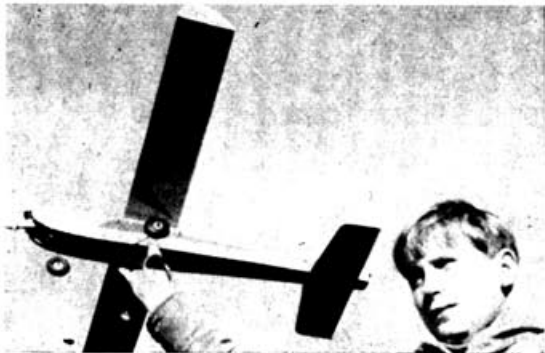


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'A series of blunders'

BLUNDERBIRD

3



By
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THE drama remains the same. Only the actors and props have changed. Twenty-five years ago he paid half-a-crown for a mottled sheet of Utility paper and a bundle of 1/16 in. obechi—that is, a 16 in. wingspan, flying-scale, rubber (unobtainable of course) powered Spitfire. After incredible Croidian labours he carried his brainchild to the nearest bombed site or allotment, and heaved. The curtain fell with a crunch. A few years later the reintroduction of balsa prolonged the finale to five seconds, but the result was almost always the same; enthusiasm died with that first model, and another budding aeromodeller was lost.

Nowadays it is father who forks out ten quid for a 16 in. wingspan, ready-to-go, flying-scale, control-line, unbreakable plastic Spitfire. A fortnight after Christmas the nurseries of our land are filled with mangled plastic and redundant .049 glow motors.

In an effort to retain some of the precious enthusiasm of my pupils I formed a club, designed a model around these engines, and kitted it at £1. For this the kids got pre-cut balsa and ply, wire, wheels, dope, tissue, plan, cement, bolts—the lot, including a one-ninth share in a tin of fuel-proofer. All materials were bought by me at normal retail prices, without even an Educational Discount. I selected the balsa. I object to paying through the nose for a kit (let's face it, 'Blunderbird's' nearest commercial counterpart costs £4.97d.) only to reject half the contents as too soft, unbalanced, short-grained, and for a beginner this can be disastrous. It was intended to call the series Thunder-

bird 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Gazing fondly but rationally upon my kids I amended this to 'Blunderbird'.

Instead of die-cutting I sawed out the parts on the school jig-saw. It is nothing like so difficult or tedious as one might imagine hard $\frac{1}{4}$ in. balsa. Mark the positions of wing and tailplane dowels. Square up stack of sheets below the 'Master' (I used eight simply because eight boys had started bringing their half-crowns per-week), and drill through dowel holes with school bench drill. Shove scrap dowel through the holes and treat the result as an ordinary block of balsa. This way you get sixteen fuselage sides identical in shape, and providing you choose each sheet for uniform density throughout its length, they are in perfectly matched pairs.

I produced nose doublers and cheek pieces in the same way, all out of hard $\frac{1}{4}$ in. sheet. Thus all the fuselage forward of the wings has rock-hard sides $\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick. The low-wing full-house multi kit I built recently had 3/32 in. medium sheet sides with soft 3/32 in. doublers. My 'Blunderbird' is still in one piece.

The starboard set of nose doublers I cut $\frac{1}{4}$ in. shorter than the port, so the kids had automatic right rear thrust built in. The inset top rear deckings came out of soft $\frac{1}{4}$ in., just as strong as hard $\frac{1}{4}$ in. and giving a much better glueing surface. I sawed a slot for the fin, so the kids couldn't very easily have it offset 30° or so. Tailplanes from $\frac{1}{4}$ in. sheet; fins from tailplanes cut in half. Kim Axten decided that a triangular offset from tailplane manufacture

looked great stuck in front of the fin of his 'Blunderbird 5' (biplane version) and since that day, O best beloved, all the 'Blunderbirds' you see, as well as all those you don't see, have free fin strakes.

Although a 'plan' was mentioned earlier, in fact each boy got a Graupner-style exploded view (duplicate at school or office) and advice as he went along. 4 mm. ply firewalls were common to all 'Blunderbirds' including Mark I, which was a glider. Two vertical 3/16 in. dowels were glued very firmly to the back of each firewall, projecting $\frac{1}{4}$ in. top and bottom. Reason for special glueing is that in the bicycle u/c or glider versions the bottom end of the dowels strike playground, runway, or car roof, and break loose, chewing-up underside of fuselage. An engine or lead-filled glider nose block was then attached to a second 'false' firewall and this retained by bands. The detachable glider nose block was to allow boys to convert to power upon achieving affluence. On my R/C version I omitted this knock-off engine mounting because I did not anticipate landings heavy enough to tear out my engine. Nor did I anticipate a wing-loading of 20! oz. per square foot!

'Blunderbird 2' is the standard aircraft. '3' is identical but for a trike u/c. In the 'I' a ply skid-cum-towhook replaces the u/c, and a block the motor. Naturally you can't expect maxes from such a solid beast. For 'Blunderbird 4' you build a simple cabin where the wing should have gone, cut a replacement hole in the fuselage bottom and increase dihedral. The '5' possibly gave the kids more fun than any other version. A Babe Bee is marginal on power and she will wallow around at two or three feet for ages followed by a whooping horde who can almost keep up. Any possessive spoilsport who wants to urge his 'Blunder-by' beyond the reach of clutching fingers can try a Golden Bee or a touch of the Nitros.