



Is There Anybody Out There? Part 2

al, Thursday 27 December 2007 - 08:18:17

Is There Anybody Out There?

(Part 2)

By Johan Johansson

Hello again fellow Aeromodelists and welcome to part two of my babbling-about-model-flying-in-England-and-Sweden session! Let's see now where we stopped last time, hmm Right! Ok, so England was a bit more organised than Sweden.

Club time!

As I mentioned in part one of this writing the main organisation in England is called [BMFA \(British Model Flying Association\)](#), and most of the local clubs around the country are members of this organisation. There are several reasons for this: The main one would be the earlier mentioned insurance they provide, with coverage for every member of the organisation. This insurance would be very expensive to get hold of individually and it is only because of the excellent safety history and the open communication with the authorities and CAA (Civil Aviation Authority) that they have been able to negotiate this. Other benefits are the free access to lawyers and people that are experts in how accidents or disputes should be handled, knowledge impossible for every member to know about. There are many other benefits of joining this organisation, so to summarize it could be said that they are working for all the members (Aeromodelists) to make model-flying easier, safer and generally more enjoyable!

The local clubs consists of a committee, with depending on the constitution of the club could consist of:

- * Chairperson
- * Vice Chairperson
- * Secretary
- * Treasurer
- * Vice Treasurer
- * Safety Officer
- * Members

The committee is most commonly elected once every year by the members and the fees for joining the club varies. To just get an idea, the club I was a member of during 2007 the yearly fees were Ls 28 for the membership of the club, and Ls 27 for the BMFA insurance



which every member had to have. As regards to the kind of places these clubs fly from it varies a lot. Everything from a former RAF (Royal Air Force) base with 1km long concrete runway, to fields with a grass-strip measuring 8x30m. The typical field has got a grass-strip though, and one of the club members (or on a rotating schedule between several members) would make sure the grass is not too long with the help of the lawnmower owned by the club. Some clubs accept new members straight away, while others has got a waiting time for over 2 years.

Lets (Control) Stick Together

Due to the nature of our society the places suitable for model-flying is getting more and more limited, and the use of clubs and associations are therefore becoming more and more imminent. A lot of the clubs in England would not have been able to exist unless they had such open, regular and informative discussions with the government and the associations for civilian and military flying. During my time in Sweden there were more or less always talks about shutting down our club because of some angry person being annoyed with the noise or plans to build more houses, and I hear rumours about the same thing happening regarding Spilve in Riga at the time I am writing this. I know for sure that if it had not been for the local club here in Sweden being members of SMFF (Swedish Model Flying Association), the club would not be there today, resulting in people having to fly at private lands, quite often not very popular.

True Story

To mention a more concrete example of the usefulness of clubs would be an incident that happened in London not too long ago. The model-club is located in the flight-path of one of the commercial airports in London, which was built after the model-club was founded. When they built the airport they were very close to shutting the model-club down as it was considered too dangerous to have it so close to the real airport, but because the model-club was well known to the authorities and discussions started straight away when the plans were announced, the club was allowed to continue. The agreement included some very specific rules for that particular club, such as they were not allowed to fly higher than 400feet (about 120m) and no one would be allowed to fly unless they had passed their "A" test mentioned in There Anybody Out There?-Part 1 (more about this test later).

The committee was always very careful to make new members understand these rules, but unfortunately there was one irresponsible pilot who really liked to see how high his model could fly. Even after two warnings he had to try it, which resulted in a near collision with a commercial aircraft on approach for landing. The pilot reported the incident via the radio straight away and within 20 minutes a police-helicopter landed at the model-field. Personal details of the guilty were recorded and very soon the authorities got in contact with the club committee. The guilty and several of the members of the committee had to go on a hearing with the authorities at Heathrow airport, where they had to explain why they had breached their rules. The club-committee explained that they had nothing to do with the incident and that they would immediately expel the guilty from the club and make sure as many as possible new about it, and after more discussions between the two parts with more rules incorporated they were still allowed to keep the club at the location based on the very good safety record they had had. One can only imagine what would have happened if that model-airplane would have hit the passenger-plane on the approach to landing, but one can also imagine what damage it would have made to the reputation of model-flyers in general if there had not been such good communication between the different parties.

Personal Thoughts

To conclude the subject I have chosen for this part I would just like to say that my own experience of clubs so far has been both positive and negative. It is very easy to notice the negative aspects such as the fee, tests and rules to abide to while the positive points might be a bit more distant and not felt in the everyday model-life, but when the time comes when there will be a dispute with a



non-flyer or flyer, my experience is that it is well worth the negative aspects to have the backing of an official body.

A lot of things are happening very fast in Latvia, and from what I have seen so far the time will come very soon when we need to be organised to be able to communicate with the authorities, to not get completely run over. What do you think? As I wrote in one of my posts on Nakotne I see these articles as a means of starting a discussion that could be very healthy for all of us, especially in the long run. Please let me know what you think about this as it would be very useful for all of us, and it would make it a bit more inspiring for me to write. In English, Latvian or Russian doesn't matter. If There Is Anybody Out There?, the next part will be about safety and explanation of the before mentioned tests for the clubs. Anyone up for it?

Johan