

Bill Olson  
Central Coast Radio Control Flying - History

Did you know that at one time there was a Central Coast model aircraft club called The Central Coast Radio Flyers? The "Radio Flyers" tag was adopted briefly in the mid 70s. However, before that Radio Control flying around Gosford began in the early 1970s.

Founding member radio control flyers in 1972 included Dr John Clarke, who became club president, Roy Sommersby, Bill Woods, Rodney Woods, Ian Clarke and Greg Waters. Roy Sommersby at that time was the Australian C/L combat champion and also held many Australian free flight records.

They were soon joined by Ken Newton, Eric Keech, Ellis Rowe and two control line flyers Bob and Bruce Newcombe. The Newcombe brothers converted to R/C shortly after joining.

The first Central Coast model aero club meeting was held in John Clarke's lounge room at Terrigal in 1972. Afterwards the club met in the now closed Terrigal Sailing Club at the Haven. Bill Woods became the driving force in RC flying in those early years. He later moved on to full size planes and was one of the pioneers behind the Warnervale airstrip.

Proportional radio sets were scarce and expensive in the early 70s. Back then sets cost from \$350 upwards and individual servos were \$25. The sets were analogue with no computer controls.

John Clarke operated an OS radio, from OS Engines, while Greg Waters owned an early Futaba set. When Ken Newton arrived from Sydney he brought with him a single stick Australian Silvertone set. Kraft (US) and Titan (Australian) sets were also popular makes.

Many of the early flyers had started with C/L and learning to fly R/C was a tricky exercise. However Central Coast flyers were taught by Newcastle Aeromodellers led by Maurie Dick, who distributed the US made Kraft radios, set up on mode II. This explains why Newcastle and Central Coast flyers mostly use mode II, even today

Lost planes were, and still are, an expensive setback. Bill Woods lost a model with a new OS 60 Gold Head while flying at Bateau Bay in 1972. After a fruitless late Sunday search, the club put an ad in the local paper. A woman finally rang to say the model was sitting in a tree near her backyard. She had seen it there some days earlier and was wondering what to do when she saw the ad. Later on fly-aways would not be so lucky.

The first time I spotted radio control models was in 1972 at the old The Entrance airstrip near Bateau Bay. This area is now occupied by sports fields and a High School. They drew a big crowd on Sundays because of the nearby Entrance road. The club however was soon on the move because permanent flying fields were hard to find, even in those days. By the time I had decided to join they were no longer at Bateau Bay and for a time I was unable to locate them.

The club flew brief stints at Gosford racecourse and Wyong racecourse. The club also flew at other sites, but was constantly being moved on.

When I finally wanted to join in June 1973 the club had moved to the back of Berkley Vale near the railway line. Bill Woods was the club secretary and he taught me to fly on an Australian made Titan buddy box cabled set. Bill's favourite trick was the high speed inverted rudder tip grass grazing pass, which to this day I cannot perform.

Because many members had been control line flyers they flew R/C the same way, standing in the middle of the field and doing left hand circuits around themselves. We never learnt right

hand circuits. This made taxiing from the pits an interesting exercise as both you and the aircraft were crossing an active runway.

Later, when I began visiting other clubs in Sydney and Newcastle I was told that they only flew from in front of the pits, so I quickly learnt to fly in either direction. Slowly this idea was introduced to the Central Coast club but for a while there were dual flying positions on the field.

The Berkely Vale field was surrounded by tall gum trees, which you flew over to approach for landing. I left the wing of my Hustler in a top branch while learning to land there. Despite the trees, the Berkeley Vale field had excellent runways which were scraped out by one of the members, Rex Datsun, an earthmoving operator. Rex flew a Keil Kraft Super 60 tail dragger.

The club's first completely lost aircraft happened at Berkely Vale. I and other flyers saw Jack Grant's Hustler disappear late one Sunday afternoon across the railway line after a dead stick, but it proved to be a mystery that was never solved. Despite weeks of searching, the plane was never seen again.

Unlike today, radio sets were built in Australia and foreign equipment was heavily taxed. The two main local brands were made in Sydney by Silvertone and Titan. Flying was on 27 MHz AM which gave a solid link, as CB radios were yet to become popular.

The Australian made sets were very advanced for their time and surprisingly powerful. The Silvertone keyboard had been introduced with channel spacings down to 15Khz. Successful flying demonstrations were done on single 15 KHz spacings using the locally made radios. However as Japanese sets became more prevalent, wider spacing was the norm. Each channel was twin colour coded and flyers were expected to have the same two colour ribbons on their TX aerial.

The Berkeley Vale site was finally lost to developers in the late 70s and model flying moved to Tuggerah and a new era.  
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