

Quick Primer to Model Rocketry

Mitch Small, Rocket Ranger

Model Rocketry is a fun hobby that can span the range from very simple, to a life consuming passion. If you have never ventured into this hobby before, here are some quick pointers.

Kits are sold by complexity level. Level one kits are the simplest to build. They will require trimming of fins and simple gluing of fins to the body. Some companies also have kits that snap together or simply need an engine to be loaded prior to flying. These are called RTF (ready-to-fly) or E2X depending on the company. At the high end of complexity, level 4 and above, you are required to create templates, cut fins from stock material and make various subassemblies. There is quite a range in between these levels. One final word about kits: smaller is not necessarily better for a beginner. If the kit is small, lots of small parts and fine detail work may be required.

If you have never flown model rockets before, you will need a launch pad and a launch controller. These are available separately, but are also frequently bundled with special RTF packages. Launch pads, controllers and rockets are freely interchangeable, so you are not restricted to one brand of equipment. Estes is probably the best known, and most readily available, brand, followed by Quest.

The engines are probably the most confusing part for a beginner to understand. A typical engine, technically “rocket motor”, will be designated something like B6-4. The letter designates the thrust class, horsepower, for the engine. Suffice it to say that a B engine has twice the horsepower of an A and half the horsepower of a C class engine. The first number relates to how hard you jump on the accelerator: the bigger the number, the faster the burn time. The final number indicates the delay before the charge fires to pop the chute.

It is a good idea to bring a few basic tools with you. You will need a hobby knife for trimming parts, fine grit sand paper for final shaping of parts and glue. Most kits go together with either white or yellow wood glue and some plastic cement. Personally, I find toothpicks or bamboo skewers the best glue applicators, but this may depend on your building style. Superglue is useful, but not essential for some steps, as are epoxy glues. Masking tape may prove useful, as might a pair of tweezers or other pickup tool for

holding small pieces. Most hobby shops or craft stores will have kits with the essentials plus some other kits that are more elaborate. Most model kits will require some type of paint for a final finish. Painting is a specialty unto itself, but most people use some type of spray enamel.

Friday night we usually socialize while assembling rockets or doing minor repairs. This is a great time to pick up building tips and see what other types of kits are out there. If you are planning on assembling anything other a level one kit, you may want to consider doing subassemblies beforehand and just doing final assembly at Kon-O-Kwee. This can save from feeling the time crunch to get your rocket ready for Saturday. Weather permitting, we launch on Saturday most of the day and do repairs or more building between flight sessions. Sunday has no flight schedule as some people leave right after breakfast and other stay until after lunch.

The Trailblazers will have some rockets for sale at the campout as well as a nice selection of engines and spare parts. Things will also be interesting as this year we are having a contest. A hula-hoop will be placed at the far end of the flying field. The first Parent and the first Trailblazer to land their rocket in the hoop will win a rocket. For the Trailblazers, you will win a Fliskit Thing-a-ma-jig and the Parents will be shooting for a Phoerd X-150 Pick-up Saucer. Full details will be posted on Friday night.

See you all there!