

Clone Helicopters

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As we continue to struggle with the current economic woes, frugal is the order of the day. Unfortunately model helicopters are not cheap to own and operate, with an average cost of \$2500 for a flight ready 50-size nitro heli, and at \$32 a gallon for 30% fuel; you'll certainly feel the strain in your wallet. But we must fly our model helicopters, and the more you fly, the more we are infused with the need to fly – it's a freaking paradox. The bigger size machines are even more expensive and costlier to operate, and forget about repair cost after a crash, and no matter what size heli you fly, the more you do, the greater the risk an incident will occur. Avoidance is not the answer, and just hovering one inch off the ground is boring, if we want to progress, we need to push beyond our present skill level to unfamiliar maneuvers, and therein lies the draw, the sense of danger, living on the edge, the adrenaline rush that keeps us hooked and coming back for more. If it was easy, then what would be the challenge in that? So what do you do?

“Don't Crash” but just saying it will not prevent it from happening, and what about the initial expense? What can we do about that? What if there was an alternative, or just plain cheaper helicopters? Well I'm glad you asked, because there is. At <http://hobbyking.com> an online distributor, you can find some jaw dropping deals. Let me tell you about that, I'm a 90-size nitro flier which equates to about \$1,000 on average per kit (\$800-\$1,500), so when I saw Hobby King's 90-size heli clone at \$280 (no typo, that's the price), I thought it must be junk, inferior quality plastic parts, or just altogether crap. But I went online to see what the guys in the forums were saying, and much to my surprise, they all had good things to say about this helicopter, and some have been flying their machines for well over a year and still going strong.

In my case I have a Thunder Tiger Raptor 90-size heli, with the old blue head OS 91 Hyper engine, these engines were not the best OS produced. They have vibration issues which caused major vibration problems in my Raptor. I've tried everything I could to remedy this problem but to no avail, and I refused to get rid of this engine, so I thought it just might work better in another helicopter. That's when I decided to get the **JS TZ-V2 .90 Size Nitro 3D Helicopter Kit**.

Sadly there is no cure for me, I'm a heli addict and I'm doing as well as can be expected with my affiliation. The way I deal with this problem is that I buy little by little electronics, parts, blades, flight support equipment, and a whole assortment of other essentials for when the day comes I need them (that's if I don't get caught first by my wife). So I pretty much had everything I needed to put together another helicopter.

I put in my order (with free shipping of course), and about a week or so later it arrived. When I opened the box and saw its contents, I was very impressed, this is no crappy helicopter. This is an inexpensive quality machine with all the high end metal parts you expect to see on the more expensive models. Which leads me to think that if you can get a kit of this caliber at such a low price, then why are the other brands so expensive? Are we paying too much needlessly for a brand name? For example I see some kids wearing \$200 Nike sneakers and I won't pay more than \$40 for my whatever brand, and they last me a good couple of years before they wear out. Yeah I understand advertising cost, distribution expense, and middle man profit margins driving up the final cost to the end consumer, but by a thousand dollars, boy are we getting reamed. Anyway, the website photos of the JS

helicopter were impressive, and at under \$300, how could I go wrong, and I quickly came to the conclusion I didn't once I got mine. Take a look, tell me what you think?



This is a close copy of the JR Vibe 90-size helicopter with a few differences. You can even use replacement JR parts on this machine if you feel the need. However Hobby King carries all the replacement parts for when the time comes should you need them, and even A Main Hobbies.com has begun to carry this line of helicopter parts for even more availability (I like A Main Hobbies, and I order from them often). So parts support on this brand heli is looking good too, I bet by the end of this article you'll be ordering a machine of your own, and why not? Good machine, good reviews, and good parts support. In my case it was more of a leap of blind faith, I need to see the helicopter I intend to get flying before I actually get one, and I haven't seen anyone at the field flying this heli yet.

After I finished putting it together (the manual was not the best, but not a problem for anyone with experience), which took me about 3 or 4 days (came in weighing under 11LBS). The first flight was awesome, the OS 91 Hyper that gave me so much trouble in the Raptor was smooth as silk in the JS (the tail belt drive helped big time with that). No engine break-in was needed, and the fine tuning for my flight preference was completed in no time at all. The machine handles great, flies smooth, performs very nicely, and has become an excellent addition to my fleet. Actually when I fly the JS I find myself more at ease, I enjoy the flights more, and tend to try more maneuvers with this machine than any other one in my fleet. Maybe it's because in the back of my mind a whole new kit only cost under \$300 and with my Raptor for example I can spend upwards of \$500 on repair costs after a crash?

Yeah that's all great and everything but maybe a 90-size helicopter is not for you – I knew you were going to say that! Well Hobby King carries a 50-size nitro (JR Vibe 50 clone) for \$200. Fine but what if you're not a nitro guy – man I'm way ahead of you, I knew you were going to say that too! They have a 500-size electric (Align Trex 500 clone) for \$50, and if you keep looking you'll find other jaw dropping deals and not just on helicopter kits. They have generic or clones on electronics too.

Sure we'd like to have the best, but no matter how refined your taste is saving money is great too. In a high risk hobby like flying model helicopters, having an alternative to fall back on can maybe help some get into this segment of the hobby that would be otherwise out of reach for them. Hey my \$40 pair of sneakers are still going strong, and my JS heli is a great flying machine, and I'm glad I got it. I now have the Raptor 90, the JS 90, and the Trex 700 (Align 90-size) helicopters, each fly great, and different from each other. The Raptor seems to be more of a F3C machine, the Trex 700 a 3D heli, and the JS a very nice sport flying helicopter.

Each one of these helicopters can easily carry over to any other discipline, but isn't it nice to have choices? But I'm on a budget, and I can't own multiple helicopters – it's like I'm reading your mind, I knew you were going to say that too! This hobby is just like anything else in life, you take it as far as you want or can, and the longer you stick with it, you'll eventually own multiple helicopters as well. But if you're starting off and on a tight budget, that \$50 trex 500 size heli clone is worth some serious consideration, and once you begin to improve your piloting skills to where your crashes are fewer and further apart, maybe you can begin looking into something a little bigger, faster, or better. But in the meantime if you can save some money in the process, why not – right?

Heli economics lesson 101 over, clones are good, flying is better, so then get a machine and get to it, and let's see how long it takes you to do a loop? Not that you have to, but how are you even going to get there if you don't have a machine first? So check out the website and if you get a clone helicopter, let me know how it worked out for you? Until then keep practicing on the sim, reading anything helicopters, go to the field, and online to see what the guys are saying in the forums, and I'll see you at the field – Gus.