

Dick and Dave's Excellent Adventure to the 5th European SAM RC Champs.



The 5th Euro Championships were to be held in Slovakia near the medieval town of Trnava, site of one of Europe's earliest universities. Trnava is only about 35 miles east of the capital Bratislava, which is similarly, only about 35 miles east of Vienna. It is fascinating just how small some of these countries are all the more remarkable that they all speak different languages.



Czechoslovakia was formed from the Czech and Slovak states of the Habsberg Empire at the end of WWI. The powers that be decided that each was too small to be viable on their own so they joined them. Following the Soviet era and the Velvet

Revolution in 1991 the Slovak people petitioned for separation. Although they are both Slav states they actually speak different languages and have very different levels of development. The TV and Travel writer, Rick Steves, calls Slovakia the West Virginia of Europe. Both states were inducted into the European Union two or three years ago.

Originally the US "Team" for the 5th European SAM RC Champs consisted of a good sized bunch of contest flyers and characters but one by one some of them dropped off for various reasons leaving Dick Bartkowski and myself from SAM 76, Ed Hamler and Miriam Schmidt from SAM 27 and Roy Brown, our "American in Holland" who provides us with all kinds of support from his old Nissan station wagon.

I rented a car in Vienna and we picked up Dick by rendezvousing with his flight from Washington. We easily made it to the contest site by early afternoon, but not before the first of many adventures.

The first adventure was finding the place of our lodgings. We had all elected to stay at the Dolná Krupá Manor House, or Castle located in the village of Dolná Krupá just north of Trnava. Reaching Trnava was easy but once there we found none of the roads had numbers or signposts but we stopped at a gas station in Trnava and Dick asked a man in a van for directions. Despite Dick's attempts to communicate in several of his "new" languages the man was not able to help. Imagine our surprise when he indicated they should go into the store and ask, but proceeded to pick up a stack of maps and carried them inside. Guess they weren't the right maps. Anyway we received excellent instructions that led us to a country road passing through extensive farm fields, all bursting with fresh crops.

Eventually we entered the village and drove slowly through it until we found a large imposing building behind an iron fence. It took several laps and inquiries before we realized that that the big building was the right place but they knew it only as a museum.



Dolná Krupá Manor House

The classical manor house was built over the years 1793-1795. It is surrounded by an extensive English park in which there is also found a Garden Pavilion, commonly named Beethoven's lodge. L. van Beethoven visited the manor house several times, attracted by the sincere friendship of several members of the Brunswick family (inside story; he had the hots for a woman!). He dedicating several of his compositions to them. During its life the Manor house was one of the most attractive noble residences in Slovakia.

But that was then and this is now; and in between we have this little thing called Communism. Imagine how the Soviets looked at this place upon their conquest towards the end of WWII! The Slovaks are trying to maintain the building, which is now owned by the National Music Society, but it must be a daunting task. You can see all kinds of touches that hark back to its glory days, but forty years or so of Soviet style maintenance has left much of it in a primitive state. It is indeed a museum and serves the community as museums do, but it also has accommodation for about thirty people in a sort of hostel style.



Part of the US team, Dick Bartkowski, Bev Penry, Mary and Ed. Hamler and our Italian associate, Gabrielle Montebelli

Our initial encounter; adventure #2, was to find the person in charge (among maybe a total staff of four) had no idea we were coming! Fortunately Ed Hamler had a cell phone that worked in Slovakia and he had the number for our organizers. They offered to come right over from the flying field where registration and all the other tasks of organizing and setting up were taking place. Mrs Sedlar and our friend from the Czech Champs, Zdenek Slapnicka arrived in Zdenek's Land Rover like 4x4.

It seems that the organizers took over the whole place for four nights and they had made the room assignments. We were told to go to our rooms where we would find the key in the lock, but if we didn't we should take any open room! Jean and I settled in to find a rather plain and very dated room but it was clean and looked out over the parkland behind the building. That done we

assembled for the drive to the flying field for check in then on to find a place for lunch. Zdenek said there were two ways to the field; a long round about trip through several villages or a cross country trip on a dirt trail over the fields to the next village. We thought he was kidding but our convoy followed obediently across the dusty trail then through another couple of villages and another narrow road to the contest site, at Airport Boleraz, a huge all-grass 3000 meter airfield strip, the location of the region's flying club.

Traveling from the US to these meets means that we can't take our comfort equipment with us so last year we fried in the strong sun and had difficulty even finding somewhere to sit. We had requested some relief in these matters from our hosts and they did a super job in providing a canopy, benches and copious bottled water and iced tea for each nation's team.

The flying field looked to be superb with the vast mowed runway area and wide free approaches beyond. The airfield included a hanger and office/control tower building, the latter incorporating the organizers processing space and room to host the daily cooked lunch. As with our Czech experience on just such an airfield, we regularly encountered "shared use" of the runway as one or other of the club full-sized planes took off or landed. One such takeoff in a Cessna took the path between two groups of flyers spread across the runway width!



Excellent shelter and comfort accommodations on the flight line

Dick and I processed our models by filling the forms, having the model of our choice weighed and handing over a bunch of money. They wanted cash in Euros but we had Slovakian Korunas; another adventure not reported here. Our US flying buddies had the first of their problems here as they borrow radios from European friends and without the radio components, which they had yet to pick up, the models could not be weighed. Anyway, we all did what we could then drove into Trnava for lunch as there was very little in the way of food available at the field vendor; lots of good beer and booze though! Following a late lunch we continued the processing of models and paid with whatever funds we could muster from the bankomat. The organizers now realized they needed to deal with this currency problem. Eventually we drove across the dirt track back to the "Castle" to clean up and get dinner.

Adventure #3; there were no provisions for eating or drinking in the Castle nor in the village and by now the village store was closed too. Worse; we were told that because the Castle contained the valuable museum we were to be locked in at eight o'clock! Hmm..... Well the three staff people saw our plight and produced a 2 liter bottle of Fanta and another of Coke but that was it. Dick and I allowed that we were dying for a beer as the weather had been hot and eventually Dick began to communicate with the two staff guys and they said they could provide us with some beer; great, a beer for everybody. Dick had been learning German and Polish over the last year in preparation for the side trip that he and Cathy were planning. So all during our time together he practiced his communication skills on every friendly person we came in contact with; but particularly those with whom we needed something. But we were hungry and asked if there was any food to be had and they said they could find some sausage and bread; hands up who wants sausage! Then as the party began to liven up I suggested it would be a whole lot better if we could get some vodka to dilute the Fanta. Vodka was produced and the party really rocked; way beyond my bedtime, so I am told (ask Dick).

Bright and early we drove once again over the fields to the flying site ready for the opening ceremonies and to prepare our

models. We discovered that the organizers had changed the schedule of events. There were so many gliders entered (76 out of a total of about 220 model/competitor entries) that they thought it would take all day to fly the six rounds of competition and they moved our events to the next day. But before competition started there was the opening ceremony. Each Nation was provided with a placard and the members lined up behind them. Problem was, they couldn't find the USA sign but one of the organizers brought us the US flag from the meet podium. See the cover picture.

The Brits were present for the first time in the persons of Tony Roberts flying in electric Old Timer and "Mister SAM 1066 David Baker"



The opening ceremony was attended by the governor of the local province and several other dignitaries. It was well done and a perfect way to start the meeting.

The eastern Europeans and the Germans really like their gliders and with nothing else to do we watched all kinds fly with several high starts arrayed along the field. Roy flew a Gross Winkler model loaned to him by Leo Bussmeier, the leader of the German team and one of the founders of the Euro Champs.



Leo Bussmeier launches the Gross Winkler for Roy Brown



In a huge field of old guys the event was won by a 11 year old Jakub Dvorak who is the grandson of Frantisek Dvorak the Wakefield World Champion from 1959 .



Moving our events to the next day gave us an opportunity to get organized and eventually Dick and I made some test flights. This was really made possible by our decision to fly on the new 2.4 GHz radios. You see, there are no channel conflicts with the 2.4 sets; you turn on the Tx and then the Rx and when they bind you are hooked up and you and everyone else is safe. Fortunately the organizers recognized this and we were allowed to fly at the other end of the field. In prior years we used 35 MHz equipment that I had bought. We both had all kinds of problems with interference, hence the decision to buy the 2.4 stuff, which in the event worked perfectly.

We concluded our day with a good meal in a Trnava restaurant having being granted a stay of curfew. They locked us in at about ten o'clock!

Although Saturday was our first flying day there were several other events to be flown first. The practice used in Slovakia was for each event to be flown through all rounds before the next event began. At the beginning of each event they determine the flying order by making a draw. The first five contestants are called to fly, and then the next five until that round is completed. Then they proceed to the next round. Timing is done by a crew of people dedicated to that role for the whole event. You are given five minutes to fly once your name is called, although they were not anal about this rule and they would work with you if you needed extra time for a valid reason.

So, Dick and I had to wait for two events to be flown before we were up. These were Old Timer Limited Engine Run and Nostalgia LER, the difference being in the cut-off date for the models. In any event, the European SAM organizations recognize a 1950 cutoff date whereas in the US we use 1942. Our team

leader and legendary SAM flyer, Ed Hamler, flew these two events, winning one and placing second in the other. This year Ed also flew the two electric events and ½ A Texaco.



Our first event was Old Timer Limited Motor Run for any Old Timer model to any scale where we get a one minute climb with either seven NiCad / NiMH cells or two LiPo cells. But as our time grew close Dick discovered a problem with one of his batteries and couldn't find where he has stored the spare; what to do? The Record Hound has a very short nose and the battery has to have a certain form factor to fit in the space ahead of the bulkhead. The stars must have been aligned or some other influence because lo and behold, my new killer sized NeuEnergy LiPos fitted and I had three of them so Dick could use one, although this would necessitate both of us re-charge between flights. This might be an issue as I had elected not to bring the big and heavy Orbit charger. Instead I brought a new, compact "cheapie" 3 amp unit and my old 1 amp one too. Although three amps is a respectable level it is not a complete indicator of charge time as the LiPo chargers drop the charge current as they approach the 4.2 volt per cell limit. We may not have sufficient time to re-charge between flights.

Dick made a test flight and things looked good to go. Last year I flew the Big Stardust in this event but I had not sorted out the power system. I planned for an 80 amp power system using NiCad cells but could not coax it over 60 amps or so. The climb, and thereby the time, suffered and I could not make a still-air ten minute max. I fixed it this year by switching to the big NeuEnergy LiPo rated at 98 amps continuous. Well remember the Racer's Credo; "if a little is good more is better" so I elected to use it all the available power and with a new Castle Creations 125 amp controller Dick and I set it up to pull about 100 amps. The only difficulty was setting up a climb trim to handle the vertical without corkscrewing as a rudder and elevator plane must fly in a yawed attitude to produce the necessary torque reaction. It looked weird.

As luck would have it we were in the same flying group and Dick had elected a hand launch so we asked for permission for me to launch Dick then fly my model. I recruited Brit Tony Roberts, to help me launch. I need someone to hold up the left wing tip against the substantial torque from the 18 ½ inch prop.



Tony Roberts holds while Dave Harding fuses the bomb.

Dick's first launch resulted in a way out of control initial climb and he elected to call an abort, but the timer told him he must land within a minute and the resulting "arrival" caused a bit of damage that was easily repaired, and thankfully the out-front expensive LiPo suffered no damage.

My first flight was picture perfect with the big model going out of sight during the last few seconds of the climb. *Al Taft's rule; "all my models go out of sight, but I can see them when the motor shuts off"*. Scary but it works if the model is trimmed hands-off. On the rollout I could see it clearly and it set into an excellent glide for an easy max. Dick realized that he had not set the climb trims, easy to do with a new radio setup, so he was confident in his second attempt.



I swapped my battery for my fully charged spare, putting the other battery on charge with the new 3 amp unit. Dick tried to top off his LiPo with a charger loaned to us by Tony Roberts, a charger that neither he nor Dick had ever used before. We didn't know how well these chargers were working as I had not brought the Wattmeter to measure the charge.

This time Dick's model climbed very well but the motor cut at about 50 seconds. Nevertheless he found a good thermal at low altitude and rode it for a max. My second flight climbed as well as the first and looked good but I had added some ballast to handle the wind and also found some strong sinking air and missed the max. These big 4900 LiPos have a capacity of almost 300 amp minutes. During the climb I use about 1/3 of this and Dick probably only 15% so we could re-fly without charging although if we did so the voltage would be lower and the climb somewhat less, but we tried to re-charge them between flights.

Dick's third flight resulted in an even earlier motor shutoff and he made a flight of somewhat less than seven minutes. Thinking about the problem he concluded that the ESC was cutting off at the low voltage limit; it was set for the seven cell NiCad pack, but we didn't have, or couldn't find or borrow a Castle Creations programming guide. (It was buried in my suitcase Dick!). My third flight was excellent and made the second max to put me in the flyoff.

With no way of changing the voltage cutoff Dick flew again and once more suffered an early cutoff for a sub max flight. However despite these problems he did place 16th in a field of 31 flyers.

Ed Hamler also made the flyoff although he was having difficulties controlling the climb as his model has a slight wing warp and the high power of his Steve Neu motor induced unwanted motions. Six qualified for the flyoff.

Now this is thermal flying territory as there is no max in a flyoff. Ed is the supreme master of thermal flying so I asked him if I could fly in his air and share whatever thermals he found; he said sure. I launched first and the big guy was a dot in the sky way higher than anyone else. I circled over Ed until there were only three of us left and I still had the altitude advantage but the Italian, Rover Meresecchi, had found a thermal at a different part of the sky, so I flew to him. I hooked his thermal and we both climbed at about the same altitude but he moved over and I fell out. I couldn't find it again so I came back to land for second place; a thrill! Ed took third.



Roland Meresecchi, first and Dave Harding second in O/T Electric.

The previous day Ed handed me a Cox 049 and said have a go at 1/2A Texaco with the 1/2 A O/T Electric airplane. I had not planned on flying this event despite Ed's enthusiasm for flying both, the reason being that last year the events were run simultaneously and I couldn't see how you would continually make the motor swap between rounds. But not to disappoint Ed, I used the spare time to make a bulkhead so I could fasten the Cox overhanging the front of the existing bulkhead. (I mounted the Speed 400 off its front frame directly into a bulkhead that formed the front of the airplane, so the Cox would be several inches further forward, and I didn't know if it could be balanced.

Saturday evening there was a banquet at the Castle complete with a Dixieland band and fireworks; A great opportunity to spend time with our European friends.



Sunday was the last day of the meet and the schedule called for completion of competition flying by two pm followed by the awards and closing ceremony. But at least one event had been delayed till Sunday so the prospects for an early finish looked dim, not that it mattered to us as we were staying one more night in the Castle.

1/2 A Old Timer Electric was our planned final event.

Dick and I had test flown these on the previous evening to ensure that the swap of our receivers etc. did not upset the trims, so we were ready.

I had an excellent first flight with the Speed 400 making an easy un-aided max. I charged the big LiPo but the second flight went sour as it didn't climb to nearly the same altitude. On checking the battery voltage I found it to be way down and didn't know how it could have been that low, so I installed a new freshly charged battery and made my third flight which also turned out poorly. The motor/prop did not seem to be singing as it was in the first flight so I wonder if the motor went away as they can when operated at these high current levels. I will check it when I get the chance. Anyway I was done with the electric events. Dick's aging Trenton Terror flew beautifully almost disappearing vertically in the clear air, but he came down just short of a max twice and

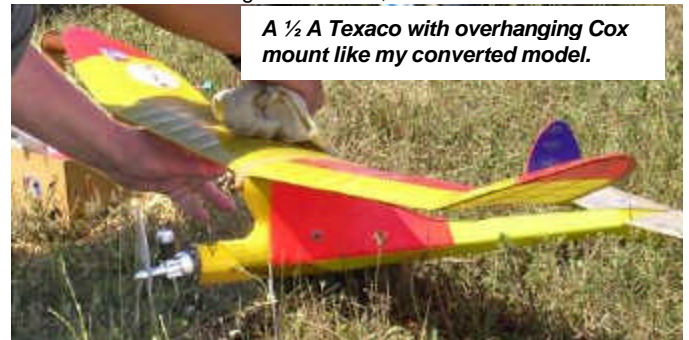
somewhat more on the third. He was happy though as it performed better than it ever has.

Dick Bartkowski with his venerable Trenton Terror about to fly in 1/2A Electric Old Timer



Ed's performed magnificently and he easily made the flyoff along with ten others out of a field of 39. Miriam got disoriented in her first flight and crashed the model. Gabrielle fixed it for her and she made another flight but landed off the field. Roy got off one flight before running into motor and ESC difficulties that he was unable to fix despite having two of everything and all the necessary tools. He was just beaten by the clock.

Anyway, my fortunes in 1/2 A Old Timer Electric allowed me the time and urge to give the 1/2 A Texaco a try. It was not clear that I could balance the airplane with the Cox overhang, and I didn't know how much ballast, if any would be required. In the event the Cox mounted smoothly and I used the small Rx LiPo and voltage regulator from the big Stardust in lieu of the big LiPo for flight power. I managed to balance it then found I needed three ounces of lead to bring it up to weight. This I shoved under the wing mounting bands. I crudely taped the small LiPo and voltage regulator in the big battery cavity to finish the configuration. The model looked something like this one;



A 1/2 A Texaco with overhanging Cox mount like my converted model.

The engine started first flick and with a little twiddling of the needle I launched, whereupon it quit within ten seconds. I called an attempt then flew it again, this time a little richer, but it quit again after a little longer. Ed said it was vibrating too much so he changed to a bigger prop and this one was somewhat better so with the engine running he topped off the tank and I launched for my second of three flights.

This one went very well although I missed a max (to Ed's amazement; "I found no lift Ed" "you what?.....") (Must have been everywhere but I didn't see it!) But in the middle of this flight someone; the CD maybe; said you are DQ'd because you filled your fuel tank with the engine running. Fortunately the timer continued to time (although it is not reported in the results). Ed blew up when I told him. "You go back and demand that they show you the rule" says Ed. My efforts failed but Ed. came in and demanded a meeting of the Jury. Subsequently Ed said they had decided in my favor and I could fly again. This time the flight was erratic and shortly the model flew in an unstable, uncontrollable manner with the wing fluttering violently on the down legs, eventually diving vertically into the camp grounds with the engine still running strongly. The front end was demolished back to the pylon, the wing was all shook up inside the "plastic bag" but the

radio still worked and the engine looked OK, although I was not going to turn it over with all the grit on it. I must assume that something shifted due to inadequate fixing and the CG moved a bunch. (Now you know why I couldn't show you a picture of it). But it was fun while it lasted.

Ed got screwed as he flew the Speed 400 flyoff; his timer didn't start the watch. Since it was a mass launch the guy became confused and was waiting for someone to tell him when. First the CD said "every body down and start again" but then after some conversation with Jury members he reversed himself. Meanwhile, Ed re-charged and flew again and made an absolutely outstanding flight to OOS altitude. He stayed away from the mass of flyers so he did not know who had what time but there was a protest that he had better air and they disqualified him, or they wanted him to fly again, or something. Meanwhile everybody was waiting to fly the 1/2 A Texaco flyoff, also with Ed.

With much rumination going on Ed just declared that he would not fly again in any event as his eyes had gone and he had had enough. That solved the organizer's problem but Ed should have been the meet Champion as his 1/2 A OT Electric flight was almost certainly a winner and he is a top 1/2 A Texaco flyer, he won last year.



Following the ceremony our team was famished and looked forward to one last meal together but the organizers asked us to share some soup with them and their volunteers, a nice and generous touch. It took a while to prepare but was a fitting ending to our Slovakian adventure to be with our gracious hosts who had worked so hard to make this a memorable event.



All this took so much time that the awards ceremony, due for 2 pm, didn't start till 7:30 pm. Ed received an award for sportsmanship, which he richly deserved as he basically saved the meet by stepping aside and letting them finish the flyoffs.

So our medal tally (not that it really matters) was Ed with first, second and a third and me with a second. The complete results can be found on the SAM 119 website along with over 700 pictures; <http://www.sam119.sk/> The organizers were really on the ball with keeping the scores up to date on their laptop computers. They published the complete results within a few days of the meet and followed up with the pictures later. Many of the pictures I have used in this article have been taken from their site.

At the end of the closing ceremony the president of SAM Hungary invited us to the 6th European SAM RC Champs that they will host in 2008.



The US Team at the final supper.

Won't you join us in Hungary next year?

Dave Harding

Many of the photos you see in this report are due to the efforts of Jan Sabo, one of the Slovak organizers and all around good fellow who helped us a good deal. His English was very good and, of course, was a whole lot better than our Slovak. Thanks Jan.