



Remembering the Birth of Aerobatics World Championships for Radio Controlled Engine Powered Models

50 years ago, on the weekend of 23rd and 24th July 1960, the very first FAI World Championships for radio controlled aerobatics models were held on the airfield in Dübendorf, Switzerland. They were organised by the Aero Club of Switzerland and spectators were fascinated by the 20 competitors from eight countries competing in sometimes stormy conditions.



Ed Kazmirski, the first RC Aerobatic World Champion

The World Champion standing in front of about 20 photographers as he brings his winning "Orion" model in to land

Only Models Built by the Competitor

The rules explicitly required the aeroplane to have been built by the pilot. The engine and the RC system were exempt from this requirement. The main construction materials used were balsa and plywood as well as silk, paper and stiffening varnish. The average flying weight is said to have been between 2 and 3.5 kg. The models were smaller and much lighter than those of today and all three types were represented: low-wing and high-wing planes and even one biplane. The latter was the much admired De Bolt Bipe, owned by Eliasson from Sweden, that unfortunately did not make it off the ground. There was a remarkably broad range of engine cylinder sizes – from 2.47 ccm (MVVS) to 9.7 ccm (Ruppert).



Rebuilt "Orion" the model aircraft of the first World Champion was an exemplary aerobatic model airplane for years

Ruppert engine used by most of European competitors

Storm Winds and Numerous Crashes

On Saturday, a stormy and unsteady westerly wind was blowing over the former home airport of Swissair in Dübendorf. It is unclear whether these difficult conditions were responsible for the crash of German Hans Gast's model. De Bolt, USA and Corgi, Italy had the same bad luck. Their beautiful models shattered on a grassy field. Both blamed faults in the RC connection. Apparently, after each crash, spectators immediately crowded around the debris and a swarm of journalists wanted to have a close-up look at the scene of the accident. De Bolt was relaxed about it all – he had a spare model with him – and let the boys take parts of his crashed aircraft home as souvenirs.



Unlucky Hans Gast, GER crashed his "Smog Hog" into the runway

Swiss Competitor Fredy Bickels original aerobatic model airplane of 1960 World Championships



Rebuilt "Caravelle" of Gustav Saemann, GER 2nd place

Very Different RC Control Systems

Unlike RC Aerobatics World Championships today, the RC systems used varied significantly. Five competitors are said to have built their own control systems – this should include those by Stegmaier and Nievergeld which used vacuum to move the control surfaces. The highly sophisticated Stegmaier control system received much recognition at various European competitions and the Orbit RC system was at a very professional level. The servos didn't look much different from today's larger types.

Swedish competitor Eliasson was not very successful with his De Bolt "Bipe"



Since 1960 the Trophy of the Belgian King is the RC-Aerobatic World Championships Trophy showed with the current World Champion Christoph Paysan Le Roux, FRA.

Significant Public Interest

These first RC Aerobatics World Championships were apparently perfectly organised. Arnold Degen of the Swiss Aero Club as competition leader and site speaker Hans Waeffler, with his technically sound commentary, was able to fill the audience – up to 8,000 spectators are said to have turned up – with enthusiasm. Chief press officer Werner Koelliker managed to mobilise various major daily newspapers, which led to a mainly positive media response. But even then, the question of safety was an issue. One large Zürich daily paper wrote: "However, the serious question remains, whether radio controlled model flying in its present development phase is sufficiently safe to justify the involvement of a large audience".

Photos: American Modeler 1961 and Hermann Mettler
Text: Based on an interview with Werner Koelliker

