

On his way to early retirement I managed a quick chat with Albert Heyché

AN UNUSUAL MODELLER

by Diana Cameron-Tough

The thing that I enjoyed most about the Euro Cup Meeting at Bretons, was the fascinating and most interesting people that we met. One of these was Albert Heyché. He first came to our attention as the builder, with the assistance of Walter Vanbelle, of two Blue Thunder models, however, we soon got talking about his most interesting life with radio control helicopters.

He is a charming thirty-three year old Belgian. He owns a shop which sells reproductions of old French furniture, and with his characteristic drive and determination announced that he plans to retire at the age of forty-five. Albert certainly seems to know the meaning of the saying 'Work hard, Play hard.' His wife was four times Belgian show jumping champion, and he himself has won the Belgian National Helicopter Sportsman's Class four times, with duProft usually winning the FAI class.

Albert first started in helicopters about ten years ago. He first bought an aeroplane, whilst he was learning hotel management at the London Hilton. When he returned to Brussels and finally had time to build it, he hap-

pened to pick up a Graupner catalogue. Flicking through it he saw a helicopter, and said "That's the one for me." He jumped in his car, drove to Germany, and brought back his first helicopter.

Understandably, those first years were plagued with problems, as he knew no one to give him any advice or help. It took about four years before he felt really confident and able to control a helicopter. When he needed a small part it took about four months to arrive, so those first four years were quickly lost. "Yesterday", he told us, "I broke my cylinder head – put in a glow head, and whoops it was gone. I told a man who has a shop (Len Bliss) and he said 'don't worry', and he went and got one for me. No problem any more. Ten years ago, you went into a shop, and said that you wanted that part. They said, What for?, and when I said a helicopter, all the guys in the shop would go ha, ha, ha, you fly a helicopter ha, ha, ha."

I asked Albert what it was like when he first took his Graupner out to fly. He replied showing his great sense of humour. "It was wonderful... for the first three minutes. After that it was

rubbish" In those days the radios, servos etc were not as good as they are now, and the machine suffered from too many movements and vibrations. Slowly, bit by bit, he changed pieces, and gradually started to gain control. During the years he has flown Schlüter, Heim, Graupner, Hirobo, Kalt etc, which has given him the tremendous experience he has today.

He believes that over the past six years he has averaged about 250 hours flying a year, and that is with the problem of having to drive 30 miles to his flying site.

Albert says that he works on his helicopter projects nearly every evening from about 8pm to late, with possibly even fitting in a few hours before going to work in the morning. He also flies Sunday afternoons, but manages to keep his wife happy by working very hard like this for about three weeks, then when he can bear the sight of glue no longer, he closes the door to his hobby room for one week – to retain his sanity, and no doubt that of his wife's! Can you just imagine it though, he will make ten to fifteen fuselages all one after another, so if he or one of his fortunate friends have a crash, they can go and get a replacement. "But", he says, "after that, for at least one year, don't talk to me about making fuselages – its finished." I'm not surprised.

I asked him if he has many crashes now, but he says not any more, unless there is something wrong with the mechanics. The last time he had a crash, he lost a paddle in flight – it broke off and took the ball link out, so there was no movement. He couldn't control the pitch on its descent, so it smashed down. Miraculously the mechanics were OK, and the engine still running, but the side plates were smashed. Philosophically he told us, "It was about four years old, it had had a good life, so I said – It's OK."

We then went on the talk about his project with Walter Vanbelle, of the building of the BLUE THUNDER models. Ever eager for something unusual to build, they saw the film and decided to build two models. They started completely from scratch, and three weeks later the first one flew.

It took Albert ten days to make a mould and fuselage. It would have taken fifteen days for a fuselage to arrive, so it was quicker to make one. They did not have very good photographs, and no specifications so getting the right dimensions was a problem.

The first model has a Webra 61 engine, which is three years old, and has probably used a hundred gallons of fuel in its life. The radio equipment is an old Hirobo – probably one of the first ones in Belgium. The mechanics are standard Heim, the only modification being a separate trim for the gas idle. However, initially the engine was too fast for the fenestrom. Forever





Close up view of Albert's Blue Thunder model. Not to scale as John Simmone's, as used in the film. Details of new kit by John Simmone in Issue 3.

ingenious, he modified it with a piece from his 808.

The first time it flew, it was turning too fast – up to 16,000 revs "I was flying in a straight line," he recounted, "but sideways. I needed my ten years' experience to bring it down – gas, gas off, gas, gas off, aaaaaahh, it's down." By the time the model got to Bretons, it had still only flown for about an hour.

Albert was pleased that people had seen the film, and could appreciate what it was that he was flying about. They had hoped to recuperate some of the costs from Columbia films, who had naturally shown a great interest while the models were being made. They had hoped to go into cinemas and make short flights, but the model was proving to be too difficult. "It is a very smooth machine" he said, "but when a machine is very smooth, it is very difficult to fly." Also flying outside the cinemas proved to be out of the question, as there was no light in the evenings now, when the film was showing. He is disappointed that people are not now showing enough interest. "It is very special," Albert told us, "but all they ask is how high does it fly? How far does it go? How much does it cost? Those three questions I

am always asked."

The model took about two hundred hours to make, and it is still not quite finished. Costing out the hours and materials, the movie people said they were not interested. What a shame. However, Albert, with his charming philosophical attitude to helicopters said, "I turned to Walter, and said never mind, the model – It's just for us." Well, we have enjoyed it also, and I hope you too find the photographs interesting.

We continued on to Albert's next project, not even having time to talk about all the unusual and interesting helicopters he has built in the past. This next Winter he hopes to build a 1/3 scale Jet Ranger. He believes he will make the mechanics himself. He says it is not difficult – you can find the gears etc by looking through an industrial catalogue. It might be 20cc or more, depending on the cost. He would make a plug in wood, take a mould, and then make a body in fibreglass. He says that he used to make them in epoxy, but it never worked well for him. "Anyway" he said, "if you have a crash with a fibreglass or an epoxy model, both are broken."

We talked about Pete Reay's Scor-

pion, which he felt was a good model and a fine achievement. Albert, however, had lots of tips how to make the model lighter. Over the years he has gained a lot of experience in how to minimise weight, even to the extent of never using a bigger screw than necessary. He said he had not made a Scorpion, as in a hundred people, maybe one would know what a Scorpion was. "The others," he said "Just think it's a dangerous little animal. If you take a Jet Ranger, however, and make it big, most people will appreciate it. I feel that if you take many hours, and this will take at least one thousand hours, and then make a machine that no one knows, it will be fine machine for you, for me, but no one else knows what it is."

He, therefore plans to build the Jet Ranger in the colour scheme of a friend's full size machine. They can then go round to shows etc, demonstrating the full size and the model, and the crowd will appreciate it. It certainly will be an impressive model. After all, if he intends to retire in twelve years' time, he's certainly got to keep his eye to business! All I can say, Albert, is Good Luck. I'm sure you'll make it.