

RC Virgin

Category : Blog

Published by [Admin](#) on 2013/10/11

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RC Virgin      (function(d, s, id) { var js, fjs = d.getElementsByTagName(s)[0]; if
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"/connect.facebook.net/en_GB/all.js#xfbml=1"; fjs.parentNode.insertBefore(js, fjs); }(document,
'script', 'facebook-jssdk'));      RC Virgin
by Chartreuse Green 11/9/2013 13.45
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Not, as you might think, an article about a nice Catholic girl but rather the tale of my experiences with radio operated model aviation. When I first heard of radio controlled (RC) planes little was I to know they would take me to the heart of the Alps, to France, Switzerland and Italy, enable me to be in on the ground floor of an aerial photography business, open up new areas of writing, get me bitten by the RC flying bug, and introduce me to a possible personal Shang Ri La.

We've all made paper aeroplanes, constructed the balsa glider from the cornflakes packet, maybe had a go on a radio controlled car but the sphere of RC model building and operation is still relatively obscure. Furthermore females are in a minority, not because of any obstacle or prejudice for I found all the gentleman I encountered both welcoming and encouraging to the field, but simply through lack of awareness that this delightful and fascinating world exists, which I hope this account may help to remedy.

Christmas 2012, I hear of a new friend's enthusiasm for model planes. He tells me they are not toys although many people think it's 'just playing'. Over the next weeks of our growing acquaintance he shows me photographs of his model spitfires, deltas and trainers. I see them up close, static, hanging from his ceiling or parked on furniture, observe them being tested in the garden, scaled down engines, wafting cherry and vanilla scents as the fuel burns, begin to learn the different notes, watch battery powered electric motors turning propellers, appreciate the aerodynamic lines of the crafts in the sunlight. Finally I am honoured with a trip to the flying field where I see them airborne and am inspired. I want to learn to fly.



I begin with a miniature quadcopter, a Hubsan 4x lent to me by my now boyfriend who teaches me how to fly it. A quadcopter operates on a principle similar to that of a helicopter but has four propellers, each at the end of an arm extending from a central body. Quadcopter are also known as drones. I practice in the bedroom which has the fewest obstacles of any room in the flat. The quad reveals its personality by lodging itself on the top of a wardrobe and skittering around out of my reach. Finally by luck I coax it to the edge so climbing on a chair I can reach it. Next it ensconces itself under the bed, right in the middle and winks its best working blue eye at me as I crawl under to retrieve it. It has become a wilful pet.

Over time there are fewer incidents of this nature. I learn to hover it from a stool to the bed and finally the day comes when I am ready to take it outside. It is far easier with so much more space. On the other hand the wind is all too eager to carry it off into the trees. It attracts dogs, small children and strolling elderly couples. In answer to their eager questions I repeat what I am learning about the technology behind these dragonfly-like beauties. The four propellers are each turned by a motor controlled by a speed controller. The four are co-ordinated by a control board under the canopy of the quadcopter and power is supplied by a battery. I was later to learn about the types of each. Instructions to the control board are given by the pilot through a hand-held controller rather like a games console. There are two sticks; one for power (throttle) and another for direction. When I felt the quad getting away from me because of my lack of expertise I would cut the throttle and bring the tiny machine to ground, unfortunately sometimes less gently than others.

I crash one time too often and the control board is beyond repair. My patient and understanding boyfriend lends me his second drone, an SQ1. I increase in competence and my work break is filled with the excitement of flight, correcting for wind, becoming more adventurous with speed, direction and turns. I am no longer an RC virgin though still a noob (newbie to the uninitiated).

Meanwhile the world of built-up balsa planes is being swamped by foam gliders which have mixed reviews. I am drawn into the balsa versus foam debate and am to learn the hard way, for the emotional impact of which I was quite unprepared.

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