

THAT WORST DAY

As he put the car away after a fraught day, shopping with the family, pilot X looked up and admired the stars that were just starting to appear in the twilight sky. After weeks of mist and misery it looked as if at last tomorrow would be a good flying day, even if it was going to be cold. It was one of those winters where the weather was always awful on Sundays!

In excited anticipation pilot X put his equipment on charge before locking the garage and joining the family indoors. The evening weather forecast confirmed his assessment, Freezing overnight temperatures with a crisp and clear day to follow with only light winds expected. Soon there would be an end to the weeks of frustration.

The following morning dawned just as advertised. Pilot X resisted rushing off to the field early, reasoning that around noon would be the warmest part of the day. By 11:30 he could wait no more. Within fifteen minutes he was unloading his car at the flying field and enjoying a good natter with the lads. Thermals, of the underwear variety, were the order of the day and most had a drink from their hot flasks before heading for the circle.

After most had had their first flight a distinct air of euphoria and relief was evident amongst the flyers. Weeks of frustration had gone and as usual more time was spent chatting rather than flying. There had been a steady flow of modellers arriving at the field and pilot X took the opportunity to return to his car for warmth, hot coffee and more chat

Eventually pilot X wandered back to the circle for another fly, remembering to borrow a glow battery from one of the other chaps. The good weather had brought out quite a number of flyers and a busy afternoon followed. At about three o'clock pilot X noticed that the sun was starting to get low and that there was a marked drop in temperature.

Probably less than half an hours flying time remained. Resisting the temptation to say 'I'll just have one more flight' pilot X prepared for his last flight of the day.

The engine started reluctantly even with the borrowed glow battery. Pilot X carried out the usual pre-flight checks, controls, full and free movement at full throttle, SMART, patch clear and the aircraft was away. The thought of having to clean the de-fuel the model passed through his mind as he performed his aerobatics and he resolved to fly the tank dry. He had just completed a climb to height and was about to enter a spin when something seemed odd. It was as if the throttle had closed just a split second before he had moved the stick. Still, she was responding OK now and he concentrated on getting a clean exit after three turns. As he opened the throttle the engine picked up cleanly at first but then slowed to idle. Thinking he might be low on fuel he instinctively tickled the throttle up and down and was rewarded with intermittent bursts of power. The aircraft was now just upwind of the circle and its antics had attracted the attention of the other modellers. Just as well. Pilot X was still trying to figure out what on earth was happening and continued to move the throttle back and forth. The next he knew the throttle was wide open and the aircraft was in a shallow banked dive straight towards him. Suddenly he realised what had been happening but it was too late.

The crash was spectacular, the shallow angle of impact spreading debris in a long line from the point of first contact. What happened? Asked one of his colleagues. Pilot X was almost too ashamed to explain.

Why did pilot X's aircraft behave the way it did just before it crashed?

And what was the most likely cause of pilot X's predicament in the first place?

Answers:

1/ The apparent loss of throttle response was in fact the R/C systems low battery warning – from the transmitter. This is easily forgotten some time after purchase of the equipment!

2/ Charging the batteries in the cold – Nicads don't like the cold for either charging or discharging and may only operate at around 50% of their capacity. Always store and charge them in 'room temperature' surroundings and use a battery monitor at the field, if not fitted in the plane use frequently in cold conditions.