

Buying Your First Plane

1. Type of Plane

When learning to fly Radio Controlled model aircraft it is recommended to start with a conventional "Trainer". These are high wing aircraft with a tricycle undercarriage (i.e. a nose wheel plus the two main wheels).



When viewed from the front, the main wing sits on top of the aircraft and usually has a slight V shape (dihedral). This wing design helps the plane to return to level flight when the transmitter controls are allowed to return to their mid positions, hence making them easier to fly.

The WOT trainer is a popular trainer which has recently been produced as an ARTF (Almost Ready To Fly) model by Ripmax. Most ARTFs are cheaper to build than a built it yourself kit ... by the time you add up the costs of all the materials ... and you can generally have more confidence that the model will fly straight!



A number of our club flyers have learnt to fly using a Cougar 2000 (a fun fly aircraft) by using low rates (less control surface movements). The advantage of this is that you can then use the same model on high rates to take part in club competitions etc.

2. Glow Fuel or Electric

There are strong views from supporters of both technologies. Electric is quiet, less likely to cut out unexpectedly in flight ('deadstick'), and more controllable. Electric power is becoming increasingly popular with flight times of around 10 minutes and recharging in 30-60 mins, with the correct equipment.

However, glow engines still have the edge if you want to fly, refuel, fly again, etc without waiting for your battery to recharge, and for a lower initial cost outlay.

My personal view is that a learner should start with a glow engine trainer to learn how to safely use these motors before moving to electric, which then have their own safety lessons that need to be learnt.



A trainer will typically need a two stroke 40 – 46 size (0.40 to 0.46 cubic inch) size engine. The OS LA 46, Thunder Tiger GP42, and the Irving 46 are all good trainer engines which can be used in other models once you progress.

A number of our club flyers use the Thunder Tiger 42 in the Cougar 2 mentioned above, and it has proved to be cheap but reliable.

If you decide to go electric then either buy the recommended power pack (propeller, brushless motor, speed controller, and LiPo battery) for your plane or seek advice from someone who is competent with this technology. You will also need a suitable charger and balancer. Read ALL of the safety warnings associated with LiPo batteries, as treated badly they can explode and cause a fire.



2. Which Radio Should I Buy

My personal advice on this topic is to:

- Talk to the instructor you are going to learn with. Your radio will need to be compatible with theirs if they are going to use a 'buddy box' configuration (this allows the instructor to take over control of your aircraft should you get into trouble).
- Stick with one of the big three i.e. Futaba, JR or Spektrum.
- 2.4 GHz will give more freedom than 35MHz. Only use one or the other of these frequencies ... do not use anything else for flying.
- Buy at least a 6 channel and preferably a 7 channel transmitter. When you move on from your trainer you can then use the same radio for more complex models. My Spitfire incorporates flaps and working undercarriage so wants a total of 8 channels, but I get by with 7 by coupling two of the 8 servos together.