

What it takes to get started in pattern.

One of the problems we have getting newcomers started in pattern is the equipment we fly. We can tell them until we are blue-faced that a 1.20 powered fiberglass job is not needed in Novice and Sportsman, the difficulty is in getting them to believe it. I can see where it would be rather intimidating for a newcomer to show up and feel self conscious about his/her .40 powered sport plane amongst the full-blown pattern machines.

In the lower classes, practice is MUCH more important than equipment. Lets face it, the Novice and Sportsman classes are not very demanding when it comes to equipment. They are comprised of relatively simple maneuvers, none requiring lots of vertical performance. Most Novice and Sportsman trophies are won by the person that can do the roundest loops, all in the same spot. Practice makes perfect! (My first two wins were flying a .40 powered "Miss Martha").

Certainly, equipment does matter, but not to the extent that some people believe. If someone asks me what plane do they need for the Novice class, I ask "what are you flying now?". If they want to build something, I usually suggest a half dozen kits, like a Goldberg Tiger or Bridi Kaos. However, the Goldberg scale planes do a great job as well, the Extra shows up at a lot of contests.

If you have not tried pattern yet, do so. Use whatever you have, go and have fun. Don't expect to win your first contest, but do watch and learn. Ask a few questions. You will learn what the judges look for, and how to do it in front of them. Practice, but don't burn yourself out. If you get tired of practicing the Novice pattern, try the Sportsman pattern a few times.

If a maneuver is giving you trouble, break it down into separate components. This is especially true of the Reverse Outside Loop in Sportsman. Learn to roll to inverted, fly inverted, and roll out. After getting tired of doing that, throw in the loop. I suggest you use a technique I picked up in childbirth class. Before you start the maneuver, take a deep breath. Roll inverted, then keep saying to yourself "push, push, push" so you won't forget which way to move the stick. Continue repeating this to yourself until you roll out, then take a cleansing breath. (Actually, I heard of this technique from Joe Kolb a few years back. It works!!)

One thing I have learned is that pattern flyers are a great group to hang around with. Some of the best friendships I have were formed on the contest trail. It is a part of the hobby that I look forward to, every contest is like a reunion.