

Caught in the Searchlight: Keith Bradley



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.



A big smile, an infectious laugh, someone who loves a good story, well that's Keith Bradley. Though Keith always had an interest in model aviation, it was not until 1997 that he first got started flying. At a local hobby shop he was referred to the Lake County Radio Control Club. Keith envisioned a small plane with a Cox .049, but when he went to a club picnic and saw **John Russell** flying a 1/3 scale Skywalker with smoke, as Keith describes, "It was all over for me. Oh my God, I've been buying smoke oil ever since."

After getting advice from several members, he bought his first plane, an ARF high-wing trainer and installed an OS 40 engine and Futaba receiver. He received flight training from **Steve Yeaton, Keith Storrs**, and **John Russell** but got most of his instruction from **Al Parshall**. Al devoted Tuesday evenings to teaching but was so popular an instructor that the would-be RC pilots were lined up waiting for him

when he arrived at the field. According to Keith, student pilots would be lucky to get ten minutes of flight instruction as Al felt compelled to rotate through his many students.

After the trainer, his first build was a Super Tigre 2250 with an 80" wingspan. He put a small rubber pilot in it and tied a scarf about its neck which would flap in the slipstream. Though the plane was designed for a solid fabric covering to maintain strength, Keith tried Century 21 Permagloss Coverite. He said he could spend all day on it with a heat gun and the covering just wouldn't tighten up. Undaunted, he took it up, but brought it down soon when the wings started flapping worse than the pilot's scarf. Keith eventually put struts on the plane and that solved the problem. During that period he also had an Ace 4 with a 120 which he bought from **John Russell**.

Keith's next build was a Stinger 120, followed by an Aeroworks Edge kit with a 3W 100 engine and a smoke system, of course. Keith says that plane was his favorite of all the planes he has had. He flew it for about 5 years. It met its demise one day when Keith entered a knife edge after take-off. As Keith puts it, the rudder servo "went south" sending the plane into the pond. While Keith was able to retrieve the plane from the pond, it was too damaged to be repaired.



Keith and his Edge 540 (before it went swimming)

Though known mostly for his big planes and smoke, Keith says that "Hands down, the hardest thing to do in this hobby is to fly helicopters." He counts as his most satisfying experience, after hours and hours of practice, being able to take off and land a helicopter nose-in over and over again. When asked for his "best story," a helicopter is also featured. Keith was still at the hovering stage when he announced to **Steve Yeaton, Russ Scott** and **Keith Storrs** who were also at the field that he was going to try forward flight. Keith nosed down and his Raptor helicopter went forward and soon he was flying circuits out over the pond. After a time he could hear his engine start to lean out due to low fuel. Russ, Keith and Steve began yelling at him to bring it down, but, as Keith laughed and said, "I didn't know how to transition back out of forward flight." While trying to figure that out, he decided to take it back out

over the pond and bring it in to land, the others still yelling. Well . . . he ran out of fuel over the pond and in she went. He paddled out in a boat to find the helicopter and succeeded when he saw the low battery warning LED's in the murky water. He reached over the side with a rake and was able to scoop the helicopter up. On the advice of the others, when he got home, he opened it up, took the servo's apart and other electronics and let everything dry overnight. Keith was proud to add that he had the helicopter back in the air the next day.

Of his helicopter days, Keith says that, due to the fact that he was a distributor for Ace which made Raptor helicopters, he had three Raptors and on a good day, at least one would still be flyable when he got done flying for the day. He recalls that **Steve Yeaton**, also a distributor, would come to the field with 4 or 5 Raptor crash kits, and generally they would be sold to Raptor pilots by the end of the day.

A visit to Keith's shop shows planes everywhere:



Ripmax (Kingtech 180), Viper ((Jetcat 140) and Pilot Decathlon



A Gilmore Red Lion and an Eflite Eratrix 3D

His other love (apart from his wife Donna, he is quick to point out) is also at the shop, a 1933 bi-window Chevy Coupe, his 50th birthday present to himself. Keith invested enormous time in it. He made most of the detail parts, and even bought an industrial sewing machine to make the upholstery. The car displays Keith's exquisite workmanship. Keith shows the car at local car events.





Handmade upholstery and decorative detail



Electronics panel in the trunk.



Fuel injected Corvette 350 c.i. engine, bored out to 383 c.i., putting out 430 hp.



Metal flake paint and Bradley designed LED's for brake lights.

About his jets, Keith told the writer, "I swore to God that I would never do jets and to this day I blame **Russ Scott** for all the money I have spent on jets." It seems that at one time, Keith wanted to buy one of Russ's helicopters. He went to the field to meet Russ who was there with his wife. According to Keith, Russ liked the particular helicopter and didn't want to sell it. Russ was warming up a jet while Keith was trying to convince Russ to part with the heli. Keith watched as Russ took the jet up for a couple of flights. Later Keith learned that after he left the field, Russ's wife told Russ he didn't have to worry about the helicopter. From the look on Keith's face watching the jets fly, she said, he would be buying a jet, not a helicopter. And she was right. Keith now owns three jets.

Even with his experience, he says he still gets the jitters when he flies his jets. He counts flying a jet as the second hardest thing to do in the hobby. But the writer can attest that Keith is one damn good jet pilot. This past summer, Keith was flying his Boomerang Elan jet when it suffered a flame out over the corn field. Keith's first words were, "I'm in trouble now." After making the split second decision not to attempt to do a wide turn to land into the wind, Keith lined up for a cross-wind landing on the short East-West runway. He greased it down just as it came past the corn. The roll-out was prolonged and it was touch and go whether the jet would stop before it went into the brush at the west end of the runway. It stopped just short and suffered no damage. As Keith breathed an audible sigh, all the other pilots began cheering and clapping.



Keith Shown talking with **Bill Brown**, Keith's Pilot Decathlon with 122" wingspan and a 100 cc DA twin engine shown in the background.

On the day of the picture, Keith flew the Decathlon several times. On one flight, he took it up, flew some loops and rolls and did some flat spins, all the time, Keith's trademark smoke pouring out the exhaust. Then Keith took the plane straight up and had it hanging off the prop with the DA easily handling it. That day, I told Keith that if one day, he opened his trailer and discovered the Decathlon had been stolen, well . . . the thief would be me.

Keith also has a 105" wingspan Corsair under construction. He is going to power it with a 5 cylinder radial 250cc engine. He brought the engine to the field to test run it at our New Year's Day event, 2015. It purred on the test stand but Keith, being Keith, even had smoke pouring out the exhaust on the test stand.

Keith says that he doesn't bother to use his timer. He gets about 8 minutes from a 40 ounce tank of smoke oil. When his plane runs out, "well, no reason to fly without smoke" and so he brings it in for a landing. He also shared that he mixes Old English Furniture Polish with the smoke oil so the smoke does not dissipate as quickly. Keith is probably the only person the writer knows who has a 55 gallon drum of smoke oil in his shop. Meant to get a picture of that too . . . oh damn.