

OTHER PASSIONS...

John Adams' perfect landing

Busy Crown Prosecutor John Adams has a secret passion. He is an avid collector, builder and flyer of model aeroplanes. It is a hobby he has had since the age of twelve and one which shows no signs of abating over thirty years later.

John's hobby began in a small way with home constructed balsa wood aeroplanes on control lines. These were powered by small engines and restricted to circular flights. Over the years he has moved to state of the art radio controlled planes powered by batteries.

These days the passion (and expense) of the hobby has grown to such an extent that he now has a special room at his home simply to accommodate his stable of planes. Over a lifetime of flying he has had over fifty radio controlled planes but at present keeps a more modest squadron of ten. Eight of these are electric powered, one is a pure glider and one is powered by an internal combustion engine.

John is pictured here with one of his favourite planes, a Fokker 190 which is a scale model of the German fighter of World War 2, which at the time was the most advanced fighter of the War and superior to all Allied planes. John's version of the Fokker is radio controlled, has a retractable undercarriage, weighs in at 3.5 kilograms and is capable of speeds up to 140 kilometres an hour.

The planes fly up to altitudes of up to 300 feet — civil aviation regulations prohibit higher flying — and flights are usually of about twenty minutes in duration. Given the speed of which the aeroplanes are capable and the altitudes they can reach, landing is the tricky part where the skill comes in.

John says that the principles of landing a model aircraft are exactly the same as in a conventional plane but with no modern electronic aids and without the advantage of being in the cockpit. An

ability to conceptualize height and distance in three dimensions is essential. "You have to use your eyes and judge the landing perfectly which I find delightful. You have to reduce the power just right. Too slow the plane and just drops out of the sky, too fast and it will run off the end of the landing strip, bounce or cartwheel."

John has represented Australia in model aeroplane flying competitions in Belgium and the United States. In his chosen class he has been New South Wales champion twice and Australian champion once. "The class I used to compete in was the speed and duration test. But there are acrobatic classes as well — figure eight's, loops and rolls that sort of thing. Duration gliding is when you turn off the motor and see how long you can glide. I have had several flights of over two hours and I have lost a plane in a powerful uplift of air."

Readers may be surprised to know that John has no desire to become a conventional commercial pilot. He dismisses it as "boring" and "glorified taxi driving". "My type of flying is better for me because I am able to actually see the purity of flight. I can see the flying and see what the plane is doing in the air. That really appeals to me."

Still with all the care, skill and years of practice accidents happen and planes



are lost. John remains philosophical. "I get upset when planes crash because the planes are my friends, if you like. I don't like crashing them but when it happens you just have to grin and bear it."

John flies most Sundays at East Point and works on his planes during the week when work permits. "I do it because I like it. It is something I have been doing all my life. It is a different part of me from the part I use at work. I can use my other talents and express them in my planes. It is a creative sort of thing. It is also multidisciplinary. I have to know a bit about aerodynamics, a bit about construction and a bit about materials and most importantly a bit about myself. I have learnt not to fly when I'm feeling short tempered or otherwise out of sorts. I've learnt to have patience and to concentrate on the flying. Plus I just love the sight of the planes sitting in the air."

And will John Adams ever tire of flying? "I don't think so. The best part of flying is the landing. I'm still trying to make the perfect landing. I don't think I'll ever make the perfect landing but I'll keep trying."

