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Radio-controlled airplane flies across the United States

By: Robert Reilly

A group of model airplane enthusiasts will fly a battery-powered radio-controlled (RC) airplane designated as a parkflyer in all 48 contiguous states. A parkflyer is a small RC plane typically flown in a field such as a local park or soccer field. The name they have given this adventure is Wings Across America 2008 or WAA-08 for short.

Bob Reilly is pilot number 29.

This type of project has been attempted before. What sets this project apart from all the others ever attempted or completed is that the pilots will hand deliver the plane from pilot to pilot. The plane will never be shipped by mail to its next destination. This method will be creating a chain of pilots that personally fly, then hand off the model to the next pilot, all across the continental United States. In the end, the model airplane will have flown in all 48 states and cover a distance of more than 14,000 miles along the way. It will end its journey at home field about 12 months after its maiden flight in eastern Virginia. Currently, more than 250 pilots have registered to take part in this history making project.

WAA-08 is the brainchild of Frank Geisler of Gloucester, Va. Geisler is an avid RC pilot who also enjoys discussing flying with people all over the U.S.A. using the RC Forums on the World Wide Web. When he discussed this project with some of his on-line friends, it was received with such enthusiasm that the project was born of this energy. All that was needed were hundreds of RC pilots across the U.S. in every state willing to fly the plane at their home field and then drive to the next pilot, thus forming a nationwide network of pilots who would fly across America.

That's when I became involved. I was contacted through the on-line forum RCGroups.com to participate due to my love of RC flying which has been a passion for 30 years. Since I fly my planes in the field behind my house, and the timing was right, I chose to fly this leg of the journey at the North East Aircraft Technology Fair in Shinopple in the Catskill Mountains. This is the largest fly-in of all electric remote controlled aircraft in the United States. There are only a small number of e-pilots in Pawling, but the hobby is expanding rapidly. The plane was flown by myself and then the plane was taken to the next pilot in Ridgefield, Conn., who will do the same.

The equipment used for WAA-08 has been donated by the participating pilots. Fortunately, one of the pilots owns Stevens AeroModels in Colorado Springs, Colo. Bill Stevens donated a plane called a SQuiRT which stands for Simple, Quiet Reliable Trainer. This tough little 38" wingspan parkflyer is easy to fly and should take the abuse that more than 320 pilots can dish out. Stevens also talked his Horizon Hobby sales representative into donating their newest high-tech radio system to go along with the plane. Batteries and a charger were donated by Common Sense RC. To insure the batteries for the plane were safely transported, Big Al's Hobby Supply from Tupelo, Miss., donated a Lipo sack.

The RC community has really embraced the idea of flying this plane across America. I have had the privilege to speak with so many wonderful people participating in this adventure. I have never been in a hobby that has so many people willing to help one another. The sense of camaraderie demonstrated by the pilots in this project has been outstanding, and I am humbled by it all, but yet proud to be a participant. The RC community is always looking at ways to promote the hobby and introduce the fun, excitement, and learning opportunities this hobby has to offer to young adults. What better way is there then to fly a model airplane around the USA?

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