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Model enthusiasts enjoy classics competition

By **Quilla Barrett, Times Staff Writer**
 Published June 24, 2007

What once was a childhood pastime for members of Gadsden's RC Flyers has become a competitive hobby, as was demonstrated Saturday at the Senior Pattern Association model airplane championship.

Each plane, and its owner, has a story. "My wife bought me a kit for Christmas in the mid-'80s," Mike Robinson said. Tom Gardenhire, who worked in a local hobby shop, helped him get started. He was a competitor in Saturday's novice division. "I'm still learning," he said.

An intermediate, or "sportsman," competitor, Chris Gregory, began flying in 1974 but stopped for several years. "I got back into it spring of last year," he said. He then "went on a search," to find the perfect plane, which he used for Saturday's competition. He flew an Intruder, a plane which he feels is one of the best.

A popular belief, obviously, as each contestant felt he had the best plane in the competition. Many put hours and hundreds of dollars into their planes and developed a personal attachment to them.

Cass Underwood, an expert-level flyer, was flying his father's plane, which oddly enough, was called "Daddy Rabbit." The plane was designed in 1966 by a man from Decatur.

Underwood and his father, Bruce, were commonly considered the competition's "experts."

"Their planes act like there is no wind up there," a local competitor said, noting the wind had been a factor for several people throughout the day.

Cass Underwood began flying in 1966, quit in 1975 and started back in 1997. "I've been doing this for years. It's just enjoying what we like as our hobby."

The hobby has obviously changed throughout the years.

"We had to cut out our parts and make sure they fit. It was a lot more tedious work," Elmus Humphrey, a spectator, said. "I grew up building planes, but

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Photo: Gadsden Times | Amy Wallot
 John Baxter calls out maneuvers for Jim Slocum during the radio controlled model airplane stunt contest Saturday.

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never really tried flying. I enjoyed building more."

The event attracted 22 competitors from the Southeast and an estimated 100 spectators.

Some "pilots" were there only to watch, although they had competed in other competitions.

Michael Stern, from London, England, came to the United States to fly in the International Hand Launch Gliding Competition in San Diego. While in the country, he decided to support his grandfather in Saturday's event.

Flying is a family hobby for Stern - he learned to fly from his mother, father and grandfather.

Dennis Hunt, Stern's grandfather, has been flying for 57 years. The plane he flew for Saturday's competition was flown in the late '60's, and won the American National Championship. "It's an excellent plane," he said.

Joe Sherpa and Sharon Amberson attended the event hoping to gain a little more expertise. "My dad taught me how to build models as a young boy," Sherpa said, but added that he may not flying anytime soon. "It's going to take a lot more watching."

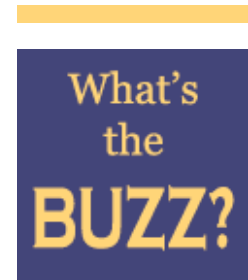
"We're still in the learning process," Amberson added.

Organizers say the competition's success could be a sign of things to come.

"They use to run contests every year," Jack Stephens, president of RC Flyers, said. The last competition was held in 1996, but members hope it won't be long before the next one.

"I'll say we've got a good chance to make it next year," he said. "But they may choose a cooler month."

The contest will continue from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. today at 199 Friendship Road. Model aircraft signs will be posted along the way.



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