

Caught in the Searchlight: Bill Brown



In this feature in Flypaper, each month, we highlight a club member on a rotating basis. While we see each other at the field or at meetings, we may not know a lot about the other members, their personal background and their history in RC flying. Searchlight should help us get to know one another better.



“If it has an engine in it, then I am interested,” was Bill’s reply when asked how he got started in model aviation. While he had seen LCRCC members flying at Steffie’s field when he was a youngster, it was not until 1987, when he lived in Russell, just down the street from the flying field, that his interest in RC flying perked up. He would ride his motorcycle to the field and watch **Steve Yeaton, John Russell, Al Parshall, Dick Hultz** and others as they flew their planes.

In that same year, he and his wife Paula discovered that she was pregnant with their first child. As Bill tells it, he had been racing motorcycles and he decided that he needed to do something less dangerous. (*Editor’s note: We wonder if Paula’s version of who made that decision would be the same as Bill’s.*) Bill opted to buy a helicopter, because, as he says, “I am not good with wood.” Despite the fact that everyone in the club told him he was crazy because helicopters are too difficult to fly, he bought an Hirobo Shuttle with an OS 28 engine. Though his original is long gone, Bill recently bought another one,

shown at right. He quickly learned that everyone was right, while not impossible, helicopters are hard to fly. Fortunately he had help from **Brian Frost** at Sterling Field. Brian was able to fly inverted, no small feat in the “dark ages” as Bill calls them, when all heli’s were flybarred. Brian and Bill would fly with a trainer cord. About that same time, **Earl McMillan** retired from the Navy and he and two others from the Navy, **Ray Warner and Don Wade**, as well as Bill, were all learning to fly heli’s at the same time. Bill is quick to point out that the others were all ahead of him. For the next couple of years Bill was doing mostly hovering and a little forward flight.



Some other club members suggested that Bill get an airplane as it would help him learn forward flight. Bill bought a 60 size Ugly Stik. Initially **John Russell** took him up on a trainer cord and taught him the basics of flying. Bill says that one day, while waiting for John to come to the field, Bill, being Bill, got impatient and took off himself. He was able to land the plane, and afterwards he flew planes on his own.

Bill says that forward flight with helicopters was better after he flew planes, “. . . but it was still ugly.” He had a lot of crashes but persisted, and it was a few years more before he became proficient at forward flight. Seems there is a lesson there for all of us. He rates his most memorable RC experience as learning how to hover a helicopter, “that moment when it finally clicked and I could do it.” He notes that there were no simulators when he started. He says that he learned everything but nose-in in the early years, but he eventually got that too. Bill was one of the LCRCC members that was featured in a June, 1992 “Kenosha News” article about the club. The caption under the picture kind of sums up flying helicopters: “Bill Brown and his tricky-to-fly gasoline-powered helicopter.”



In the past few years, Bill has devoted most of his time to flying helicopters. Watching him fly these days, one can see the result of almost twenty years of flying. He added inverted circuits to his routines some years ago. But it was not until last year that he started doing backwards circuits regularly. He says that he has also done some inverted backwards circuits, but he usually tries to practice when no one else is around. It’s not, he says, that he is deterred by the “walk of shame,” as he readily admits to having had a healthy share of those already, but he prefers to practice new routines

without the distraction of having someone else around. He has quite a fleet of heli's. Up until recently, he was flying his Hirobo Freya glow engine heli. Last year, he got a T-Rex 700 gasser, pictured above, and it has become his helicopter of choice these days.

Bill's account of the funniest experience he had in RC flying was one day when he was at **George Schneider's** farm. Bill and **Steve Yeaton, John Russell** and **Earl McMillan** were sitting in the barn. The barn had a few windows and they looked out and saw **Ray Warner** run past one of the windows. It seemed odd to them, but within a second or so, they saw Ray's Concept 30 helicopter fly by the same window at about 4 or 5 feet altitude chasing Ray. They learned later, that for some reason, Ray had lost control of the helicopter, which had a full tank of fuel. The heli kept going north into Wisconsin and hasn't been seen or heard of since.

Bill says that there were periods in which he didn't fly much. One of his other outlets was racing RC boats with **Mike and Dave Taylor**. He did that for 3 or 4 years. He and Mike and Dave were members of the Badger Boat Club and they would travel to events. Bill has 4 or 5 boats, including a gas weedwacker- powered Catamaran made by Aeromarine and an F-class hydro, made by Roadrunner.

But a consistent interest has been car racing. One can't help but get the impression that Bill just likes speed . . . and as the picture shows, he is pretty good at it and has the trophy to prove it. In his garage/workshop, he also has a 1991 Chevy Camaro and a 1957 Chevrolet wagon. As to the latter, well, let's just say it needs a lot of work.



He also has quite a few planes hanging from his garage rafters, including two SIG Somethin' Extras and an Aurum pattern plane. But he has come a long way from the first plane that he ever flew, a Cox .049 P40 Warhawk, that he flew into the staircase of his house the first time he tried to fly it.



His latest acquisition is an Edge 540 Wild Hare with a DLE 30cc gasser, and a 78" wingspan (pictured at left).

Looks like wood got him in the end.