

Pilot Profile: Eric Brandenburg

by Russell Knetzger

Last month Art Schmidt was our lead-off Pilot Profile because at age 88 he is the oldest active pilot at our field, just edging out Leo Pachucki, also 88.

This month we profile our youngest pilot, Eric Brandenburg, age 14, who soloed at age 13 after only a handful of lessons. He is the closest thing Floyd Katz, Eric's flight instructor, has seen to a "prodigy" in model aviation.

Since soloing, Eric has continued his torrid pace of advancement.

After mastering his basic trainer, Eric chose for a next-step model a "Funtana 90." It's a moderately large "3-D" plane, capable of vertical suspended flight, and other advanced flying such as aerobatics.

Almost simultaneously Eric started flying "combat" with a "Spad," designed for the .15 sized engine popular in combat flying. As fellow 2004 graduate pilot Andy Runte, DVM, said, "Combat is great for quickly sharpening pilot skills." It must have worked that way for Eric, too, because this year he added helicopter flying.

What's next? "Scale Aerobatics," answers Eric. That is an obscure part of model aviation, not flown in Wisconsin at all, certainly no Wisconsin club sponsors such an event, and neither is it a common type of model flying nationally.

Not to be confused with "RC Scale" (of which the club saw a computer slide show last meeting of the Phoenix 2005 Scale Masters championships), "Scale Aerobatics" consists of flying "Pattern" but with a model that is a scale version of a full size aerobatics plane. Eric chose a large scale "YAK 54," an established Russian entry into international full size aerobatics competition. Eric is pictured is with his YAK.

The YAK model weighs 17 pounds, and is 30% of the full size. Its wing span is 87 inches, and is powered by a 50 cc gasoline fueled engine. Eric has one test flight on it, and it seems tail heavy to Eric.

So far not too much sadness has entered Eric's model aviation life. The one big exception was a



Eric Brandenburg with his 30% YAK 54

crash of his helicopter, too extensive to merit re-pairs. Eric has analyzed the crash as a failure of the switch harness. His new helicopter is to be bigger and will have a better quality harness.

For flying this winter Eric wants to equip his Fun-tana with skis to function on snow. He seemed interested in the suggestion to use floats instead, because the bottom ridge better resists sideslip on takeoff and landing, and because it allows summer flying off of water. He has already observed the MARKS Club mid-July Float Fly at Bong Recreation in Kenosha County. Bong has ideal shallow ponds for water float flying.

Where is model aviation going to take Eric? Into a lifetime affiliation with aviation, he hopes. "I've loved aviation since I was small," he says, "and I want to pursue an aviation career." He considered aeronautics at Editor Bill Stiller's alma mater, "Boys Tech" as we all knew it. But instead he chose Rufus King High School on the north side, now the MPS flagship school for the college bound. Eric lives off Howell Avenue a few blocks north of Mitchell International Airport, so high school each day is a long trip.

Eric next seeks his full-scale pilot license. He has 1-1/2 hours in an AT-6. The US Air Force may be a route to a pilot's career, if that remains a goal.