



# The First 30 Years

## Flying Toys Ltd celebrates a special anniversary

For those of us with longer memories than others, the development of a viable rotary wing machine was a technical problem fraught with difficulties. Dieter Schlüter was a pioneer and Morley Helicopters produced a flyable version of the pod and boom Bell 47, made famous in the TV series 'M.A.S.H'. Now, one of the most stunning innovations in modelling was the introduction of the micro helicopter, which caused quite a stir, everyone it seemed had to have one.

At the forefront of bringing this technological revolution within reach of everyone was Flying Toys Ltd of Shoeburyness in Essex who celebrate their 30th anniversary this year.

### Beginnings

Flying Toys began as DPR Models operating from a small factory unit in Westcliff-on-Sea making catapult launched gliders. Not the sophisticated style of model we now take for granted. The philosophy of the company was to provide inexpensive flyable models that could be built quickly and easily by complete novices. The kits were supplied complete with adhesive and, if assembled following simple instructions, would produce a model with excellent flight performance. The man behind this venture was David Rawlins, a modeller through and through since childhood. David's early career was with Keil Kraft where he had an interview a year before leaving school. Much against the advice of his headmaster he joined the company after taking 'O' Levels.

By 1970 David had progressed to design draughtsman, jointly responsible for producing the KK SE5A and the Jetex range. He was also involved in upgrading the Super 60 design for radio. A few years later he was promoted to Production Manager. David admits it was a difficult decision to uproot himself from a solid job to establish DPR models in 1978 but has since been more than vindicated! At one point the company were producing over 1000 kits per day.

### Partnership

David met his wife Janine just after starting the business and they married in 1980, since when she has been deeply involved, becoming full time business partner after the original business partnership was dissolved. During this time they have attended many shows and promoted modelling in schools with various contests and also running competitions for children at major exhibitions throughout the country. Publicity and the production of eye-catching catalogues and flyers have long been key to the success of Flying Toys. Indeed Janine was a model featured with many of the products. This task was then undertaken by, their



Janine with the van and stand at a 1979 show the year after the business began



Kids competition at Filey 1983. How many are still modellers?

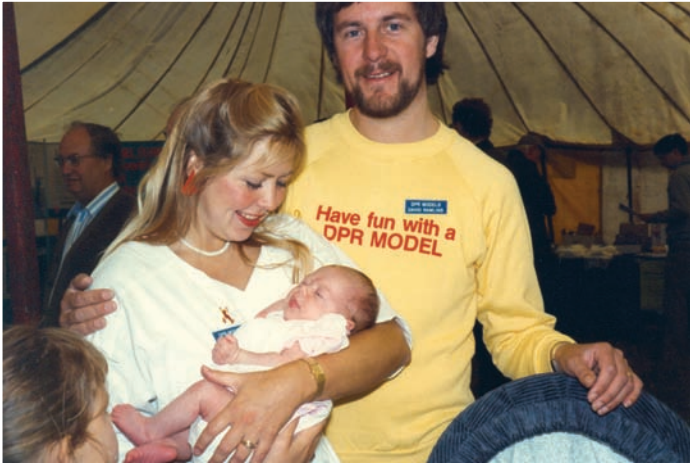
daughter Jenilee as a youngster. She has now grown into the stunning young lady who graces the pages of all the latest catalogues alongside their Godson Ryan, a real family business.

Times were beginning to change and in order to reflect this the name of the company was registered as Flying Toys Ltd in 2003 to better reflect the nature of the business. David has never had a problem with his products being called toys, as he believes that if by exposing a wider young public to the joys of model flying in any form, the seeds of a long-term modeller may be sown. Indeed the products in the latest publication for 2008 range from fairly simple items to a myriad of kites and flying machines to a sophisticated

and very new twin rotor Chinook-style helicopter that will still fit in the palm of your hand. Among the innovations for this year is a twin motor EDF jet, which is steered by varying the thrust of each engine.

### Frustrating

Sometimes supply can be frustrating. David quotes an example of last Christmas when a delivery of a 40-foot container of Sky Challenger helicopters arrived on Christmas Eve! Fearing the worst that the stock would 'hang about' he was pleasantly surprised to find it all sold in the week when business re-opened after the festivities. The nature of the Toy trade means that all trends have to be anticipated long in advance of any sales. This causes problems in itself, as demonstrated by more products than expected being available for market early in the year. David and his team burnt many a midnight candle making sure products were photographed and the catalogue signed off just in time for the Spring Fair.



David and Janine with new arrival Jennilee on her first visit to the Nationals...

"There are some amazing new products in the catalogue this year, more than we could possibly have anticipated. But we are still seeking innovative products to add to the range. We have just run with the flow in business terms, however we have placed orders to take us up to next Christmas already" said David. To illustrate the growth in the mini heli and model trade he cites Silverlit who began the mini flight craze with the X-Twin planes and Picoo-Z just over three years ago. It has since spread worldwide and they are now producing around 2 million items a month! This in a production unit that has doubled in size and staff, yet still proved not enough to meet the demand in peak season. David says: "The space in our Catalogue for Silverlit was two pages in 2005 and now it has grown to twenty-four, with the new mini micro helicopters being just unbelievable." To reinforce this, he told me that the storage space for Flying Toys is now six times the size of that when DPR began, and now occupies five warehouses!

**When is Micro Simply Enormous?**

Does that sound like a conundrum? Not if you are Willard Wigan. This genius of a micro sculptor is a self-confessed addict of the Picoo Z series and has several of them. He decided to immortalise the mini marvel by sculpting one of solid gold that sits atop a pinhead. He was on hand to show his incredible 2 mm long sculpture and to demonstrate the Picoos at the Spring Fair on the Flying Toys stand. The body of this heli-gem is solid gold but the rotors are carved from black nylon to the correct section and scale. It even has the rotor shaft and control faithfully reproduced. As the latest addition to his unbelievable Art Collection see the Willard Wigan website, there is no doubt that this is probably the most expensive micro helicopter in the world!



David Rawlins presents mini helicopter fan Willard Wigan with a new Picoo-Z



...and now she's all grown up and gracing the pages of the catalogue. The trio seen here at The Spring Fair last year

**The Future for Flying Toys**

After all the amazing advances in micro technology introduced during the last 30-years, David and Janine Rawlins cannot imagine what may be available in the future!

Their prediction for the next innovative international craze to follow the Picoo Z phenomenon is miniature indoor and outdoor Ornithopters, offering the new I-Fly Vamp from Interactive and Silverlit I-Bird, that have now achieved a degree of sophistication to satisfy even the most demanding aeromodeller, but are easy enough to fly for a complete novice.

Meanwhile using further technical wizardry, simply click on to the Flying Toys website to see the company's comprehensive collection for 2008, and view the latest models using video in action.

The website additionally offers an opportunity to literally turn the pages on their colourful 72 page on-line catalogue for immediate reference, and to order an A4 glossy copy!  
**RCMW**



Solid gold carved Picoo-Z on a pinhead by artist Willard Wigan

**Contact Details**  
**Flying Toys Ltd**  
 www.flyingtoys.com  
 01702 295110  
**Willard Wigan**  
 www.willard-wigan.com