

# World in motion

**Action vehicles imply movement, excitement and momentum. With technology advancing all the time, those themes have never been so prevalent.**

**T**o any self-confessed gadget freak, this year's Toy Fair would have appeared to be stuffed full of hovering, buzzing micro-helicopters and high speed RC cars. Anyone who grew up around the model and hobby business will tell you that learning to fly a conventional model helicopter back in the day required a degree in engineering and the manual dexterity of a bomb disposal expert. Plus, the things back then were huge!

Now there are micro 'copters for indoor flight powered by cutting edge motors and batteries that give amazing power to weight ratio. Even better, you now only need download an app to your iPhone and the inbuilt accelerometer of the handset means you can fly the 'copter simply by shifting the angle and direction of the controls.

David Rawlings of Flying Toys, himself a veteran of the UK hobby business, saw the potential early on for a new breed of RC flight toys that could bridge the gap between hobby stores and Toy shops.

"Following the launch of Silverlit's original classic 2-channel Picoo Z micro helicopter in 2006, that started the whole indoor phenomenon, Chinese manufacturers have increased the specification every year, offering 3 and 4 channel choppers, plus more sophisticated styles with lightweight alloy bodies and electronic gyros," David told TnP.

"For 2011 Silverlit has taken its innovation one step further, as retail customers demand a helicopter that doesn't just fly, but offers added value.

"The new coaxial three channel Heli Blaster for instance features a missile firing facility, allowing six lightweight plastic rockets to be launched independently, before landing to

reload. A prefabricated target has been included for prospective fighter pilots to practice their skills. Simply launch the rockets by pressing the set top buttons, accompanied by a special lighting effect that illuminates whilst shooting.

"Meanwhile, Silverlit's innovative Sky Cam helicopter can take up to three minutes of video, or loads of photos whilst flying, using the remote control transmitter. A contra rotating rotor design achieves an extremely stable hover, combined with an electronic heading lock gyro for superb directional stability, to take the clearest pictures, which can be downloaded to a computer via a USB lead using the graphic software provided.

For 2011 though David's most significant new development is the Parrot AR.Drone. Featuring powerful brushless motors providing generous lift from the four propellers, with a package of sophisticated electronics, to make it easy and fun to fly.

Offering the world's first quadricopter designed to be flown indoors or outside with an iPhone®, iPod touch® or iPad™ using touch screen Wi-Fi® technology, the Augmented Reality Drone features an autopilot facility to take itself off, hover at a predetermined height, and land automatically upon command.

Suitable for both beginners and experts, the AR.Drone features a robust carbon fibre framework, with a tough foam protective body for indoor use. A streamlined hull is provided for flying outside, with pairs of red and green LED lights fitted front and back to assist orientation.

The AR.Drone generates its own Wi-Fi connection with a range of up to 50 metres, incorporates an onboard computer, two electronic gyroscopes, an ultrasound altimeter



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**Flying Toys**

and accelerometer, plus vertical and horizontal cameras streaming live video to the on screen display.

As if this wasn't enough technology to satisfy any enthusiast, Parrot's AR.Pursuit augmented reality game allows interactive combat between AR.Drones, with up to three players!

At a RRP of £279.99 it's not cheap but having exhibited at the recent Gadget Show Live at the NEC, David confirms that there is plenty of consumer and retailer interest.

In cars the conventional RC model is also seeing some interesting developments, designed to make RC more accessible to the non-hobbyists.

At Nuremberg the hobby halls featured representation from the likes of Tamiya, Kyosho and others, but at this level there is little attraction for toy retailers who may want to stock RC vehicles without the hassle of having to supply spare parts and go-faster elements.

However, Toy stores looking for a 'one box' approach to RC cars should be encouraged by new developments from companies like Flair and Tomy, which were unveiled at this year's toy shows.

Flair's Lazer Stunt Chasers, as the name suggests, uses an infra-red projection to direct the car regardless of which way it ends up, while Tomy displayed a line of micro RC cars that could be paired to specific controllers and allow multi-car races.

These would help deliver a middle way between high performance hobby kits and the basic RC in a box end of the spectrum.

