



RINGMASTER FLY-A-THON

BE A PART OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST CONTROL LINE FUN-FLY

by John Cralley

The Annual Worldwide Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon is the largest Control Line (CL) model airplane fun-fly in the world. Modelers from around the globe fly Ringmaster models on the first weekend of October each year.

The event started eight years ago when Las Vegas CL Speed pilot, Joey Mathison, came up with an idea for a fun-fly using Ringmaster model airplanes. His suggestion was to see how many Ringmaster model flights could be put up in a single weekend. Participants could fly anywhere and simply keep a count of how many flights were made. The flight count would then be submitted to a designated email address and the total tally calculated.

He suggested the idea to Dee Rice and David Gresens who were the originators of the Brotherhood of the Ring, an online forum devoted to Ringmaster CL models. They agreed that it sounded like something fun to do. The Brotherhood of the Ring agreed to sponsor the event, make the tally, and compile a final report.

Richard Grogan, one of the administrators for the Brotherhood of the Ring, created the rules for the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon and volunteered to make the final tally and report. His rules are still the basis of the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon today.

Largest CL Fun-Fly

How has the event become the world's largest CL fun-fly? In its inaugural year, 2008, 62 CL modelers put up 255 Ringmaster flights. These flights were mostly made by US members of the Brotherhood of the Ring forum, joined by pilots from Canada and Brazil. It was decided to make this an annual event because the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon was not only fun, but a good opportunity to promote CL modeling.

The event continued to grow, including participants from other countries, and a Facebook group called the Annual Worldwide Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon was initiated to help disseminate information about the event and to allow postings concerning Ringmasters and the fly-a-thon. The group currently has 224 members. It is open to the public to view, but only members can post to the site.

The goal of 2,500 flights was set for the 2014 Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon. That was easily exceeded with 2,714 flights made by 456 pilots. Pilots from Australia outdid themselves with 52 fliers putting up 604 flights. New participating countries included Bermuda, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Sweden.

Dee Rice and David Gresens held another popular CL event, the 8th Annual Ringmaster Roundup contest, on the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon weekend. This is an AMA-sanctioned Stunt contest for S-1 Ringmasters that is held annually in Houston. By scheduling it on the same weekend, each of the contest's 52 flights counted as a Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon flight.

A touching event was held at the Napa Valley Vintage Stunt Contest in California, where 13 pilots flew Jim Aron's Ringmaster at the Jim Tichy Memorial Circle provided by the city of Napa. Their Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon flights were dedicated to the late Jim Tichy.

Attila Csontos, from Slovakia, joined in the spirit of the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon by designing a 900mm electric-powered Ringmaster. He cut a number of foam wings and he and others helped a youth group build the models to fly in the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon. Attila gathered 77 pilots and they made 168 flights. There were six novice pilots and the fliers' ages ranged from 3 to 77. Twenty-five of the pilots were women.

In anticipation of the 2015 Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon, Attila has again been helping a youth group build a new fleet of Ringmasters. These models have a traditional wing (ribs and spars), but otherwise are the same 900mm electric-powered models that were used for last year's event.

A goal of 3,250 Ringmaster flights has been set for the 8th Annual Worldwide Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon. Although the event emphasizes the number of pilots and total flights, the Brotherhood of the Ring appreciates every single flight.

Although numbers are a driving force, the event is not simply focused on the tally results. Flying a Ringmaster during the fly-a-thon promotes CL modeling and a feeling of camaraderie that is hard to describe.

Some modelers and groups set goals for themselves such as Dee Rice who spent an entire day making 71 flights on his 71st birthday, but the spirit of the event is to join others around the world flying CL models. It is also an opportunity to promote model aviation by acquainting others with the hobby.

Slovakian children display their new 900E Ringmaster variants. The electric-powered 900E was designed by Attila Csontos and makes a great trainer. Arpad Csontos photo.



A ring of Ringmasters flown for the first Fly-A-Thon at Hobby Hideaway. Jim Swearingen photo.

Participating in the Ringmaster Fly-A-thon is a great way to celebrate model aviation and that is a worthwhile goal.

Ringmaster Models

What qualifies as a Ringmaster model for the event? The original S-1 Ringmaster was first kitted by Sterling Models in 1950 and is the premier CL model in terms of kits sold in the US and Canada. The model was originally designed by Matt Kania for the Fox .35 Stunt engine, but it flies well using modern engines such as the Brodak .25.

Several companies still sell kits for the S-1 Ringmaster and original kits occasionally appear for sale on auctions sites such as eBay. Sterling subsequently kitted several variations of the original Ringmaster, including the 1/2A Baby Ringmaster, the 1/2A Beginners Ringmaster, the 1/2A Ringmaster Biplane, the Ringmaster S-1A, the Ringmaster Sportster, the Super Ringmaster, and the Ringmaster Imperial.

Any Ringmaster variant can be flown for the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon. However, only the original S-1 Ringmaster is eligible for

This Pat King-designed X Wing Ringmaster belongs to Steve Villve from Australia. John Lemont photo.



competition in Old-Timer (OT) CL events.

The Estes Company took over the Sterling line of models and continued to kit Ringmasters until well into the 1980s. Today there are many additional variants of the Ringmaster, including a giant 1,000-square-inch Ringmaster and a tiny micro Ringmaster.

To qualify for flying in the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon, the model must have a wing that is scaled up or down from the original S-1, but the airfoil can differ. Likewise, the tail appendages must be scaled up or down from the original. The fuselage can be in any configuration as can the landing gear. I have included photos that illustrate some of the remarkable variants that have been built by Ringmaster enthusiasts.

Because the Ringmaster and its derivatives are so popular in the US and Canada, there are many available to fly for the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon. Although Estes no longer sells Ringmaster kits, kits and short kits are available for the original S-1 and a number of Ringmaster variants. Brodak Manufacturing sells almost-ready-to-cover S-1 Ringmaster models, ARF S-1 Ringmasters, and an electric-powered version of the model. Electric-powered S-1 Ringmasters aren't allowed in OT Stunt contests, but they are becoming increasingly popular.

Participants in the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon are welcome to fly electric-powered Ringmasters and I fly several during the event. RSM Distribution has a take-apart electric S-1 Ringmaster kit available, as well as a regular S-1 kit. Micro-Scale Models sells a laser-cut Super Ringmaster that can be either electric or glow powered.




In Brazil, Cremon Hobby sells S-1 Ringmaster kits, which are quite popular there. Other cottage industry individuals, including Pat King and Pat Johnston, are able to supply excellent kits, short kits, and plans for various Ringmasters. Mike Griffin sells the RSM Ringmaster kits and also contracts to build the models. There are probably additional sources of kits and plans of which I am not aware.

CL fliers in Australia have joined in the fun with increasing enthusiasm, but modelers from other countries

Expert pilot Joe Gilbert is flying an S-1 Ringmaster. Elwyn Aud photo.



RINGMASTER FLY-A-THON RULES

-  FLY SOME FORM OF RINGMASTER DURING THE FIRST WEEKEND OF OCTOBER.
-  RECORD THE NUMBER OF FLIGHTS, THE NUMBER OF PILOTS, THE LOCATION OF THE FLIGHTS, AND ANY SOLO FLIGHTS BY A NEW PILOT USING A RINGMASTER. A FIRST SOLO FLIGHT IS COUNTED AS TWO FLIGHTS.
-  EMAIL THE DATA TO A DESIGNATED ADDRESS BY NOON EDT (USA) ON TUESDAY FOLLOWING EVENT (OCTOBER 6).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND PHOTOS ARE WELCOME, BUT NOT REQUIRED. THE FINAL TALLY/REPORT WILL BE POSTED ON THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE RING WEBSITE AS WELL AS OTHER FORUMS.

have been slow to take up the challenge. The lack of available Ringmasters to fly has hampered overseas participation.

In 2009, I made contact with Italian modeler Gabriele Marci, who graciously drew a set of plans for the original S-1 Ringmaster. The plans were in Italian and used metric measurements. Gabriele designated the plans to be in public



Jim Carter's Red Baron Ringmaster triplane variant is a Pat King design and is a great flier. Jim Carter photo.

domain so that they could be used by anyone to build a Ringmaster.

Being metric made it easier for modelers outside the US to build S-1 Ringmasters, but they were challenging for US modelers who wanted to scratch-build a Ringmaster. I enlisted the help of Pat King, who converted the measurements to Imperial units and added modern improvements such as adjustable leadout guides and a wingtip weight box. Pat also waved his copyright claims for non-commercial use of his Baby and Beginner's Ringmaster plans.

These three plans are now available and can be printed on a large-scale printer at copy shops and office supply stores to give full-size working plans for scratch builders. Send me an email request and I will email you the PDF file(s) for the plans.

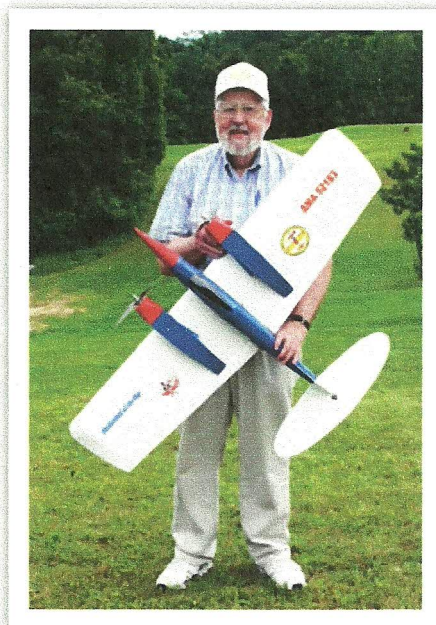
Conclusion

The original S-1 Ringmaster is a great-flying model, but it must be built light in order to reach its potential. For instance, in the hands of expert pilot Joe Gilbert, his 22-ounce S-1 Ringmaster won the OT event at the 2015 Vintage Stunt Championship contest in Tucson, Arizona. Joe has consistently flown his Brodak .25-powered model to top honors at contests across the US.

The Ringmaster can be built to fly competitively; however, it is also a good model for training new pilots. This makes it ideal for the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon. There are many Ringmasters available in the US and many—perhaps most—older US and

The author is holding his 526 electric twin Ringmaster. It uses a Pat Johnston wing and Pat King fuselage and nacelles. Will Hubin photo.

Canadian CL fliers learned to fly using a Ringmaster. Its popularity stimulated the origin of the Brotherhood of the Ring Forum, so it is fitting that the group sponsors the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon.



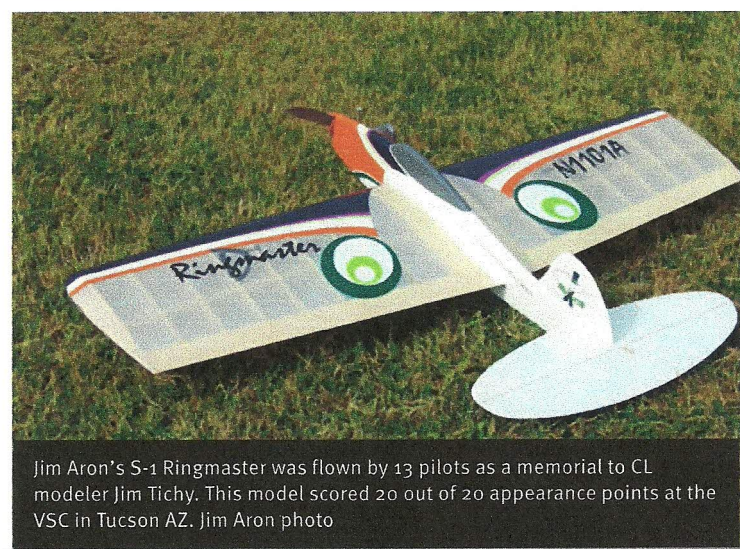
It is a trip down memory lane for me, an octogenarian, to fly one of my Ringmasters in the Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon, and it is particularly gratifying to see reports of new CL pilots soloing during the event. Is there a new generation of CL modelers forthcoming? The pleasure of feeling that you are physically one with your aircraft cannot be experienced flying any other kind of model airplane.

Please help celebrate CL modeling by joining fellow pilots around the world October 3 and 4, 2015, by flying a Ringmaster in the world's largest CL fun-fly. 🛩️

—John Cralley
jccrall@ilstu.edu



John Stiles' fleet of Ringmasters was flown for the fifth Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon. The Ringmaster Slobster variant in the foreground was inspired by the famous Brodak Bi-Slob model. John Stiles photo.



Jim Aron's S-1 Ringmaster was flown by 13 pilots as a memorial to CL modeler Jim Tichy. This model scored 20 out of 20 appearance points at the VSC in Tucson AZ. Jim Aron photo

SOURCES:

Annual Worldwide Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon Facebook Group
www.facebook.com/groups/RingmasterFlyAThon

Ringmaster Fly-A-Thon reports
2015flyathon@ringmasterflyathon.com

Brotherhood of the Ring
www.brotherhoodofthering.info

Brodak Manufacturing
(724) 966-2726
www.brodak.com

Cremon Hobby (Brazil)
www.cremonhobby.com

Micro-Scale Models
www.msplanes.com

Pat Johnston
patsplans@yahoo.com

Pat King
www.pdkllc.com

RSM Distribution
(951) 678-1406
www.rsmdistribution.com