

Extreme Aerobatics Champion - Frazer Briggs

Contributed by Janice Angus

IN NOVEMBER, the Papakura Manukau Aero Modellers' Club hosted an RC Bandit sponsored fly-in which featured a demonstration of extreme aerobatics by Frazer Briggs (aka "Bogan").

Frazer is considered the most skilled IMAC (International Miniature Aerobatic Club) competition pilot in the country and has represented New Zealand internationally for over 10 years. I was fortunate enough to speak to Frazer and find out a little about his background and achievements, so far, in the top echelon of international aerobatics competitions.

Through his father Mike's interest in aero modeling, Frazer was first introduced to the hobby as a 3 or 4 year old. He started flying at 7 and at 15 began competing at club level in the Waikato. At 18 he traveled to Australia for his first international competition. By 1997 Frazer was becoming well known in international model aerobatic circles and was the first New Zealand pilot to be invited to compete in the TOC (Tournament of Champions) competition in the USA. Entry to this tournament is by invitation only and only the best of the best are invited to compete.

From then on, Frazer has been regularly traveling to the States and all over the world competing with success both as an individual and as a NZ Team member in IMAC competitions. His results include:

- 4th, 1999 Tournament of Champions
- 3rd, 2003 Tucson Aerobatic Shootout
- 1st, 2004 Tucson Aerobatic Shootout
- 3rd, 2005 Tucson Aerobatic Shootout

The main annual competition for Frazer is the Tucson Aerobatic Shootout which is held in Arizona every October. This year Frazer finished 7th overall in the invitational category.

Categories of competition

There are two categories for IMAC competitions – Precision and Freestyle. For international competitions, the governing body annually sets the schedule of manoeuvre sequences for precision flying. Every manoeuvre includes the basic aerobatic elements of lines, rolls, loops, stall turns, spins and snaps. In competition, pilots are flying and judged on the same sequence of manoeuvres, though the prevailing weather conditions at the time are a factor to contend with.

The Freestyle section is where pilots can let loose and demonstrate their skill

and originality in a 3 minute sequence of extreme manoeuvres. Freestyle is judged on 4 basic criteria – originality, versatility, harmony and rhythm and execution.

As with any sport, when competing at an elite level, a lot of time is spent practicing and perfecting the routines. Generally, Frazer will practice up to 3 times a week, averaging around 10 hours in total. In the lead up to a major competition the time



Frazer Briggs at a recent demonstration for the Papakura Manukau Aero Modellers' Club.



Firing up "The Beast", Frazer's Raven. Assisted by (at right) Gwyn Avenell, NZ Scale Model representative.



Jarrod Briggs, Frazer's 9 year old son. A keen flyer following in dad's footsteps.

spent practicing increases. This year in Tucson he had a weeks worth of practice in the Arizona desert under extreme conditions of 35 to 40 degrees Celsius.

Practicing for perfection

At Clevedon Frazer flew the same plane he competed with in Tucson this year – a prototype Raven by EG Aircraft with a 3.1m wingspan. It is a plane he helped design and which has performed beyond expectations. For competition it is powered by a DA-200 engine but flew with a 150

sized engine for our display and certainly had plenty of power.

The Raven is a Chinese built ply and balsa plane with carbon fibre laminations for extra strength and retails at around \$US2,000. This is pretty reasonable when you consider how much plane you get for each dollar. It is a 41% scale and weighs around 18kg. An ARF (almost ready to fly) it comes pretty much assembled, so not too much time is needed to put it together. Frazer put his model together in the evenings during a week long period.

As a day job, Frazer is a self employed computer programmer so he is very fortunate that he has a very understanding "boss". His flying is funded by main sponsors – JR Radio Gear, EG Aircraft and Desert Aircraft Motors.

Around the world

America is considered the Mecca for aero modelling and there are even pilots who compete professionally on the circuit. Apart from flying in Australia, Frazer has also flown in Europe and India. He considers the skill level and facilities here in New Zealand are at least as good as what he has experienced around the world.

In Germany, model flying is a very "social" activity and a lot of beer is consumed before and after (and even during) the flying sessions.

The scene in India is vastly different. It is a very new pastime there and they do not have easy access to planes and equipment as most needs to be imported. Frazer believes that as the sport gains more interest and equipment becomes more widely available the level of skill and flying facilities will increase there rapidly.

Now that the American flying season is over for another year, Frazer's next competition is the NZ Nationals being held at Carterton from 29 December. He plans to attend a couple of competitions in Australia and then have a quiet period of around 6 months during our winter before he starts to gear up for Tucson 2010.

In the blood

Aero modeling is certainly in the Frazer family's blood. Frazer's dad, Mike, a flyer himself, is his main support person and is an integral part of "Team Bogan". Frazer's son, 9 year old Jarrod, is a chip off the block. A keen flyer, he is already competing successfully. Given a few more years, Dad may well have to hand over the aerobatic champion mantle to "the Apprentice".