

Borders Model Boat Club

Starting Out in Boat Modelling

At a first glance, a quick look at the web site of a model shop can come as a bit of a shock as the goods on offer seem to carry very high price tags. However the hobby need not be as expensive as all that. Prices vary a lot between suppliers, and a browsing session on the internet soon finds the cheapest supplier.

If you look at E-Bay, be wary of suppliers from outside the UK. There is not only the risk of nothing being delivered, but also a shock if the Customs and Excise Officers intercept the parcel. You can end up with an unreasonable import agent charge on top of any VAT etc which they demand. Also be aware that foreign sourced radio equipment, even if it carries the same brand name, may not comply with UK and EU law. (Look for a “CE” mark on the unit)

The advantage of joining a club is that “club boats”, owned by the club, are available for short term loans, while you get the hang of things, and decide what type of model you wish to own. Club members can advise on where to get things, what sort of things to get, and may even have old gear to pass on to get you started. Sometimes former members donate boats and equipment to the club to pass on to beginners.

What Type of Boat?

To a large extent, this is up to you, but there are restrictions imposed by the Regional Council on what may be sailed on Gunknowe Loch. Only electric or steam powered, or sailing boats are allowed. High speed surface skimming craft are banned. Yachts are more tricky to operate, but are great fun. Submarines tend to be very complex and temperamental, and require a lot of technical knowledge to operate satisfactorily. Detailed scale models can give a lot of satisfaction, but are often fragile. Some people like to operate a more functional model, and perhaps fit it with an on board video camera. Novelty models, like ducks, can be built. Talk to various club members (and look at their models) before deciding.

Do not be too ambitious with your first boat. It is best to build a cheap and simple rugged model with only steering and motor control to gain experience. More complex things such as lights, working fire hydrants, sound effects, video cameras, etc can come later.

Advantages / Disadvantages of Ready-Built Models

There are a lot of “Ready to Sail” models on the market at very reasonable prices, which include the radio, batteries, charger etc. All you do is charge the batteries and they will operate. Most of them are very good and do what they claim to do, and are often priced below the cost of a radio transmitter and receiver combination.

Obviously cost is the main advantage.

The cost has been kept down by the design of the electrical system. It has been designed to be used only in that model. The radio will probably be a two channel system whose range is much lower than normal radio gear. They are usually powered by two motors, and steering is done by motor control. Often the motors have no proportional speed control, but are simply on or off. There is little or no scope for adding extras to the model, without removing the radio supplied, and replacing it with conventional gear.

Buying Radio Equipment

Before buying your first radio gear, *ask for advice from a senior club member*. Look at the make and type of radio gear that other club members are using. It makes a lot of sense to use the same as if things go wrong, the problem can often be isolated by comparing your gear with another.

If you buy second hand gear, remember it is second hand for a good reason. Don't buy someone else's problem.

The radio frequency bands which can be used for model boats are 27Mhz, 40MHz and 2.4GHz. Equipment using the 27 and 40 band is gradually being replaced by the more versatile 2.4 GHz gear. (The sets with the short stub aerials are 2.4GHz) The Club recommends "Planet 5" radio as being extremely well built and reliable. The 5 channel transmitter and receiver combination is currently sold at £43 by Servo-Shop. (See below)

The little motors which drive the rudder are called servos. While transmitters and receivers are not interchangeable between manufacturers, any make of servo will work with any receiver, provided that the plugs match.

Electric Motors and Electronic Speed Controllers

Always seek advice from senior club members before purchasing electric motors or speed controllers. They have experience of the durability of the different makes.

Where to buy

In the Borders Region, I am not aware of any specialist model boat shops. Most things have to be bought via the internet.

The suppliers I use are:

www.shgmodels.com

This is a mail order company. You can't order on line, so have to telephone, or e-mail an order. They have a very good line of low cost vacuum formed model kits, which are easy to build. (I have built one)

www.howesmodels.co.uk

This is a well established model shop.

www.westbourne-model.co.uk

This is a well established model shop.

www.alwayshobbies.com

This is the long established "Hobbies" fretwork shop. They can supply materials and traditional model making things, as well as their own kits.

www.servoshop.co.uk

Deals mostly with model aircraft equipment, but often has the best prices for radio gear.

www.component-shop.co.uk

Usually has the best prices for good quality batteries and servos.