friend came by to visit me and commented that he had not realized that I was practicing during the day. He asked how long I had been doing this, and I decided to tell all and so related to him all of my special efforts to get to be a better 'chopper' flier than him. At first, he tried to act shocked that I would try to pull off such a charade. Then he busted out laughing while telling me that he had been doing the same thing. We were both relieved that the secret was out as we were just about worn out!

Many good things came from this experience because now our flying skill had climbed so rapidly that now it was becoming a very relaxed pleasure to fly our helicopters. The tensions and apprehensions we had when we were first starting to fly were now gone, allowing our minds to work towards improving the performance of our machines. Another thing was that all of this flying had attracted a lot of spectators wherever we flew. Many of these people became



genuinely interested in wanting to get into this sport. No hobby shops at this time were selling helicopters or even thinking of doing so at any foreseeable time. Because of this, where do you direct these people to? These people were asking all kinds of questions, such as "Is it a kit? How much does it cost? Where did you get it? How high will it fly? How fast will it go?" And on and on. All of these questions represented dollars; and in the back of my mind, a plan was developing that would some day bring these questions to me, and I would be able to provide the answers which in turn would bring me dollars. Towards this end, I determined to learn all that I could about radio-controlled helicopters so that I could help others to enjoy this great sport. More about this later.

The more flying that we did, some parts began to show weaknesses, and because of the early stages of R/C helicopters, replacement parts were almost non-existent – or at least very hard to find. Because of this, I had to make many of my own parts. In doing so, I tried to improve their function and reliability. Once the part was developed, the cost of producing them was not much greater than making one so without trying, I soon found myself in the modified parts replacement business. As other helicopter kits came on the market, I soon found that I could improve on many parts to start with, and one manufacturer referred to me as 'Mister Modification.' Even though this was not intended as a compliment, I took it as such because I had become so successful in doing so.

Some people in our airplane club, who had been

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the most critical, now began to show a real interest in helicopters. Some even acquired kits. I was able to help them avoid some of my early problems so they were able to get their machines ready much quicker. It was not long before our night flying sessions were now attended by ten or more helicopters. These included Schüter, DuBros, Kavan helicopters and a Micro-Mold Lark.

It wasn't long until we began to wonder if anyone else in Florida had helicopters; and, if they did, would they be interested in getting together and exchange some helpful information. We located a hotel for dinner and meeting room and sent a notice to all of the hobby shops in Florida that a 'show and tell' helicopter dinner was to be held on such a night at such a place. We got a film from Sikorsky Helicopters on the Black Hawk helicopter program, rented a 16mm movie projector and waited to see who would come. This effort was like trying to find out if there are any other beings in our universe! We had no idea if anyone would show up; but if they did, we were ready. The night of the 'show and tell' arrived; and what a fantastic turn-out we had! Nineteen people with helicopters showed up besides many others who were just interested. We had some new kits on display and showed the film and had a good meal. The most interesting part was the 'show and tell' followed by all of the information exchanging. All of these people had been trying all alone, not knowing anyone else to talk to or get help from. These were fantastic people, indeed, with great determination

and stick-to-itiveness! We decided to form a helicopter club, whose main purpose was to help others and trade information. Thus was born the Florida R/C Helicopter Association, which is still going strong with most of the charter members still active.

One of the things that I most enjoy about helicopters is the opportunity that they present to help others who are as fascinated with them as I am. In most cases, everyone that you meet worldwide in the R/C helicopter sport are great and friendly people, who can fly all day and then talk about R/C helicopters all night. Oddly enough, most of us 'so-called old timers' who had difficulty doing both right and left-hand turns and nose-in now see these young bucks do all of this and more in less than six months – and many time with their first helicopter.

I can do inverted flight and have even taught some how to do it over the telephone, and they have in turn taught others over the telephone. Nose-in is my latest accomplishment, but I am still not comfortable while flying nose-in. It is hard for an 'old dog' to learn new tricks – but not impossible! Learning to do autorotations took about an hour as timing was the only real factor. I have since been able to teach others in fifteen minutes. One student that I taught at a meet in California last October '83 was Jeff Sands from Denver, Colorado. He had the guts to then enter an autorotation contest doing his first engine-off against such world notables as Ewald Heim and others. Of course, he did not win by hitting the spot, but neither did he crash. The perfection of the Schlüter Superior helicopter that he flew, and his young discerning mind and rapid learning curve made this possible. Oh, to be young again!

To be continued