

Why Helicopters?

By Gus Garcia

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In all my years in the hobby I've heard every excuse there is, and before I started flying helis myself, I've used them all at one time or another. But in the end after everything has been said and done, the bottom line is sometimes we're just afraid of what we don't know, or even understand. The intent of this article is to plant a seed, to try and get a little deeper into the why not try something new mentality. So just keep an open mind as I hopefully put to rest some heli phobias.

Let's talk about expense first. More than likely it all started for us with a 40 size trainer, right? If you calculate everything you purchased, you probably were in for a thousand dollars without even knowing how to fly yet. But you pushed on, and persevered until finally you became an RC pilot yourself, and once you did, you flew that trainer without a problem. Take-offs and lands, loops and rolls, and even some inverted flying. Then that old trainer just wasn't doing it for you anymore (that's if it survived). Next came the sport planes, the low wings, and a bunch of other different airplanes to the point that you probably have about 10-20 airplanes at the house, and now you're thinking of getting that new model whatever airplane. If that's the case you have about \$10,000-\$15,000 into the hobby. I understand, and like I tell everybody that asks me the how much question, you spend your money on what you like, and as for how much you could spend with helicopters depends on your tastes, budget, and preference.

Another big deterrent about helicopters is they can be challenging to fly, and the learning curve does take a little longer to acquire the skills needed, but it's not impossible either. Let's go back to airplanes to illustrate this point (for you airplane fliers). It took time, patience, and practice to learn how to fly, and you didn't do it alone either, did you? You had an instructor helping you out on your road to becoming an RC pilot. In other words you had help, so get help learning how to fly a helicopter. Our hobby is all about helping others, and many guys will be more than happy to help you learn how to fly. However, we now have an additional learning tool at our disposal, the flight simulator, and it's not just for beginners, but for advance pilots as well. You can learn everything from hovering to the wildest 3D moves in your simulator, and once you got it down, you can transition that new skill to the field, and the nice thing about it is all that wrecking you do in the simulator doesn't cost you a dime. I still use the simulator extensively to improve my skills, and so do a lot of other guys.

As for the flying characteristics of a helicopter, they do need constant radio input to keep them in the air, take your eyes off it for just a second, and you'll be picking up the pieces. All your attention, all your concentration is needed while it's in the air, you don't have time to think, only to react. Basically you need to hone your reflexes to do without thinking. This is no different than many other activities in life where sharp reflexes play a major roll at accomplishing the task at hand. Riding a bicycle is all about reflexes in order to keep your balance, driving a car involves sharp reflexes to react in order to avoid an accident, when was the last time you had to think in order to walk? You just needed to go from here to there, and did it.

As we fly more and more whether airplanes or helicopters, we're honing our reflexes to react without thinking. You don't look at your transmitter, or even think about what your fingers are doing at the sticks, you just know what maneuver you want to do, and your aircraft does it. Have you ever seen what some of the top 3D sponsored helicopter pilots can do with their machines, its jaw dropping! And if you ask anyone of them how they got to that level of flying, they'll tell you, practice, practice, practice, like I said, honing your reflexes to react without thinking.

As for us heli pilots, we get a higher thrill level flying helicopters because of the complexities associated with them, the greater the challenges, the greater the rewards. And once again you don't need to reinvent the wheel, we can help you set-up your radio, tune your engine, calibrate your gyro, and even give you tips and lessons on how to fly. Why am I bringing up this point again if I already covered it? Because you don't have to do it alone, if one individual is not right for you, find somebody else to help you out. There are guys flying helicopters everywhere, some charge, some don't, and if you're an AMPS member, the club officials, instructors, and members will see to it that you're given lessons at no charge.

Helicopters are not any better or worse than airplanes, just another way for us to enjoy the hobby. But if you've already tried your hand at helicopters and found out you don't like them, well now you know based on your own assessment, and not second hand hearsay. But if you haven't tried helicopters yet, or even though they are a little too complicated for you, why not reason on this, if a bunch of other guys are doing it, why can't you?

I hope I've given you plenty of food for thought at trying something challenging and rewarding, and remember life is not just about the destination, but the journey along the way, and when one path comes to an end, more often than not a new one opens up to us. Will you choose to travel for a while in the helicopter path?

Till next time, see you at the field – Gus.