Feet on ground, heads in clouds

Radio-controlled planes let pilots enjoy the thrills without the spills

By Bill Marvel

Staff Writer of The Dallas Morning News

Stunt pilot.

The very name dazzles. Who wouldn't like to bust loose, tear up the sky with hammerhead stalls and Immelmanns and outside loops, doing impossible things as though gravity and all other earthly laws have been suspended?

Except ...

It takes months to get a pilot's license, for one thing, and years of practice to do aerobatics. And a sturdy plane costs upwards of \$100,000. And there is always the possibility of a crash. Just a month ago, a member of a Canadian aerobatic team plunged to his death into Lake Ontario.

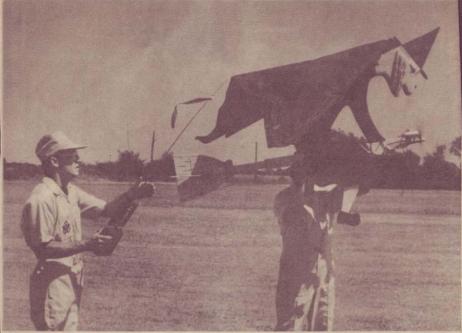
The members of the Lone Star Squadron have thought about all these things. That's why none of them has a pilot's license. Their planes cost at most about \$1,500 each. And when they crack up, they always walk away.

The squadron is the opening act at the Airfair Addison air Please see RADIO-CONTROLLED on Page 16C.



The Dallas Morning News: Ira Rosenberg

Lone Star Squadron members (from left) Ivan Shomer, Dick Aley, Alan Buckner, Tommy Meyer, Don Huffhines and Laverne Chandler can do some hair-raising stunts.



Dick Aley's flying witch always enchants the spectators.

The Dallas Morning News: Ira Rosenberg

Radio controlled stunt planes are marvels of miniaturization

Continued from Page 1C.

show next weekend. But don't look for squadron members in the air. Their planes will be up there, but they'll be on the ground where it's safe, flying by radio control.

"We've been doing this a year and a half," says Chris Lynes, who manages the squadron. Next week's show will be a kind of homecoming. The idea for the squadron was born two years ago at the Addison air show, when members of three local radio control model airplane clubs exhibited their planes and put on a flying demonstration. "Everybody loved it," says Mr. Lynes, "and we thought, what could we do if we got organized?"

The national Academy of Model Aeronautics has dozens of sanc-

"These are not toys.

They are precision
machines. They can do
everything real airplanes
can do and a lot more.
They're just small."

- Ivan Shomer

tioned show teams across the country. The Lone Star Squadron is just one of the newest and, so far, the only team in Texas.

"We fly probably 10 shows a year, including private shows," says Mr. Lynes. "We flew for the Ross Perot company picnic and for the ground-breaking at the new Alliance Airport."

The team's 23 members wear powder-blue jump suits and matching baseball caps (from Sears), and they try to present a program as polished and entertaining as full-size air shows. They can put a dazzling array of flying machines into the air, from precision models of real planes to flying gadgets and gizmos that defy the laws of aerodynamics.

Airfair information

Airfair Addison takes place Sept. 30 and Oct. 1, at the Addison Airport, 4505 Claire Chennault. Advance tickets, \$7 for adults and \$2.50 for children, are available through Rainbow Ticketmaster and at Sears stores, or at the gates for \$10 and \$4. For information, call 931-1192.

There is the flying Porsche sports car, for example, which is pursued during the show by the flying Stop Sign.

"The aerodynamic qualities of the sign leave something to be desired," says its pilot, Ivan Shomer. "When the engine quits, it dies."

The squadron's Addison finale this year will be an aerial combat. "We fly four planes with crepe streamers 60-75 feet long," says Mr. Shomer. "The objective is for your opponent to cut off the tail without hitting your eighber."

hitting your airplane."

Charlie, at 9 inches tall the squadron's shortest member, will bail out of one of the planes and, with any luck at all, make a radio-controlled descent. (At the McKinney Air Show, according to his controller, Allen Buckner, Charlie hit a thermal and kept right on going up.)

But the real show-stopper and crowd-pleaser is the Witch, a figure in a flapping black cape who zooms around on her broomstick, spewing smoke and cackling.

All this is possible because of dramatic advances in electronics and miniaturization during the past decade. The entire radio system that controls the witch weighs only 12 ounces, according to her pilot, Dick Aley.

"These are not toys," says Ivan Shomer. "They are precision machines. They can do everything real airplanes can do and a lot more. They're just small." Mr. Shomer put in about 200 hours constructing his Enforcer, a sleek, cherry-red plane that looks—and handles—like a jet. In fact, most radio-controlled planes spend far more time on the workbench under construction than they do in the air.

"You got some macho people who say it (a crash) doesn't bother them. But when they go home, it does."

- Tommy Meyer

That's why, when a \$1,000 investment and 200 hours of loving work ends up as a pile of balsa wood in the middle of a field, it's enough to make a grown man cry.

"You got some macho people who say it doesn't bother them," says Tommy Meyer, a squadron member. "But when they go home, it does."

Not all accidents end in disaster. Squadron member Laverne Chandler was flying along peacefully one day over Frisco when his Laser 200 ran into a buzzard. "Boy," he says, "there were feathers all over the place."

The bird plunged about 100 feet before regaining its equilibrium and wobbling off.

Mr. Chandler was able to land with nothing worse than a broken prop.

But the occasional hazards are worth it. For Ivan Shomer, as for all the pilots of the Lone Star Squadron, time spent in the air is really time spent in the cockpit, soaring in the imagination.

"I never look at the control box," says Mr. Shomer. "I picture myself in the cockpit."