just which combination of words should I use to begin this article? Remarkable, amazing, sensational? Anything less would certainly fail to describe the quality of this, the fourth event in a new era of aerobatics. The very fact that the three former RCM&E Freestyle champions - Ali Machinchy, Dave Stephens and Paul Skinner - were to feature in the flight order, guaranteed something special.

This year we were far better prepared - the date and venue was set early, allowing pilots to slot this event into their calendars without trouble. The Knebworth MFC conduct their annual ‘fly-in’ the day before our event, allowing several freestyle entrants the opportunity to use this excellent venue to camp overnight ready for Sunday’s competition. And, although the prediction of severe weather threatened to dampen our spirits, fortunately, this once again proved incorrect. Instead, light winds, sunshine and another record entry further enhanced the potential for the very best in 3D artistry. Pilots travelled from all parts of the country. Dave Drummond, ‘Sport’ class winner, came all the way from Ireland. Will he come again? “Absolutely!”

As was the case last year, the flight line contained a fair mix of model types and sizes along with a considerable variation of power source, including an electric model. Yes, a 3D capable two-metre Capiche, fresh from the workshop of accomplished designer, Malcolm Corbin. And very impressive it was too, particularly in the equally capable hands of our 2000 champ Dave Stephens, returning after a two-year absence. The ‘Funtana S’ used by Nathan Farrel-Jones, obviously based around the European full-size unlimited aerobatic design of some 10 years ago, is another new and very interesting variation. Its unusual wing shape and relatively long tail moment results in a pleasant and competent example for 3D flying. I recall a time when any degree of ‘excitement’ was an aerobatic model flying at something approaching 100mph, maybe with an eight-point roll thrown in during a pass down the flightline. Indeed, it’s still nice to see an eight-point roll being performed well, but that same degree of excitement within aerobatics can now be achieved at significantly lower airspeeds. It is easy to believe that 3D is a risky form of aerobatics, because the model is generally in close proximity to terra firma; the slightest ‘slip of the finger’ can be embarrassing! However, two factors tend to suggest the risks are not as great as one might think. There were two ‘crashes’ this year, one a small lightweight model flown by Luke Shaw, the other Lance Maher’s Synergy. The Synergy is a typical two metre YS 140 powered hi-tech package. Lance managed a ‘slip of the finger’ at rather low altitude. The consequential inverted arrival simply damaged the canopy and several other fairly minor areas that were easily repairable.

THE LONGEST DAY
So, the scene was set for the 2003 RCM&E Freestyle event and as the first flight approached already the Knebworth flying site began to fill with spectators - far more than previous years. It was a daunting prospect for first pilot off, Lance Maher - not helped by the fact that his YS F3A motor refused to start, meaning he was sent to the back of the flight order. The dubious ‘honour’ of first off, then, fell to Mike Williams. Mike has flown at all previous events and knows the routine well, introducing the expectant crowd to what the day had to offer. A further factor the expectant crowd would not have been aware of is that Mike, as always, was flying with his usual grace and elegance, but was slightly disadvantaged with his smaller, but nonetheless capable, ‘Corbin’ Capiche 80.

THE MODEL THAT STOLE THE SHOW!
No less than 90 Kokham 340 poly-lithium cells power the otherwise standard Capiche. Simply powered by a Hacker C-50 Acro motor coupled to a 4:1 gearbox and swinging a massive 22 x 12 prop, 2kw of power (over 3 horse-power) allows this model to 3D with the best of ‘em, as indeed it did!
Whenever we catch up with Martin Bell he’s always flying an own design (more power to his elbow), indeed this is his O.S. 46 powered Stiletto. First time at the competition, Martin was placed 5th in ‘Sport’.

A healthy crowd of supporters and spectators assembled to watch the proceedings and enjoy some outstanding performances.

A true master of his art.

What Ali Machinchy can’t do with a Capiche 140, isn’t worth knowing. Better still, he does it all at knee height!

And in case you don’t believe us, this is the 2M class electric Capiche during a prop-hanging low-level torque roll.

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A true master of his art.
At just 15 years old, young Nathan Farrel-Jones (pictured top right) has one hell of a bright future in model flying. The Funtana S is the first kit that he's built and he flew it like a hardened display professional into a convincing 2nd place in the Advanced class.

Nathan’s Funtana is powered by a YS 140 and has three digital and two coreless servos. It, and he, both flew beautifully.

Paul Skinner was just one of the many top fliers to enter this year, but one of the few to use streamers in his display. In typical Skinner style it worked well and enhanced the show. The model, incidentally, is his own Freestyle design called ‘Pulse’ - very impressive!

Paul Skinner’s ‘Pulse’ torque rolls for the judges and an inspired crowd.

ABOVE: Judges, Andy Nicholls and Peter Brett, really did have a tough job on their hands. Nobody would have changed places with either of them.

BELOW: Suffering engine problems and a heavy arrival, Lance Maher was unlucky this year... but he’ll be back!

BELOW: Freestyle aerobatics needs people like David Drummond who came all the way from N. Ireland to ‘clean up’ in the Sport class - a talented and genuine guy who deserved every bit of his win.

BELOW: Judges, Andy Nicholls and Peter Brett, really did have a tough job on their hands. Nobody would have changed places with either of them.
EVENT REPORT

It’s always great to welcome back pilots from past events, but it’s also important to attract new ones, if progress is to be achieved. Obviously, with the larger entry this year new pilots were likely to be seen. Nathan Farrel-Jones and Paul Marsten, just two examples of those new recruits, were soon to be seen ‘interfering’ with the top four places. I recall Paul Marsten dabbling with F3A several years ago, so he’s not a newcomer to the competition environment.

JUDGES
For the third year Andy Nicholls, now a 3D addict, finds it difficult to refuse an opportunity to witness this type of flying, despite the fact that it’s incredibly hard work watching some 50 flights in one day. Andy becomes really involved with every flight, no matter who the pilot may be. Peter Brett, once a sceptic, as so many have been in the past, is one of our most recent exponents, bringing a wealth of experience from his decade in F3A. Peter, also on the Power Tech Committee of the BMFA, now finds himself very surprised at the popularity of freestyle aerobatics. Interestingly, from a spectators point of view, when judging ‘criteria’ are obviously not an issue, it appears so easy to watch this type of flying. One might find it difficult to comprehend just how much effort is required of the judges. Conversely, F3A is relatively easy to judge, but increasingly difficult to watch. As has been said so many times before, this type of event would not be possible without such judges, but it is a huge advantage when they’re so hungry to watch the flying.

Thanks go to RCM&E for Capiche assistance in setting up site facilities and securing dates for the event. Finally, a big thank you to John Mee, Darren Mee and Martin Smith for helping out a rather busy Contest Director with the score calculations.

My sincere apologies to those I may have neglected to mention. There were just so many enthusiastic spectators expressing an interest as the day progressed that it simply became impossible to keep track of everyone and everything.

PROGRESS
For the first time we are in a position to consider numerous proposals from a number of pilots, judges and spectators. This is an excellent and encouraging development: it means all are thinking about the future of freestyle aerobatics!

There has recently been a meeting to discuss various issues - nothing too dramatic, mainly some contest rules and explanations of the judging / flying format. It is the right time to begin a process of small changes, although I see no reason for extreme alteration as the majority of those previously involved with this event appear very content.

Anyone is welcome to send suggestions that may improve our ‘freestyle package’ to freestyleaeros@yahoo.co.uk

LOOK TO THE FUTURE
I can only suggest that Freestyle aerobatics is increasing in popularity. Every pilot on every model flying site strives to fly some form of aerobatics and here we have something new to challenge the pilot (and judge), but perhaps more importantly entertain and inspire spectators. 3D is in the comparatively early stages of development; there is likely to be a long and interesting road ahead, something to motivate all model flyers. The ‘traditionalists’ may well argue the point, but I am in no doubt whatsoever that this is the future of aerobatics. RCM&E Freestyle enthusiasts potentially have control of the future of aerobatics, at least here in the UK. Don’t let it slip away!

RESULTS

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<th>Score</th>
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<td>Advanced</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ali Machinchy 782.5</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Nathan Farrel-Jones 757.0</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Dave Stephens 717.5</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Paul Marsten 680.0</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Lance Maher 680.0</td>
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<td>Sport</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>David Drummond 587.5</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Nathan Rawlins 517.5</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Paul Camilleri 487.0</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Robert Castle 440.0</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Martin Bell 415.0</td>
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Eighteen year old Robert Castle had been flying just a year and a half when he entered this year’s event. Model is a Flair O.S. 91 four-stroke.

The Drummond ‘Hype’ strutting its stuff; O.S. 90X, Genesis throttle pipe and careless servos make it simply dance.