An insight into different personalities within the helicopter world

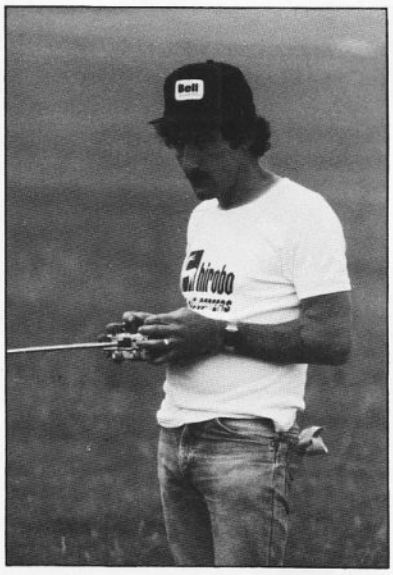
DAVE NIEMAN *by Diana Cameron-Tough*

Modellers all the world over make 'pilgrimages' to Dave's helicopter shop in Sudbury, only a few miles from Wembley and about ¼ hour out of Central London. Its comparison to a shrine becomes evident when you enter its hallowed portals. Here you find no unashamed luxury, and in Winter you'll find it warmer outside, but what you will find are helicopters, helicopters and more helicopters. You will also see some very 'tasty' and generally very large aeroplanes, such as the one used by Ruskin Air Services for the Roy Marsden TV series.

Here, if you want to learn to fly an R/C Helicopter, or if you just want to improve your technique, you will get excellent aid in 'setting up', and valuable assistance from Dave and his confederate Pete Ashford. If your nerves can manage to withstand the scathing witticisms from this 'Straight Faced comedy team' and if you can endure the inevitable demoralising check over of the machine that you have so lovingly constructed and nurtured – then you will surely have the nerve to fly helicopters! You will also have found a most entertaining duo (especially if the sarcastic wit is not aimed at your machine, or as in my case your husband's) and also a pair of good and helpful friends. It is, as all *good* model shops are, the place to spend time learning all those extra tips and just plain talking helicopters. I have learnt that there can be no such thing as a quick trip to the model shop, especially if you are like us, and the nearest helicopter specialist is 1¼ hours away!

As with all the well known figures in the model world – Schoonard, Heim, Hubert, Simone, Gorham – Dave was a proficient R/C aeroplane pilot who finally found something to get his teeth into when he saw Schlüter first demonstrate his Cobra. That was just what Dave was waiting for. The kit cost £139 at a time when his aeroplane kits were costing £15-£18, so it was quite a financial commitment.

Even though he was battling against the problems of the unknown and unaided, he did not break a thing for the first eighteen months. Ironically, he broke his first set of blades the first time he put a new set on, thinking the old ones might have been worn out! He managed to hover quite safely



after a fortnight of evenings and weekends, and after six weeks he was completing his first successful circuits. All this, after only ever having seen a R/C helicopter fly for two or three minutes. Quite an achievement! He found it a good challenge (who doesn't?) and the best time of all his flying, as it was so totally absorbing. After the first eighteen careful months plenty of blades etc, etc, got broken in the interests of advancing his ability. In those days he used a lot of fuel, but one machine really lasted.

Slowly a few people were starting to catch on to this absorbing hobby, and then Ripmax asked Dave to fly for them to promote the Schlüter range that they were then distributing. He got recognised as being a proficient flyer, and through demonstrations he found more and more people coming to him for advice on all sorts of problems, such as where to get spares. He saw the need for a model shop that specialised wholly in helicopters, so when premises became available near his outboard motor shop, he took them and opened the Helicopter Centre in 1976.

From then on, it just grew and grew. He sold the Schlüter range, and a few other models that came and went. When the Heli Boy came out it was quite revolutionary and very exciting. However, after its initial impact, and he certainly sold a lot of them, he felt that it was not a good long term prospect. Dave attributes his success to always being able to see ahead, read the market and anticipate demand. He felt that Schlüter was on the wane, even though other shops were only just catching on to it. He knew things would get stale if he did not do something to keep the momentum going. He had had a Hirobo Gazelle back in 1975, but was not too impressed, until a Swedish friend told him of the superb Hirobo Range he was now importing into Sweden. Dave read all about what was going on in Japan in some foreign magazines, then went off to Japan to investigate and see what machines were available. He toured all the manufacturers and chose Hirobo as he felt they were the most practical.

The range then consisted of a basic little Mark I Falcon, Gazelle, Enstrom, Jet Ranger and Iroquois. They took the British market by storm and sold lots. Dave had also been impressed by the excellent flying he saw in Japan his first autorotation and lots of interesting mechanical things and semi-symmetrical blades.

The business went from strength to strength, and in 1979 he moved into the shop where he still is today. They say that behind each successful man is a business woman, and this is certainly true in Dave's case. His wife, Brenda, manages to keep the book keeping and administration side of the business in order (can't be an easy task with a pair like Dave and Pete around) and woe betide anyone who doesn't pay his account on time!

Dave is a well recognised master of scale flying, which is the type of flying he loves the best. Not surprisingly, in 1979 he learnt to fly the full size. He learnt on a Bell 47G and (would you believe it) learnt surprisingly quickly and easily. He was taught by David Dixon who is now the Chief Instructor at Sloane Helicopters at Cranfield Airport. He was glad to have learnt while there were still 47s around, as Bell Textron no longer make them, although many are still used in some countries for training.

Dave has had some memorable experiences with his helicopters, like the time when a wealthy Arab asked him to fly a model inside his extensive and luxuriously carpeted flat. The model blew the rubber plants all over the place, and also blew the robes up over the Arab's head and generally caused havoc among his entourage. He opened the window, and asked Dave to fly out – fifteen stories up!

Understandably Dave declined this invitation.

He was also called upon to do some model flying for a movie called *Queen Kong*. It involved 'some bird in a chimpanzee suit' but unfortunately the public was never given the chance to see this memorable film due to an injunction being taken out against it by *King Kong!!*

Guess who was the first person (as far as he knows) to fly a model helicopter from a full size machine? He attempted a channel crossing this way, many, many years ago, but aborted it after radio problems.

Probably his most famous flying took place in 1977/78 for the James Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me*. He spent three months in Nassau (Bahamas) for the filming, flying the Jet Rangers which he had built in his shop.

He and John Simone Jnr flew Russian Attack Helicopters – Hinds, in 1981 for the film *Fire Fox* which starred Clint Eastwood. They filmed in freezing conditions at Thule Air Base in Greenland. The models were modified 222 fuselages with different tails and noses and Hirobo mechanics. The fuselage was one of the last ones produced by DC Labs. They set the models up in LA and then flew to Greenland to do some flying over the ice flows. The engines 'acted up' because of the cold and they also had trouble gluing, since 'Zap' and Epoxy would not work in the cold, as they need humidity to set them off. They also could not fly for long due to freezing fingers. After Greenland they went to Catalina, off California, for the scene where the Hinds were blown up taking off from a destroyer. Although Dave and John enjoyed the filming, and flying in the Arctic certainly was an experience, Dave was disappointed with the edited version of the film, and the participation of their helicopters. Next time you get the film on video, watch out for the Hinds.

Dave does a fair bit of exhibition flying of models and also in Gerry Haim's Hughes 300, and a few bits and pieces for TV. In the summer, he flew Albert Heyche's *Blue Thunder* model for Yorkshire Television as a promo for the film. He performed autorotations for the TV crew, but unfortunately they had no idea of the skill required to do this, in the confined space that was available. The general public are still very, very ignorant when it comes to flying radio controlled helicopters.

While the Editor was getting a few bits and pieces one day, I managed to ask Dave a few questions about his flying.

R/C Helicopters: *Which is your favourite model to fly?*

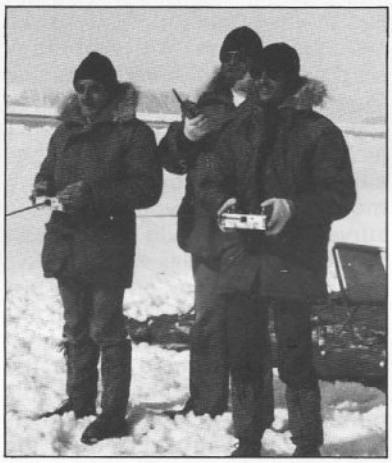
Dave: Not necessarily my favourite, but one I fly most is the Jet Ranger SST, because it is so versatile. It is a nice looking scale model that can be flown slow and realistic or if you like you can wind it up for aerobatics etc and it autorotates a treat.

R/C Helicopters: *Do you enjoy building your own models?*

Dave: I do enjoy building. I build all my own helicopters. I wish I had more time to devote to it. I always build and fly at least one example of every model helicopter that we sell. I believe that first hand experience is an absolute must if you are to give your customers a good back up service.

My favourite model I built was my first Huey Cobra. It was a complete unknown quantity yet it worked first time and went on working for many many hours in fact it is still around even now.

R/C Helicopters: *How much time do you get for flying?*



Dave and John Simone Jnr on the Greenland ice, freezing their moustaches off!!

Dave with a lovely ⅕th scale Lama, that is now no longer produced.

Dave: I don't get as much time to fly for myself as I would like. A lot of time at the field is taken up with sorting out other people's models and teaching customers to fly, so acutal time in the air is about 1-1½ hours a week, weather permitting. There are odd occasions when I can sneak off and enjoy myself, just me and a model or two but not often enough.

R/C Helicopters: *Which manoeuvre do you enjoy most?*

Dave: For me, the most rewarding manoeuvre at present is engine off autorotation. This has increased the versatility of model helicopters quite dramatically. There are many different combinations of speed, height, pitch, angle of descent etc used to achieve the desired result ie, arrive gently at a given spot.

I sometimes lose track of the amount of fuel left in the tank 'intentionally'. I fly around waiting for the motor to cut and when it does I make an emergency landing. This is great fun and certainly keeps you on your toes, it makes you adopt full-size practise of ensuring that you have sufficient height or speed to execute a safe landing in the event of engine failure. I usually play 'silly-buggers' when I'm alone for obvious safety reasons and the need to hear when your motor stops.

R/C Helicopters: *Do you enjoy competing in the FAI and Novelty events?*

Dave: The present FAI schedule is very good because it has an even balance between aerobatic and hovering manoeuvres, whereas in the past too much emphasis was placed on screaming around. You don't realise how sloppy your flying is until you try the schedule. I would recommend that anyone who is reasonably competent should get a copy of the schedule and have a go. Even if they are not interested in competition, it is very absorbing and good for discipline. *(Editor's Note: See Issue 1 of this magazine.)*

Although I fly in FAI competitions I never practise, lack of time again. To be consistently competitive you need to prepare at least two models and keep them up to scratch with all the latest 'tweaks' and get out in all weathers and 'practice'. I get a lot of satisfaction out of flying a standard model that has had lots of air time, mixing it with 'Desperate Dans' and still giving them a run for their money.

All of our helicopter meetings in UK have some form of novelty competition. They are great fun and they give less experienced flyers a sense of purpose and a

great deal of satisfaction. Initially most novices are quite introverted and reluctant to participate. I believe the novelty events, with some simple low risk tasks are an excellent method of drawing people out of their shells. I also think that the 'experts' should back off a little in novelty and give the novices some room to breathe. To this end I personally have been keeping a low profile of late.

***R/C Helicopters**: What are your views on inverted flying?*

Dave: In my opinion, inverted flight with a helicopter is rather a pointless exercise and not exactly scale looking but because it is possible I suppose you have to prove that you can do it. It looks very spectacular, but after the initial excitement wears off it is a bit of an anti-climax. I don't want to sound like a stick in the mud, but I'd like to shatter the illusions of those that think this manoeuvre is the absolute ultimate, not so... far more skill is requred to fly a slow figure 8 as in the FAI schedule than to hurtle around with the poor old heli's legs in the air. The basic requirements are simple, obviously you need a collective pitch model that will get itself upside down somehow, either by looping or rolling and sufficient pitch range to sustain inverted. A transmitter with inverted facility, ie at the flick of a switch you can reverse fore and aft cyclic, collective and tail rotor pitch. Also some attention must be paid to the plumbing to ensure that you can keep and use the fuel in the tank whilst inverted. If you are going to fly inverted regularly, then you need to adjust the model carefully to get the best performance both upright and inverted. This is quite straightforward to do, but boring to explain.

I found that after 3 or 4 scruffy attempts at rolling inverted, getting the feel of it then rolling out, I was able to fly circuits and hover as if it were the right way up. I think the only thing that was strange initially was seeing the model upside down and using the transmitter as if the model was the right way up. Being used to flying fixed wing inverted where you reverse the controls manually it took a little while to let the transmitter do the work.

***R/C Helicopters**: Would you like to see more scale flying in the rest of the World?*

Dave: Yes I would. As the helicopter movement grows, there are more people who don't have to concentrate on just keeping their model in one piece and are looking for another challenge. Many of these are progressing to scale models. We don't do so bad in Europe, in fact I reckon there are more scale helicopters here than anywhere outside of Japan. This last year or so has seen the addition of several scale competitions to our calendar. Sadly, the standard of building and flying has outpaced the standard of judging. We need to get organised and adopt a set of scale rules which are based on full-size manoeuvres and are flown at a realistic speed.

There should be a sensible distribution of points between static and flying, that reflect the skill required to cope with the many variables involved with flight. But all effort building and flying is wasted if the judges don't know what they are looking for... at the very least a judge should be aware of full-size patterns and procedures and know something about the capabilities and limitations of helicopters in general. Also some knowledge of the characteristics of different helicopters is a must, although the difference is not as noticeable as with fixed wing, (Tiger Moth's do not fly like Concorde) it should still be taken into account that Bell 47s do not fly like Huey Cobra's.

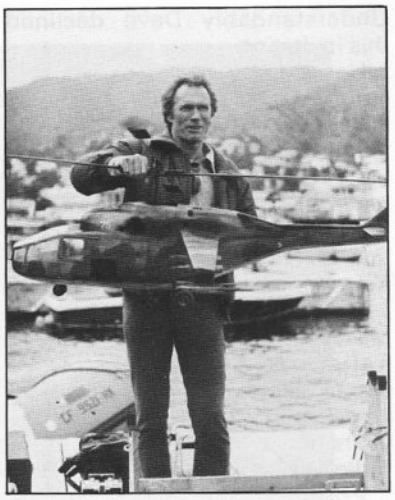
***R/C Helicopters**: Are there any particular scale models you would like to see produdced and flying?*

Dave: There are many scale subjects I would like to do but limited sales do not justify making moulds. (Perhaps you could do a survey and we could make a few of the most popular scale models that have not been done yet.) How about a nice Sikorsky S51 or Westland Dragonfly as we know it or a big gas engined S55 or the new Hughes 600, there are lots more.

As far as I am concerned the larger the better. The big gas engined helicopters come closest to full scale flying. They look and sound more realistic than the smaller glo engined models. I personally feel more tuned in to this type of model and that is reflected in the way it flies.

***R/C Helicopters**: Have you any preference for flying 3 bladed heads, flybarless, etc, etc?*

Dave: I don't see a lot of point in sticking as many blades as possible on a head or throwing away the flybar just for the sake of it. If you want an ornament for the sideboard then go ahead. But for a practical flying helicopter there is nothing as comfortable as a two blade head with a flybar. That's not to say other systems are unflyable, but to a greater or lesser degree they are always a compromise, so why make life difficult. Having said all this there now appears to be one exception to this rule, but more of this later...



Fire Fox *star Clint Eastwood with one of the model Hinds used in the film.*

***R/C Helicopters**: What radio gear and servos do you use?*

Dave: I use radio gear from the three major manufacturers – JR – Futaba – Sanwa. Obviously helicopter sets.

I use the best servos available ball raced coreless motors etc. It comes a bit expensive when you've got 14 models with gear in, but I reckon the whole installation is only as good as the servos driving it. On a well set up model the speed and resolution of the better servos is really noticeable.

***R/C Helicopters**: Do you use weighted blades?*

Dave: I don't use metal weights in the blades except on flybarless. I did do this for a time when I was getting to grips with autorotation but not anymore. I don't advise people to put lead in the blades because there will always be somebody who will get it wrong and besides it's not legal in FAI competition anymore. A safer and more beneficial way to add weight is to cover the blades in glass cloth and resin. Heavier blades definitely fly better.

Dave Nieman is one of the top scale flyers in Europe if not the World, and a well known character in England and abroad. He was fortunate enough, or maybe bright enough to be in on the R/C helicopter scene from the start in the UK, and has done much to help the hobby evolve to what it is today. Undoubtedly there are many pilots in this country who would attribute their prowess in the hobby to having been taught or helped along the way by Dave, and this includes the Editor. I also found that visiting him and Pete helped me not only to learn to love the hobby, but also to learn a tremendous lot about it. Small wonder that in the first issue the Editor acknowledged the help Dave gave us in encouraging us to get this magazine off the ground.