Will You Teach Me to Fly?

Have you ever noticed the small number of young people in our hobby? The majority of R/C hobbyists are older men. Some started way back in the control line days, and many others got into radio control later, after R/C systems became more readily available and affordable.

Unlike the last two generations, kids nowadays just don't have a fascination with airplanes. At least that's what I had read somewhere. During the past couple of months several younger people have come to our flying field and have shown an interest in flying model airplanes. They have—with their parent's help, I'm sure—invested money and time in the purchase and assembly of an airplane model.

In the past few weekends, I had the pleasure of helping a couple of kids about 14 years old, who really had it together. They showed much interest, were quick learners, and soon flew around as if they had been doing it for some time. It helped that they had driven R/C cars, or flown on a computer simulator. These two conditions usually produce a quick-learning student. But, will these youngsters keep coming back? Often times, the parents don't share the son's interest in R/C and are only there to provide transportation to and from the field. So, I believe that it is up to us to keep their interest up, by making the training and their stay at the field fun and interesting.

As one of the club's instructors, I have had a few of them at the other end of a trainer cord on a buddy box It really makes me feel good when one catches on and sticks with the hobby, soon moving from their trainer to higher-performance models. When they don't show up after a couple of lessons, I always wonder what happened to them. I question if it was something I did or didn't do during the training that may have caused them to lose interest.

I don't like to cut the student loose after that first solo flight. We should not teach students to solo as quickly as possible to get rid of them faster. We should also make sure that he can fly safely, and feels comfortable flying solo under a variety of conditions, crosswinds included.

As instructors, we have a responsibility to teach them a11 "the other" necessary things. Not only how to take off, fly and land model airplanes. We should also teach them about safety, some aerodynamics, about club rules, a bit of physics, field courtesy, mechanics, occasional team work, and consideration for others. Those are all things that I believe should be part of every R/C instructor's flight training course. And this advice is not just for the appointed club instructors either. We would all be better club members and better pilots if we did a better job of instructing and helping others.

So, when teaching others, consider including the following:

Discuss the dangers of our hobby. Make the student aware of the injuries a spinning prop can cause. Ask him or her (and bystanders) to stay out of the prop arc, and explain that propellers and spinners occasionally do come off.

Explain the frequency control system, the purpose of the radio impound, and what the consequences are if they should cause someone else to crash.

Show them how to securely hold a model in the pits during engine start up, and how to safely carry the model to and from the runway.

Make them aware of safety and courtesy rules (no flying behind the pilot stations, no taxiing to and from the pits, and how to communicate with the other pilots around the runway: "on the runway," "landing," "taking off," and "dead-stick").

Teach them something about what makes an engine run and a model fly. Explain things, whether you are adjusting a new or cranky engine ("lean" or "rich" fuel mixtures), or whether you are flying ("lift," "airspeed," "approach," "attitude," etc.).

Explain that after graduating from the trainer, before screaming around the field with grossly overpowered models, it is best to learn to fly first. "Flying" should mean "to be in control of the airplane at all times," It isn't learned in four or forty flights. It takes longer than that.

After several training flights consisting of ovals and figure eights with the usual horizontal turns, let them do their first "real" maneuver, an Inside Loop. It is very easy to do, and it will give them a feeling of accomplishment. The following weekend, show them how to do a Roll, and after the student has done a few, demonstrate a smoother and better one by pushing up-elevator while inverted in the middle of the roll Explain the effects. Let him recover the aircraft from a stalled condition. Show him how to fly inverted.

Later, add the Immelmann and Split-S turns. These are both easy maneuvers, each consisting of a Half Roll and a Half Loop. Much later, if you sense an interest in some aerobatics and a knack for some advanced flying, throw in a Stall Turn, a Half Reverse Cuban 8 turn, a Snap Roll, an Avalanche, a Cuban 8, and . . .

. . .You agreed, after all, to teach this new kid how to fly, right?

Who knows—your influence may steer this student in the direction of the IMAA (International Miniature Aircraft Association), a large-model organization, or the NSRCA (National Society for Radio Control Aerobatics), an organization dealing with precision aerobatics competition. It should give you a good feeling of accomplishment.

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