The Top 10 Myths About RC Pylon Racing:

"Try it, then dismiss it as 'no challenge'."

Myth 1 It's all about speed

If that was true, we might as well not run races at all; we might as well just hold timed speed runs and hand the trophy to the person with the highest-pitch propeller.

Fortunately the task involves more than that, and is much more entertaining.

Yes, speed is an essential part of racing and without it you won't put many points on the board, but our rules favor consistency more than speed.

AMA racing is a game of accumulating points. It doesn't matter who you're flying against; you still have to go out to the starting line, start your model's engine, made a good takeoff, go around the

pylons 10 times without cutting inside the course, and land in one piece so you're ready to go the next time without having to frantically repair something in between.

I wish I had a nickel for each time I have seen the slowest pilot at a contest go home with first place because he or she didn't make any mistakes, and the others did.

Conversely, the racing world is full of brash young Turks who look great in practice, but never seem to do well on contest day.

Their goal seems to be to scare you off with the priciest airplane, the screamingest engine, and the hottest practice laps, so you will quietly tuck your tail between your legs and disappear.

Despite such awesome displays, these fliers usually manage to come to grief somehow - most often when two of them end up in the same heat, and in a burst of testosterone they collide or double-cut (resulting in a zero) as they try to elbow each other out.

So my advice to all you newbie’s is not to try to throw a touchdown pass on your first play.

Get a decent, reliable airplane and engine that are fast enough to do the job, then practice with them until you can start up, fly well, and land under any conditions.

You will be surprised at how quickly you find yourself in the winner's circle.

Myth 2 Racing airplanes are hard to fly

For AMA rule-book racing in most of the US, you have a choice between two types of airframes: the Quickie 500 (Q-500), with its 500 square inch rectangular wing, box fuselage, exposed engine, and 3.5 pound minimum weight, and the Quarter 40 (Q-40) - a more scalelike model, with 400 square inches of wing and a 4-pound minimum weight.

The newcomer class in most areas involves a Q-500 airframe powered by a mild two-stroke .40

engine selected from a local list of approved brands. See Event No. 424 for complete rules.

The Q-500 and Q-40 airframes are user-friendly. In fact, the Quickie is an absolute pussycat. Its wing loading is only 16 ounces pre square foot - lighter than most sport models and even lighter than some Sailplanes.

Quickies take off easily from grass, they glide well, and they land gently. And they are fully aerobatic, which makes them among the best sport airplanes you will find.

For those who prefer a scale like appearance, the Q-40s are almost as easy to fly. But because of their heavier wing loadings, they generally want to take off from pavement and they land a bit faster.

As do the Quickies, the Q-40s fly just fine with street-legal sport .40s in place of the all-out racing power plants.

In either case, the fore-and-aft balance (center of gravity) and proper throws are important.

Most newcomers make the mistake of setting up their racers far too sensitive on the controls.

All you need is enough elevator for a smooth 75-foot-diameter loop, and enough aileron to do a complete 360 degree roll in roughly two seconds.

Myth 3 Racing is expensive

Actually, this is not a myth; racing is expensive. So is every other organized RC activity,

From International Miniature Aerobatic club (IMAC) aerobatics to jet rallies to the annual club

Fun-fly.

But in terms of total cost, racing is closer to the annual club fun-fly than almost anything else you will see covered regularly in Model Aviation magazine.

Top-end racing .40s go for $250-$350 each, and they will generally survive all but the worst

straight-in crash. Compare this to the average four-stroker on any sport airplane at the fun-fly, and you come out even.

Ditto for the airplanes. A top-end, ready-to-fly composite Q-500 or Q-40 airframe will set you back $300-$500, or approximately 1/10 the cost of a Giant Scale or turbine model-and you don't have to assemble it.

If you're willing to spend a few evenings gluing Part A to Part B,
you can be ready to go for less than $100.

Myth 4 Racing airplanes crash

Again, not a myth; all RC models crash. But compared to other activities, the attrition rate in racing is roughly par.

Think back to the Limbo or Bomb Drop event at the last club fun-fly you attended, and that's approximately how many crashes you are likely to see at a race.

Myth 5 You have to be an engine expert to do well

See Myth 1; speed isn't everything. Many of the "tricks" people do in an effort to gain a little extra power actually do more harm than good, or reduce the useful life of the engine.

As a newcomer, your best bet is to learn what engines are being used locally, buy one, fly it slightly rich with the recommended propeller until you've gone through a gallon of fuel, then enter a contest and see how you do.

Dub Jett, who produces Jett engines, has marvelous Web site featuring how-tos for engine care and a series of articles he calls "The Crap Trap." If you have any problems or questions go to Jett and click on Tech Tips.

Myth 6 Racing is dangerous

Racing airplanes are fast. They aren't very quiet. And racing involves flying around yourself,

four airplanes at a time. All of this makes it look at the casual observer that pandemonium has broken loose and disaster is imminent.

However, the apparent danger is mostly an illusion.

First of all, the pilots and callers are positioned in the infield, where centrifugal force (I know there's no such thing, but work with me here) protects them from any falling bits or errant aircraft, except in the most unusual cases.

Second, AMA rules require a separation of at least 300 feet between the racecourse and the sideline, where the judges sit. It's another 150 feet to the spectators. This buffer zone contains vast acreage into which the Laws of Probability usually suck any stray models that don't impact right away.

Third, racing airplanes are the most airworthy models out there, thanks to rigorous preflight

inspections and the aforementioned Laws of Probability weeding out the weak models during

practice.

I can say categorically that I have had more close calls at Sunday afternoon sport-flying sessions and contests of other kinds than at all the races I've attended.

Myth 7 You must be young and agile to succeed

Hey, this isn't freestyle mogul skiing. This is eye-hand coordination. If you're fit enough to play

shuffleboard, you can race.

At least half of the top names in Pylon are in their 50s and 60s. The rest are on their way there.

Myth 8 You must be independently wealthy to succeed

It doesn't hurt, of course. The very rich are not like you and me; they have more time to practice.

But between judicious allocation of your days off, splitting the hotel bill with a buddy, and helping to promote more local races so extensive travel isn't necessary, you can narrow the class differences and enjoy top-notch racing, even if you don't qualify for early retirement.

Myth 9 There's no challenge; left turns are easy

Correction: one left turn is easy. Most pilots can handle three good left turns in a row

(one complete lap) with a few hours practice. Six turns gets dicey.

Twenty-seven good left turns (nine laps) with traffic around you and a crosswind at 10 mph, gusting to 20mph, puts you in the 90th percentile of RC pilots worldwide; you have every right to be proud of yourself. But you haven't won the heat.

Each heat requires 30 good left turns at a constant altitude with complete focus and precision.
Try it, then dismiss it as "no challenge".

Myth 10 Nobody around here does it

That's possible, but it's not as if they couldn't - especially with a little help from you.

The first stop should be your local hobby emporium. Ask if they have any flyers for upcoming races or if they've sold any strong .40 engines recently. That will be your first clue.

If that approach doesn't pan out, log onto NMPRA (National Miniature Pylon Racing) list of maps,

addresses, and how-tos.

For a great list of sources for hard-to-find racing hardware and supplies, visit Drew Telford's site at Drew Pages Follow the links to action photos, personal Web pages of other luminaries, notices of

upcoming contests, et cetera.

I guarantee that after one or two E-mail messages or telephone calls, you need never be lonely again!