

Horsham & District Radio Control Model Club

Learning to fly a radio controlled model aircraft

Part eight - What to do when the unexpected happens

As this is something you're not expecting it will probably surprise you. This is natural, but a good radio modeller will be able to react in a positive way to the unexpected problem. This is mainly because he's probably experienced it before or at least knows what to do. One of the most common problems is when your engine suddenly quits. This could be for a number of reasons, or simply because you have run out of fuel- How long have you been flying?

I'll come back to 'Dead Stick' landings later, but there are many things that can go wrong. Sometimes a piece of the plane might fall off, in this case you would immediately throttle back, check all the functions, and perform a controlled landing, preferably away from any spectators. This is probably when you would intentionally try to avoid landing on the strip, but keep the model a safe distance from any people, including yourself. It is always advisable to try to find any parts that detach themselves, so that the model can be repaired, but also to collect any 'rubbish' and stop it fouling up the farmer's machines etc.

If a catastrophic failure occurs, i.e. the wings detach from the fuselage, then you have a much more serious problem to deal with. Firstly throttle your engine back, or stop it if possible. It's unlikely to slow the model down, but if it's stopped, then you might limit the damage it's going to suffer.

As you were flying within the BMFA safety rules, the probability is that your model will crash in 'open' land, therefore not injuring or damaging anything else. This is why it is so important to follow them at all times.

If your model does crash, conduct your own 'crash investigation' and try to establish exactly why it happened. If there was a structural failure of the aircraft make a mental note of it, so that you build extra reinforcement in that particular area of your next model. If it was a radio failure, send it back to the manufacturers for a full service, and replace any 'suspect' components. If it saves your next model, then it will be money well spent.

Finally I said I'd come back to 'Dead Stick' landings. If your engine suddenly quits, don't panic. Call 'Dead Stick' so that your fellow modellers realise you have no option but to land. They should be able to delay their landing, until your model has been safely removed from the strip.

Maintain airspeed, even if this means putting in some 'down' to achieve it. Hopefully you will have been flying at a sensible altitude! The next bit is all about judgement; most models will glide, but try to gauge how fast your model is descending. Try to fly your normal approach, but if anything, slightly higher than normal. If necessary 'cut the corners' of the approach to line up the model. All this will come with practice, but try to fly as smoothly as possible. Happy Landings!