



2006 IRCHA Helicopter Jamboree

12/16/2006

Author: Steve Kaluf

What has more than 500 pilots from around the world, a 4,000-foot-long flightline, impounds more than 600 transmitters, is supposed to start Thursday but normally starts Monday, and logs a few thousand flights?

It's the International Radio Controlled Helicopter Association (IRCHA) Jamboree!

This 14th edition of the huge, annual event took place August 10-13 at AMA's International Aeromodeling Center. It was so large this year that all attendance records were broken.

The Jamboree is the largest helicopter event in the world. It is second in overall fly-in attendance only to the fixed-wing Joe Nall event by just a few pilots. The two gatherings are superbly run, and the primary goal is that the participants have a great, safe time. That certainly happened this year!

The Jamboree is flown at the southernmost part of AMA's expansive property in Muncie, Indiana. The east-west road along the southern property boundary serves as direct access to the event. The flightline is laid out along the northern edge of this road for more than 3,600 feet. Sixteen flight stations are set up; each is a 200 x 200-foot box.

Pilots are required to fly within this box to assure safe operation and not interfere with any other flier. If a pilot decides to fly farther to each side, he or she must push out past the 200-foot box (away from the flightline).



Greg Alderman's Bergen Intrepid Turbine is powered with a Wren 54. With 8 horsepower at the ready, the model is capable of 3-D aerobatics.



Dwight Schilling (R), a 2007 F3C team member, demonstrated the FAI sequence during a noon demo with caller Paul Giles.



Mark Fadely, Bert Kammerer, Eric Larson, and Bobby Watts make up the “Four Caballeros” flying team.

The center-most box (stage center) is 400 feet wide to allow for factory demonstrations and other organized activities and is typically closed to normal flying. Along the majority of the access road, pilots can park their vehicles and/or trailers directly behind their pit areas. The latecomers may have to park a bit farther away, but it's never a very far walk from your vehicle to your pit area.

A 20-foot-wide walkway is maintained so that spectators can walk directly behind each pit and have a clear view of the machines so they can ask questions. Even though the pilots line their tents end to end, there is a temporary fence directly behind the pits to keep spectators from walking out onto the flightline.

A huge area that is centrally located behind the flightline contains the main vendor section, transmitter-impound trailer, registration trailer, audio/music trailer, two food vendors, and seminar tents. This area is a hotbed of activity every day and late into the night. Almost everyone calls it the “midway,” and it has much of the same atmosphere.

This is the place to introduce new helicopter equipment. Forty vendors displayed their wares this year, and everyone from major radio manufacturers to local hobby shops attended. Another great aspect of having so many vendors around is that if you break or need any part or piece, you can probably obtain it somewhere along vendor row.

A large public-address (PA) system and enthusiastic announcers kept things moving throughout the day. It was a treat to have Greg Poppel and Darrel Bell (Big D) return to fill that role. Bob

Sadler, who is more well known within the fixed-wing ranks, also provided commentary and seemed to be having fun, and IRCHA Secretary Brett Walker and I filled in at times.



Michael George assembles his Synergy N90 kit at a leisurely pace during the four-day event. Tented close to center stage, he didn't miss any of the action.



Kyle Stacy waits his turn to fly a 3-D demonstration. His Raptor 90SE is one of his favorite freestyle machines.

Music played continuously to keep the mood light, and the same system provided high-energy music for the noontime demonstrations and night-fly competition. And on the subject of the midday demos, wow!

Last year they were changed so that only manufacturers or invited pilots could fly. This was an excellent decision; it made the demos interesting, professional, and fun. You not only get to see the best fliers put on a show, but you also see some great new products shown for the first time by the manufacturers.

Past IRCHA president Ron Kummer serves as Jamboree event director. He and his wife Carol work all year to bring the myriad details together to make the event happen. As you might expect, this is a huge undertaking; Ron and Carol typically arrive the Saturday before the Jamboree to begin setup.

Many volunteers and the IRCHA Board of Directors serve as the labor to keep the gathering running. These workers willingly handle registration, impound, flightline control, raffle prizes, vendor row, and many other details. Several volunteers including John, J.C., and James Zankle;

Craig Bradley; me; and many others are on-site by Sunday morning to provide the labor to get things up and running as quickly as possible.



Andy Rummer aggressively demonstrates Mikado Model Helicopters' LOGO 10 3D to prove the stability and agility of the new V-Bar mechanics system.



Mikado's virtual flybar (V-Bar) system utilizes CCPM mixing and gyro sensors to electronically stabilize the helicopter.



New to the IRCHA Jamboree was the T-Rex 450 pylon race. Friday's contest was so popular that a second event was rallied together Saturday.

The AMA grounds crew sets up the AMA-provided tents, brings in tables, helps run wiring, and does a thousand other things. The rest of the IRCHA Board of Directors is on-site by Monday

evening to help finish up the remainder of the details, and the Jamboree is typically in full swing by Tuesday morning. That's not bad for an event that does not officially start until Thursday.

The early arrivals get the choice pit-area locations; flying buddy Craig Bradley and I were set up as soon as we could be. We prefer what I call the "cheap" seats down on the west end. This location gives us the best access to our pit area, which is just past where the vendor line ends.

I'd estimate that by Tuesday night approximately 100 pilots were flying at the site. Thursday morning the flightline extended quite a distance to the east and west, and by Friday afternoon it was roughly 3,000 feet long, with more than 400 pilots logged in the registry. By Saturday afternoon the Jamboree exceeded all records, with 503 registered pilots.

The Jamboree must have close to the largest raffle and prize giveaway of any aeromodeling event. Complete RTF helicopters, high-end radios, engines, fuel, and anything else you can think of is typically included in the raffle. Volunteers are paid one raffle ticket anytime they work a shift. IRCHA members are in a special raffle, and pilots are in another.

The grand-prize winner—Rob Stump—walked away with a Bergen Intrepid Magnum helicopter equipped with a Futaba 9C radio system, Futaba GY401 gyro, O.S. .91 engine, Hatori pipe, servos, V-Blades, and a custom-painted canopy by Ricko's Canopy. The machine had already been setup and test flown by Malorie Zastrow of Bergen; all its new owner had to do was charge, fuel, and start it up.



Andy Panoncillo patrolled the nearly half-mile-long flightline to shuttle pilots and aircraft to and from any of the 14 pilot stations.



AMA and IRCHA have worked together proudly to make the largest helicopter event also among the safest.



Scale flight judging was the first order of business during Saturday's busy schedule. From left to right are Tom Johnson, Steve Kaluf, and Tom Erb.

Manufacturers and distributors graciously donated all the equipment I just mentioned. A sidebar features a complete listing of those who provided contributions to the Jamboree.

An extra attraction this year was the contest to determine the US FAI F3C (RC helicopter) team members who will compete in the World Championships in 2007. The Team Selection was held Tuesday and Wednesday just north of the Jamboree site.

It's a rare treat to see flying of this caliber, and many of the Jamboree participants took the time to watch the Team Selection. Participants were Cliff Hiatt, Wayne Mann, Nob Maruki, Rolando Perez, Dwight Schilling, and Curtis Youngblood. A few others who normally compete were unable to attend this year.

When the smoke settled, the US team of Wayne Mann, Dwight Schilling, and Curtis Youngblood was announced. Cliff Hiatt is the alternate; he would step into a team-member spot if one of the other three were unable to attend the World Championships.

Congratulations to each team member and all the participants for the great flying they did. Thanks also to CD Craig Bradley for organizing the event.

The World Championships will be held in Poland next year. The US (AMA) has placed a bid to host the 2009 F3C World Championships at the AMA site.

Please help support the US team's efforts to win the gold once again. Donations are gratefully accepted. Contact the Competitions Department at AMA Headquarters for more information.



Ron Kummer started each morning with a pilots' meeting. He and his wife Carol work all year to bring the IRCHA event together.



A herd of pilots gather around the center-stage area for the morning's safety briefing. Giant tents in the background housed some of the vendors.



Event sponsors give generously to the raffle-prize pool. This is just a portion of what was left to give away after the first day's drawing.

The registration trailer—found at stage center—is the first stop any pilot makes. Preregistered fliers enjoy expedited check-in, where their name tags and pilots' packages are ready for them as soon as they show up.

Others go through the short registration process. Each pilot receives a bag complete with a T-shirt, program for the event, and copious information from various manufacturers. Included are raffle tickets and a ticket to Saturday night's cookout. Pilots are also issued a plastic name tag, which authorizes them to be on the flying side of the flightline.

The registration trailer's computer is networked to the impound trailer, and all run Dan Monroe's CD Pro software. The custom program collects each pilot's registration information, making it immediately available at the 32-foot impound trailer filled with hundreds of transmitters and transmitter modules.

Two computers running CD Pro manage the impound operation, which is staffed with three people most of the time. A person sits under a tent just outside the trailer; this is the "In" area and the first stop any pilot makes when checking in his/her radio gear.

Each transmitter or module is assigned a number, based on the pilot's number, and is stored in the trailer organized by those numbers. Two other people run the inside operation.

To check out a transmitter, the pilot reports to the "Out" window of the trailer and tells the volunteers what channel he/she would like to fly on. A quick glance at the CD Pro data screen tells the staff if the channel is available. If it is not, it indicates who is flying on it and how long it has been checked out.

As each transmitter is checked out, the pilot is issued a pager. Each channel has a pager assigned to it, so if the pilot has the channel out too long (more than 25 minutes) the impound staff pages him or her to return.

When the pilot returns his or her radio to the impound, it goes to the "In" side, the pager is returned, and the frequency is punched into the networked computer, freeing up the channel. The cycle continues throughout the event.

Next to the impound trailer is the sound trailer, which is stuffed with high-end equipment. Two high-power amplifiers shoot sound to the four huge speakers that are distributed down the flightline.



Darrel Sprayberry competes in the IRCHA Scale competition with his Vario Cobra. It's powered with an Actro outrunner electric motor.



Kerry Muncy's 1/7-scale Indy Heli AH-64A Apache measures 86 inches long.



Mark Fadely holds his Miniature Aircraft Fury in a rock-steady inverted hover with the nose in toward the flightline.

Multiple professional-grade CD players, tape decks, a 16-channel mix board, and wireless microphones combine to drive announcements and music up and down the near-half-mile flightline and provide the concert-level music for the demos and night-fly competition.

Continuing down the midway is the seminar tent. Friday and Saturday it hosted back-to-back presentations made by manufacturers and other experts. Everything from engine setup to 3-D flying was covered.

Next to the seminar tent were two huge vendor tents which were able to hold as many as 24 10-foot booths. Past these tents (in each direction) were food vendors and more hobby-related retailers. The hobby booths extended roughly 800 feet in each direction down the flightline.

New products were plentiful at the Jamboree. Mikado Model Helicopters (www.mikado-heli.de/en) showed one of the coolest things there: its new V-Bar, or virtual flybar. This unit allows a helicopter to operate without a flybar but perform as if it actually has one. This device can best be described as a "fly-by-wire" system for models.

Mikado demonstrated the V-Bar several times during the week and held an informative seminar about it. This device seems to work exceedingly well. Look for it to be available late this year.

Miniature Aircraft USA (www.miniature

aircraftusa.com) showed its new 50-size machine now called the Razor. It can accommodate glow or electric (600 class) power and looks nice. The parts count is low and the frames' stiffness has to be felt to be believed. The tail rotor is belt driven.

I've heard rumors that the Razor's price will be extremely attractive. Keep an eye open for it. The demonstration flight I saw proved that it is worthy of the Miniature Aircraft name.

Align (www.align.com.tw) had its new T-Rex 600 out in force, and several vendors were even selling them (but not for very long). I've been fortunate to see this model fly many times, and it can really perform. It features a CCPM head, carbon frames, and numerous great details that pilots have become accustomed to having with the T-Rex line.

Jason Krause/Todd Bennett had the new Synergy N9 at the event, and several pilots were putting it to the test. Wow, can it perform! I don't know who one particular pilot was, but he was doing some low-level tic-tocs that impressed me; you could see the precision in the machine's movements.

Perhaps one of the most awaited arrivals (and man, did we wait) was the new Avant Aurora. Everyone knew that Alan Jr. and Danny Szabo were in town, but they had barely been to the flying site. Even Alan Sr. was missing in action. The rumors came back that they were in their hotel room frantically putting the finishing touches on their demo Auroras.

This was an appropriately named machine; it seemed to have much of the same mystique that the super-secret, full-scale, fixed-wing Aurora had from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. The Szabos showed up Saturday afternoon, and Alan Jr. and Danny brought their models.



The Hirobo Lepton EX is MRC's latest offering in a 30-size electric helicopter. It uses CCPM mixing and single-piece carbon-fiber side frames.



Century's latest helicopter—the Freestyle—is purpose-built for 3-D competition. Predator 90 owners can purchase a conversion kit.

I did not get as close as I would have liked to those machines. The Szabos flew them hard for new helicopters. The models seemed to be rock solid and capable of anything in the air. Both were damaged during flights, but not bad. My hat is off to Alan Jr., Danny, and Alan Sr. for taking the time and going to all the effort to show us this new machine.

V-Blades by Campbell Manufacturing had the typical super line of helicopter blades but also had the new blade set for the T-Rex 450. I don't know how many were sold, but I'll bet it was a bunch.

I was fortunate to get a set before they ran out, and they provide awesome performance. I have roughly 30% greater collective authority on my stock T-Rex SE than I did with the original blades. They are so stiff that I can pick the entire machine up by a blade tip and they do not bend at all!

Past vendor row was pit area after pit area and helicopter after helicopter. Most pilots put their canopies up so they almost touched their neighbors' canopies, which provided almost continuous shade. The only gaps in the canopies were the spaces in the fence to allow walk-throughs.

A pilots' meeting was held daily at roughly 9 a.m. to make sure everyone was up to speed on procedures, including fly with a spotter, only three people at a flight station, and impound guidelines. At each pilots' meeting Ron Kummer tossed out some great prizes; it often pays to attend these.

The transmitter impound is typically operated from approximately 9 a.m. to at least 7 p.m. each day at this event, but flying begins at sunup and ends well after dark. During these "off" times a frequency control board is set up outside the impound trailer. To fly, a pilot inserts his or her AMA membership card into the appropriate channel slot on the board.

At least as many flights are put up after hours as during the times the impound is open. From Thursday through Sunday the impound logged roughly 1,500 flights. That does not include those with mini/micro helicopters using spread spectrum systems or any of the after-hours flights. Double that 1,500 figure and you might have a realistic number of flights made at the Jamboree.

IRCHA treats all registered pilots to dinner Saturday night. This is always a great time and approximately 500 people typically stick around to be fed. An IRCHA membership meeting is held after dinner, and then the prize-giving begins!

The recipients include the winners of the various contests that take place during the Jamboree. Scale, drag racing, Class I, Autorotation, and T-Rex pylon racing winners were recognized. The night-fly winners were given their awards later, at the conclusion of that night's competition.

The huge amount of raffle prizes is distributed to the lucky winners at this time. (I lost my tickets, so I don't know if I won or not!) One of the included pictures shows the table with some of the raffle prizes on it, not even including the grand-prize RTF. It's incredible, don't you think? The contest winners are listed in one of the sidebars.

This year's level of flying was amazing. I've been attending the Jamboree since 1996 (I think), and this year everyone seemed to kick it up a notch. Some of this (if not much of it) is certainly owing to the machines and electronics that are now available to the helicopter pilot. However, it's also clear that these men and women can flat-out fly!

3-D flying is the norm at this event, but you'll see everything from pilots who are just learning to hover to the best FAI or 3-D flier. The noontime demos were hard to believe; they rocked. Many of the pictures will give you a sense of what took place during the demonstrations.

What makes this group unique is that if someone learning how to hover needs help, he or she may be assisted by Curtis Youngblood, Jason Kruse, or one of the Szabo brothers. This is a close-knit bunch.

If you break a machine and go get a hamburger, you are liable to come back and find it fixed. I ended up needing some servo gears (and a few other parts) for my T-Rex. (No, I did not crash it; someone else did.) The vendors did not stock the gears I needed, but a quick ride down the flightline netted me those parts. (Thank you, Ray Stacy.)



Frank Noll demonstrates mastery of the upright hover with his favorite helicopter cleverly disguised as a 37% Carden Yak-54.



The Thunder Tiger Raptors are among the most popular RC helicopters. To prove the point, more than 100 pilots gathered for a group photo.

As I mentioned, several contests were held as part of the Jamboree. There were the new T-Rex pylon race pickup event, the traditional autorotation and drag-race contests, and the night-fly. All were great fun to watch (and participate in).

Complete results are listed elsewhere, but I do want to mention that helicopter speed world record-holder Ken Jennings won the Unlimited Drag Race with an electric-powered machine.

I was fortunate to be asked to serve as a judge for Class I and the Scale category, which brought out some beautiful models. The only thing that holds some of the builders back is lack of or inaccurate documentation. Without that vital piece of the puzzle, it's impossible to receive a decent static score.

A few machines suffered mechanical difficulties, making it hard for them to obtain good flight scores. One of the favorites—Tim Dawson (last year's champion)—suffered what appeared to be a radio bump and wiped out the four rotor blades on his Super Puma.

Being the competitor he is, "Dr. Tim" worked hard to locate new blades between rounds and get the helicopter back into the air. He was able to get it together, but a vibration (maybe a bent main shaft) limited his second flight to just a liftoff and set-down.

Class I had three competitors; two were new to AMA helicopter competition and one was flying in his second contest (the Nats being his first). All three did a super job, and I hope we will see them at future contests.

Class I at the Jamboree is a relaxed event that is designed to give competitors a chance to get their feet wet. The judges provide good feedback to the pilots so they can learn and improve.



Bobby Watts (L) exercises his Miniature Aircraft Fury during a noon demo with Beresford "Beast" Davis watching. Bobby's high-energy routine brought the crowd to its feet.

IRCHA rents 14 golf carts for its staff and volunteers, and they are used for flightline duty and many other tasks. After all, that flightline is very long.

You used to see pilots using bicycles to get up and down the line, and then it was motorized scooters, and now it's golf carts. A few of the more local pilots help obtain and rent the carts for the pilots to use.

I can't imagine how many carts run up and down the flightline. Some pilots even have private, customized carts with built-in sound systems, hot paint jobs, and chrome wheels. I wonder what will be next.

Even with all the great flying there were crashes; in fact, there were many. The good thing is that, owing in large part to the flightline setup, each accident happened well away from people.

The mishaps were a result of pilots pushing the limits a bit too far. I'd rather see the flights take place a bit higher and maybe the pilots not push as hard. Every time one crashes I feel like we were robbed of seeing an excellent performance.

I hope you enjoy the pictures of this great event; it is one of the most fun gatherings I've ever had the pleasure of attending. Consider joining us next year at AMA's International Aeromodeling Center during roughly the second weekend in August for the 2007 IRCHA Jamboree! MA

Steve Kaluf

skaluf@modelaircraft.org