

test pilot

Xmas-time - toys for the boys of all ages Reviewed by David Boddington

These diminutive indoor/outdoor models are moulded from tough EPP, are supplied complete with Li-Po battery and transmitter with integral charger - you just supply the dry cells for the Tx.



FLYING RC TOYS

SMALL, UNCOMPLICATED AND BEST OF ALL, THEY FLY!

Any long serving aeromodeller will have suffered jibes from the beer-swilling, do nothing, couch potatoes of "still playing with toy aeroplanes - when are you going to grow up"? My own retort took the form of "Never, I hope". It has served me well enough so far and I am not ashamed of still taking delight in the latest, ever more sophisticated 'toys', whether or not they are sold through model retailers, Woolworth's or 'Toys R Us'. The fact remains that they are flying models and, providing they perform as advertised, are capable of giving a challenge and entertainment. The costs of these micro and mini models are incredibly low - who would have thought that you could have bought a ready to fly, twin-engine electric model aeroplane, complete with transmitter/charger, flight battery, using digital proportional control for under £30? The mind truly boggles.

However, irrespective of the price, the attractive packaging and the desirability of these products as gifts, to or from, they will only be valued if they do the business - and

fly. I can think of no better excuse to play, sorry, work, with some of the latest additions to the hangarful of inexpensive ARTF's.

When does a toy become a model? There is no obvious distinction between moulded foam remote control toys, as found in toy shops and emporiums such as Argos and similar products sold in hobby and model shops. Perhaps the 'models' tend to be slightly more sophisticated - and expensive - but it really does not matter what name is applied, they are all attractively packaged, 'What's in a name? that which we call a rose. By any other name would smell as sweet', as Shakespeare stated. Let's just get on and enjoy playing with them. All of the inexpensive RTF aircraft are electric powered and virtually all of them need an absolute minimum of preparation to have them ready to fly, the most time consuming part is usually charging the battery. Both fixed wing and rotary aircraft are featured, the latter can be the twin rotor, mounted on a vertical shaft, or true miniature helicopters, albeit at prices of over £100.

TWIN HARMONY

Let's start by taking a look at a couple of potential Xmas presents from under £30 bracket, the Silverlit X-Flying Club R/C X-Twin monoplanes and biplane. With wing spans of only 24cm and 22cm respectively and weighing a mere 20g each, these delightful little moulded foam models would have been considered impossible a decade ago. Featuring two-channel control, the steering is achieved by varying the speeds of the two pusher electric motors and climb and descent by combined speed control of the two motors. In common with other low cost offerings, the aeroplanes are controlled on 27mgs, the precise frequency is not specified, but they are stated as 27mHz A, B, C - a similar arrangement to the non-flying vehicles. Claimed to be suitable for indoor or outdoor, calm weather flying, these X-Flying Club models have sensible layouts, with pod and boom fuselages and moulded in wing dihedral.

The transmitter has two conventional control sticks and a small knob control giving trim for

turning, the only items not supplied with these ARTF's are the six AA batteries for the transmitters, these can be non-chargeable alkaline, or rechargeable Ni-cad or NiMH types, but must not be mixed. A 3.7 volt 2.6Wh Li-poly battery is prefitted in the models and this is recharged from a fly-lead housed in the front of the transmitter, a green LED lights up during charging and goes out when the charge is completed, which may take up to 30 minutes. No warnings are given regarding overcharging i.e. leaving the battery lead in position after the light is out - and mention is made of an intelligent charging control, so one must assume that the scary stories of Li-poly batteries catching fire are not applicable in these cases; the products are in compliance with EC directive.

Four languages are included in the instruction manuals and the English translation is pretty good, there are one or two less than perfect statements, e.g. "You may need to strike but not hold the right lever for easy adjustments", but, together with the illustrations, there shouldn't be any problems in understanding the general



This could get you hooked on heli's! Twin rotor Blade Runner II is so complete you could have it out of the box and flying within two minutes - but do read the instructions first.

The instructions from Silver-lit are adequate, if amusing, something lost in translation?



A lot of room in the packaging in the X-Flying Club box - marketing strategy?

meaning. Copious warnings and safety precautions are given and although they are mostly based on common sense, the manufacturer would be required to include them by law - hopefully they will be read by the purchasers, or recipients of the aeroplanes as gifts.

Probably the most difficult operation you will have to perform before flying is to apply the decorative stickers to the model, the instructions indicate the relative positions for the three different colour schemes used on the models. To position them accurately, as they come off the sheet is difficult, due to their small sizes and immediate adhesive contact, float them on water, to which a few drops of washing up liquid has been added and the stickers can be easily moved in position. Dab them with a clean cloth to remove the water and leave to dry thoroughly. Of course, you don't have to apply the stickers, but it does make them more attractive.

Nothing to do now but change the airborne Li-poly battery and go flying. The box art suggests that the model is not suitable for children under the age of three, but

that is more to do with the risk of swallowing parts. The distributors suggest an age of eight being sensible and with adult supervision for charging and preparing for flight - after that they might be better than their parents at controlling the model! Being no more than a big kid myself, I couldn't wait to fly the mini monoplane once the charging light had gone out. The manual suggest that you can fly it in the house at any time, providing you keep clear of electric fans and air conditioning units; this seems a little over optimistic and the garden seemed a better proposition. Our garden is a reasonable size, although walled on two sides, with the house and a very tall trees on the other sides - and a telephone line going diagonally across. It was not really calm, there is always some turbulence from the surroundings, but temptation was just too great. The climb out took me by surprise, at full bore it climbed rapidly and I had to put the twin in a tight left hand reduced revs - I continued like this for a couple of minutes before bringing this amazing little craft back to earth. During the second

flight I changed from a left hand to right hand turn and the model put its nose high, at the same time a gust caught it and it proceeded in a northerly direction over the garden wall to land on a hedge in the neighbouring property. Fortunately they know I'm mad! Just one more flight, this time it climbed away strongly (I'd put a little down trim on the elevators) but managed to clip the telephone wire and cause it to spiral down; no damage was done on these flights, but I decided that discretion was the better part of valour and I would wait until I could visit green pastures with the mono and biplane X-twins.

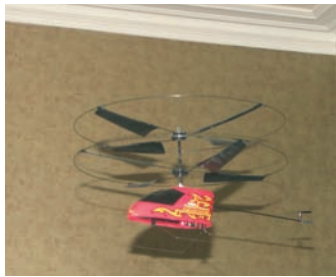
Next morning, at 8am it was off to the local park with the two R/C models, including transmitters, in a Tesco carrier bag - I've never transported two complete R/C model aeroplanes in a plastic bag before! The grass was still heavy with dew and there was a gentle breeze, but there was plenty of space. First off was the X-twin Eagle monoplane, the one that had gone AWOL the day before and this was launched into the blue, it climbed and cavorted to a good height

before the power was reduced to steady it down. Lefts and rights were performed and although there was a tendency to drift downwind I managed to get it back most of the time, at worst it was only a short walk to retrieve. The biplane twin was next for its maiden flight and this proved to be a little less skittish than the mono, though still positive on turns and climb and descent with motor control. Both models were over elevated and needed a bit of down trim on the elevators, it would be worth experimenting with adding a little noseweight to reduce the 'swooping' flight effect, although this can be cured by banking the model. The X-twins only need a gentle launch and I used the effective trim control to have a natural left turn from launch, this gives time to transfer the Tx to my right hand, I never was any good at launching left-handed (some would say I was never any good at launching, period!).

A couple of times during the flying of these 'foamies', I nearly hit myself and I also made one or two or unscheduled arrivals; in each case no damage was done - it was a

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Proof positive of the stability of the heli is in the flying shots - taken with the right hand while flying the model with the left hand, and by a non-heli flyer at that!



Two-channel control operates the 'throttle', speed controller and differential power to the twin motors for directional control, they are fully proportional. The minuscule aerial can be seen projecting out of the tail boom, range is perfectly adequate.



A very practical model, for indoors only, the new Blade Runner also features a nose light and flashing beacon.

case of collect them from the grass, open up the power and off you go again. Don't expect the smooth flight of larger electric models, but these minis can be great fun. With at least three separate frequencies available, you could certainly organise indoor pylon racing or limbo - it would call for considerable skills, but should be hilarious.

HOUSE TRAINED HELI

The Air Tech 'Blade Runner II' helicopter must be as near ready-to-go as you can get all you need to do is to fit a PP9 battery in the transmitter, the Li-Po battery in the heli is already charged. But, wait a minute, before leaping into the air read the instructions thoroughly, they give a lot of sensible and useful advice as well as some pertinent warnings. Thank goodness the instructions are really well-written and illustrated, including the flying procedures, this is one aircraft model where you do go it alone, no dual or assistance with the Blade Runner - unless you have no transmitter experience at all, in which case it is probably better to obtain the services of a young teenager, qualified in video games - he or she will make it look ridiculously easy.

First warning is that this little heli is intended for inside only. DO NOT fly it outside. Further into the manual it suggests you need a mid-sized living room, clear any obstructions and with walls and ceilings a minimum of three feet clear of the heli's flight path. The problem is how do you know how far the heli will stray towards the walls and ceiling? Having read and in some cases, re-read, the manual and inserted the PP9 battery and pushed the chairs, table and settee against the wall it was time to find out what this whirlybird flying was all about. I am no heli flyer (I did have a dabble with the Micro Mold Lark in the dim and distant 1970's)

so it was a true case of 'play it by the book', I was just worried that the Blade Runner might shoot-up the light fitting, or go whizzing sideways into the television.

Being a coward, I was flying it from behind the settee in Doctor Who mode. I needn't have worried, on advancing the 'up' stick, which I like to think of as the throttle, this dinky (that shows my age) little twin rotor chopper rose stately into the air and a slight reduction of power had it sitting at about two feet altitude. There were no strong tendencies to move left, right, forward or rearwards, and yaw movements were easily controlled by the right hand stick. Having overcome my initial concerns it was time to try a few descents and arisings - no difficulties here - and then on to some tentative forward and rearwards movement, all very non-traumatic. Spins, or pirouettes, are easily performed, I needed to apply a little left trim for hovering flight, but you do need to give turn correction of differing power settings. Very quickly your confidence increases and you start to hover close by without any concern that the Blade Runner is going to do anything unexpected. As soon as you are away from the ground effect (a couple of feet) it is smooth flying, although the throttle should be increased on the final part of the descent. Although this little machine cannot move sideways, in true heli fashion, you can perform horizontal eights by changing the direction of the body and moving forward.

How large an area do you need? If you've got a floor of six or seven feet square and walls three feet beyond that you should be able to manage, the Blade Runner is certainly not squirrely, but initial practices from a village or school hall, with smooth floor, would give you even more confidence. I would certainly think that anybody with experience on a

joystick style controller would cope with flying the heli, being smooth in operation and not affected by wind conditions it is easier to fly than a fixed wing model.

Charging, via a mains charger, with a plug lead from the transmitter to the model is easily understood and switch off when the single Li-poly battery is charged is automatic - they do warn to ensure it takes place on non-flammable surfaces. Charging time is normally between 20 and 40 minutes, the battery is not accessible, so you cannot fit a spare, charged battery. Flight times up to six minutes are usual, but you should land and allow the battery to cool if you fly for four minutes continuously.

I am really impressed with this little fun machine; it does everything that is promised, is well-engineered and the instruction manual should be used as an example to all other Far Eastern manufacturers. The three-channel radio is FM, with a narrow band receiver, on 27MHz (no precise frequency is specified) and it is not possible to make a frequency change. Little maintenance is required and spare parts are available if you should happen to collide with a solid object, there is also a very active website, check out <http://www.rcgroups.com/>

forums/ then scroll down to 'Vendors' 'Bladerunner Heli'. See the specification panel for more details on the model.

SOURCES

Where we can purchase these intriguing little R/C goodies? The R/C Mini Monoplanes and Biplanes (X-twins) and the Blade Runner II are distributed by Flying Toys Ltd, Unit 9, The Vanguards, Vanguard Way, Shoeburyness, Essex. SS3 90J, (01702 295110) and should be available at all good toy and model shops. At £29.99 each, the 'X-twin' mono and biplanes are a snip and the 'Blade Runner II', totally complete and with LED searchlight and green strobe light, is only £99.99.

DON'T FORGET THE BATTERIES!

It looks like being a good Christmas for plenty of kids from 8 to 80, but two words of warning. If you are the giver of the presents, do remember to include six AA pen cells for the transmitters and if you are straight off to the park to play, remember that these goodies are all on 27MHz frequencies and there may be a host of other children trying their racing cars, trucks, boats, or other aircraft on the same frequencies. Have FUN! 🌟



Models are enhanced by adding the supplied decals, there are three colour schemes/frequencies to allow three models to be flown at a time.