

TERROR CAN BE FUN!

By Bob Kugler

A few days ago I flew in my first Pylon Race, This was a day in RC flying that I'll never forget. You see, until that day I'd never flown a Scat Cat with a quickee engine. My first Scat Cat began its short lived existence with a K&B 28. This was my first low-wing tail dragging trainer . It flew well and I had fun with it for a couple of months. Then, I decided I would give the Scat Cat a little more pep for flying combat in last year's air show, so I installed an OS 40 FSR. While the plane was considerably quicker and more responsive it was still barely within my capabilities. No one told me that the dead stick landing characteristics of the plane that I had just begun to master would change drastically with a 25' paper streamer trailing behind. Oh well, you learn from your mistakes. Right?

Now, here it was 6:30 the morning of my first Quickee 500 Pylon Race. I had a New plane (finished the night before, of course) and I was beginning to think that I might not be prepared for what was to follow. I managed to convince John Abrahamian (someone not known as an early riser) to test fly my plane and to stand by me as I took the sticks for the first time.

As John took off on the maiden flight, I realized that I was more than just a little concerned. I remembered that another one of my friends told me that even with several years of experience he still gets nervous about Pylon Racing. With my plane buzzing around at about 200' I heard John say, "okay, you fly it." Along with his fun-loving attitude, John is known for his subtlety and his compassion.

Noticing that the throttle was pulled back to about half I felt it was safe to take the radio, I flew three or four ovals at about 200', when then engine quit and I landed the plane. The landing was a little rough, coming to rest after the third bounce, but we both survived the ordeal, John and I played with the engine long enough to eliminate the possibility of another test flight before the races were scheduled to begin, but it didn't matter, I had flown a Scat cat with a "real racing engine." I was ready! I was scheduled to race in the third heat. As I watched the first two heats I began to realize that there was something very different about how these planes flew, and my pre-race flight. (1) These planes took off three abreast. I had not even had a chance to take off. (2) These planes were Flying 30 to 40 feet above the ground, I had gone about 200 feet. (3) These planes were making 180 degree, steeply banked turns, I had intentionally flown wide and smooth. (4) These planes were being flown at full-throttle, and at speeds over 130 mph. I Flew at barely more than ½ throttle. Now I was terrified. When it came time to bring my plane to the starting line, I was visibly shaking, John, who was to be my caller, started the engine. It came to life with a scream, as only a quickee engine can. Not satisfied with the sound of the engine, John began to screw the needle valve to get every single RPM that the engine was capable of turning. Obviously mere terror wasn't enough for John, but it was too late to turn back now.

The two other planes on the starting line, one on either side of mine, were also running wide open and being held by their callers, At that point the starter pointed to each caller and each pilot and waited for a nod indicating they were ready.

I wasn't sure where to look. Should I watch the starter, my caller, or my plane? I opted to watch my plane. My eyes were opened wider than ever before and now they were glued to that plane for what seemed like 20 minutes. Then, as the starter dropped the flag, the callers released the planes and they were off. My plane veered wildly to the left and crossed under the plane that started to my left. (After the races Bob Petrinak told me that I might want to use a little right rudder on take-off to keep the plane going straight.) I corrected and barely got the plane flying straight, level, and generally in the direction of the first pylon when I heard John yell, "TURN." "Come on dive it in," I did and I got through the first turn, I was racing.

Well, my turns were a little too wide and I sometimes flew too high, but I got through that first heat. My time 2 minutes 40 seconds would not put me in the record books, but I finished. In heat 2 I was beginning to get the feel of things and with John's excellent calling I was able to get inside and pass Joe Felonk in a turn. This was great. Then, while coming around pylon 2, near the end of the race, John ordered, "Pull hard." So I did. The plane responded by making an immediate 180 degree turn and dove straight for us at over 100 mph. I pulled up just before the plane hit the ground and my Scat Cat headed straight up. It was then that I heard Stan Flynn ask if it was possible to cut the same pylon 3 times. Everyone's a comedian.

I was able to get the plane under control again and finish the heat in 2 minutes and 20 seconds. Apparently I had a fast time going until I took my little excursion.

I flew 5 heats that day with a best time of 2 minutes 7 seconds. The best time of the day, an unbelievable 1 minute and 33 seconds, was turned in by Eric Chassin. In spite of some close calls my plane and I survived the day, I finished tied for 7th place with Jim Sharkey. His best finish time at 2 minutes and 1 second gave him 7th place and me 8th. With three planes not finishing that meant that I actually placed ahead of 2 people.

I learned a couple of things that day. (1) Ask an experienced pylon racer to help you and be your caller. I was glad I did. (2) Give yourself some time to familiarize yourself with your plane and this type of flying. Otherwise, it may surprise you. (3) Nearly everyone who participated was nervous. I suppose this is healthy. (4) Pylon Racing is really a lot of fun. I guess terror can be fun. I have never been so frightened for an entire day in all my life. But, I can't wait for July 12th, the next Pylon Race Date, so I can do it all over again.

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