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Hello from the RC Helicopter Nats! This is only my second year flying helicopters and since I can tear up the sky at my local club, my good friend Dave Milner talked me into entering the Nats in Class I. I said, “Okay, what are the Nats?” He said I would do fine ...

For those of you who don't know what the Nats for RC Helicopter is, this is the description that was in the pamphlet that came with my registration packet.

“Each class has an established set of maneuvers that pilots must accomplish, and judges grade each maneuver. Class I includes primary hovering-type maneuvers; Class II adds some aerobatic maneuvers; Class III adds even more aerobatic maneuvers and includes a power-off autorotation landing; and F3C adds a number of aerobatic maneuvers to test pilots and machines.”

Basically, this is precision flying. Each pilot is judged on how well he or she does the described pattern of maneuvers as laid out in the rules. It's kind of like Olympic gymnastics, but with RC Helicopters—do it exactly like it says in the book is the name of the game here.

Just do some hover maneuvers, a stall turn, a loop, a roll, and land. How hard can this be?

Well we all showed up Sunday afternoon and got situated on Site 5. Craig Bradley, the contest director, had arranged for us to have a nice big tent with tables underneath to work on our helis. Under that tent we had a brief Pilots' meeting and Craig explained to us how the next few days would go: three rounds of flights on Monday, two on Tuesday, and two on Wednesday, making seven rounds total. Awards at the end are based on final scoring.

Craig walked some of us rookies through the procedures of the on-deck circle, calling, and what was expected in terms of how the flights go. All was good, and off to the hotel I went.

Three flights on Monday—seems a little light, but hey, I am on vacation. Let's have a good, relaxing day of flying helicopters.

Monday was the first day of competition, and as Craig mentioned at the Pilots' meeting we got three rounds in, but I can say it was far from the “light day” that I expected. What Craig didn't bother to mention is that points are deducted by the judges for little things like being 1.5 meters high on the hovers instead of the prescribed 2

meters, not landing inside the 1-meter circle, not pausing for 2 seconds on each hover, and the big kicker is that as far as the judges are concerned, there is no wind, regardless of the fact my Accu weather app said by mid-afternoon winds were 45° across the flightline at 18 mph. You, as a pilot, are expected to adjust for wind through all of this precision flying ... and it's the Nats.

After three of seven rounds of flying, here are the standings:

Class I Sportsman

- 1) Robert Montee
- 2) Bernard Shaw
- 3) Devin Hammond
- 4) Peter Bisbal
- 5) Justin Hartsock
- 6) Mike Unger
- 7) Michael Robinson

Class III Expert

- 1) Dennis Purduski
- 2) Andy Panoncillo

F3C FIA

- 1) Dwight Shilling
- 2) Nob Muraki
- 3) Tim Diperi

So, it was my first day at the Nats and what are my impressions? This is *way* more difficult than it looks. The F3C guys like Dwight Shilling, Nob Muraki, and Tim Diperi are amazing pilots. The Class I fliers that I am with are also good pilots, but we are all learning.

Three rounds of competition in one day is not “light.” The F3C and Expert pilots are all helping us become much better pilots. Although incredibly challenging, this is a ton of fun!

Tuesday we will continue with two more rounds of competition. Tomorrow I will plan to do a report on the technical side of things—who is flying what equipment, what seems to be the trends, and how I intend to get back at my “friend,” Dave, for throwing me into the deep end of the pond.

—Mike Unger

Dwight Shilling led F3C after the first day.

Photos by the author.



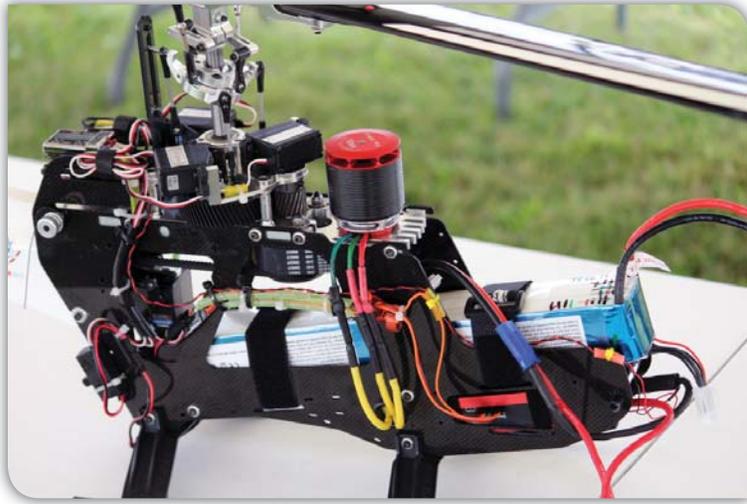
Justin Hartssock in front of the judges.



Nob Muraki is flying his three-bladed Diablo in F3C.







Nob kept the on-deck circle moving, armed with a taser for those slow pokes!

