

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)

Joining a Club

The main advantage of joining a club is that often “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. Other 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.

The Club will have negotiated with the landowner and have obtained permission to sail boats on the water they are using.

The Club will probably have “experts”, often with engineering qualifications, to sort out problems regarding materials, hull construction, control and electrics.

If the Club is affiliated to an organisation such as the “Federation of Scottish Model Boat Clubs” they may have a third party liability insurance policy in place.

When joining a Club, it is best to ensure that they have a “Club Constitution” document, a “Club Rules” document and a “Junior and Vulnerable Persons Policy” document available.

Most Clubs have a policy of allowing prospective members to attend club functions for a few weeks before joining, to see if they will fit in.

What Type of Boat?

To a large extent, this is up to you, but there may be restrictions imposed by Local Authorities on what may be sailed on lakes and ponds. In the Borders Region we sail on Gunknowe Loch, where only electric or steam powered, or sailing boats are allowed. High speed surface skimming craft and IC engined 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 what appear to be 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 just what they claim to do, and are often priced below the cost of a radio transmitter and receiver combination. However you should examine the specification very carefully.

Obviously cost is very important.

For the cheapest models the cost will be kept down by the design of the electrical system. It will have 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. The boats are usually powered by two motors, and steering is done by motor control. Usually the motors have no proportional speed control, but are simply on or off, which makes precision steering and manoeuvring almost impossible. There will be little or no scope for adding extras to the model, without removing the radio supplied, and replacing it with conventional gear. Since the hulls are often quite solid, this may be a good option, but it will only be possible if the model has a moveable rudder.

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 them 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 will be second hand for a very good reason. Don't buy someone else's problem. Also be aware that foreign sourced radio equipment, even if it carries the same brand and model name, may not comply with UK and EU law. (Look for a “CE” mark on the unit)

The radio frequency bands which can be used for model boats in the UK are 27Mhz, 40MHz and 2.4GHz. Equipment using the 27 and 40MHz bands has virtually been replaced by the more versatile 2.4 GHz gear. (The sets with the short stub aerials are 2.4GHz) The Borders Model Boat Club currently recommends the Ripmax Saturn X4, X5 and X6 2.4GHz radio sets as being well built and reliable and low cost.

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. The cheap servos available on Ebay are suitable for model boats, as it is not disastrous if they fail. (These cheap servos should not be used in aircraft models)

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.

The type of speed controller you need will depend on the motors and type of batteries you are using. (See the help file “About_DC_Motors.pdf” on www.bordersmodelboatclub.yolasite.com)

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

tel: 01785-840308

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

tel: 01865 848000

This is a well established model shop.

www.alwayshobbies.com

tel: 01508 549330

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

tel: 01928 735225

Deals mostly with model aircraft equipment, but often has the best prices for radio gear. (also trades as Steve Webb Models)

www.component-shop.co.uk

tel: 0843 2898 528

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

www.inwoodmodels.com

tel: 01480 411519

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

GCH February 2017

The information given in this data sheet is given in good faith and is believed to be correct. However no liability can be accepted for any damage caused by following any advice given in the sheet.

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