

T-34 "SQUADRON"



Although I was introduced to R/C flying way back when they were still flying "reeds", (I got my first job so I could buy a new-fangled proportional rig), there have been big gaps in my flying career. My last meaningful flying before joining the club last May was back in 1985--that's 18 years ago.

Since my earliest R/C days, I had always been attracted to aerobatic flying because of the beauty and grace of precision aerobatics, (if done right), plus the local club back then had lots of "Pattern" flyers to observe and fly with--while getting pointers from the experts. I've always been challenged with having to position the plane precisely for each maneuver, and flying the plane rather than letting it fly me. Even something seemingly as simple as a pass parallel to the flight line followed by a 270degree turn and exiting at the same altitude in the opposite direction can be a challenge at first. Back in '85, I had just advanced out of the lowest level of competition aerobatics, (Novice Pattern) before moving to Asheville in '86. Shortly after moving, for various reasons, I lost interest in flying, but as "luck" would have it, I recently discovered other R/Cers at work, and interest was rekindled.

I've gone into a little background to show where I was as a flyer when I re-entered the hobby, and joined the club. Although an OK flyer back in 1985, I felt I'd entered a "time warp"-slept for 20 years like Rip Van Winkle. Anyone who saw me last spring remembers all my planes were about 20 years old, (but

batteries were new and the equipment was legal). My "thumbs" were as rusty as the Tin Woodsman from the Wizard of Oz, and confidence was not at a high level.

I started out with my Balsa USA Swizzle Stik trainer, moved up to an Ugly Stik, then finally my "vintage" VK Cherokee, (vintage because the 65 inch wingspan Cherokee designed in 1965, now qualifies as a vintage aircraft by the Vintage R/C Society).

It's hard to get the "pattern" out of the Pattern flyer once the "bug" bites you. Almost right away I was trying to do loops and Cuban-Eights with my Swizzle Stik, and each successive plane thereafter. But something was wrong-I wasn't yet ready, (or had the desire) to fly the "hot", blood pumping, and hair-raising pattern ships I flew in the eighties, but my current planes were not really suitable for aerobatics. In some ways it was actually more difficult to try to force these planes to do what they were not designed for. I still loved the beauty and grace of aerobatics, although no longer interested, (or capable) of competing---so what to do? I was looking for something that would serve as a "pattern trainer", and was considering a Tower Hobbies Kaos, but then started noticing a small innocent-looking "WWII-like" design being flown by Bill Spathias.



Bill was making low-level passes, and touch-and-goes with the "innocent-looking" plane. Upon closer examination of Bill's plane in the air, I noticed it tracked like it was on rails, and was also surprisingly fast. The more I saw it, the more I liked how it flew.

The plane turned out to be a World Models T-34 ARF, with a 58" wingspan, designed for a 40-50 size engine, and sold by Quantum Models, (877-738-9270)---for only \$129.00!! The price was right, (you couldn't beat the price of this mostly completed ARF even if building from a kit), so what did I have to lose?

Although not ready in 12-20 hours, (not the way I build), the T-34 was straightforward all wood assembly, covered with Ultracote, and ready to go in a short time.

Reviews and flying

A nice article was written about the T-34 in the July 2002 issue of Model Aviation in the R/C Aerobatics section written by Eric Henderson. In it, he describes the T-34 as "...very solid in takeoff and landing maneuvers...it flies well in less-experienced hands" and "If you want to give Pattern a go, you can do Sportsman (401) and Intermediate (402) with the T-34". "The airplane tracks very well and rolls axially at three-quarters to full throttle." On the negative side, "The T-34's biggest weakness is that it does not snap roll very well..." This is due to relatively small control surfaces, particularly the rudder. To remedy this for those wanting to push the plane to its limits, the article goes on with descriptions of how to modify the size of the rudder and elevator for better performance. After modifications "...the result is an airplane that, for a few dollars of modifications, will snap and stop rotating on command. It will spin with rudder and elevator-only input. It is now even better at Four and Eight Point Rolls." If you add-in a 50-60 size engine, you get the additional vertical performance you need for some of the Advanced (403), and Masters maneuvers.

Article in hand, I redesigned the vertical fin, and roughly doubled the rudder size. I chose to leave the elevator and ailerons alone, at least for now. There was something satisfying about customizing the standard design-it was "fun" to add my own personal touch to the plane.

I was determined to do the original flight myself. After careful balancing, both the C/G and laterally, the plane lifted off perfectly straight needing no aileron trim adjustments. It flew beautifully and predictably-like on rails..

After the first shakedown flight, the plane slowed down nicely for final approach in a nose-high attitude for a perfect touchdown. Unfortunately, the relatively new O.S. 46 FX "flamed-out" at low altitude on the next flight resulting in three-fourths of a landing approach---some after-the-fact advice about what I should have done, and some relatively easy repairs. The fuselage tended to come apart at the glue joints-easy to repair, but reinforcing some of the joints may be something you might want to think about if you decide to try the T-34. I have since had the plane in the air a couple more times, however, the "flame-out" problems have persisted---but this time the ship was in more capable hands, with my pilot making perfect landings each time. Once again, the plane received compliments about how well it handled in the air-if only for a short time. I think my fuel-line problems are finally solved---we'll see soon enough. I'm hoping for a long, productive life for this plane.

So whether your interest is an aerobatic trainer, an aerobatic, yet stable first low-winger, or if you just enjoy boring holes in the sky, this just might be the plane you've been searching for your next ship. Bill Spathias and I both invite you to come along and join the "T-34 Squadron." Why not-what do you have to lose?

Duane Wilson
299-0670

