

F2D News - November 2011

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Well I lied... I'm back. I was expecting to be somewhat detached from aeromodelling while living out here in Austria, but last week I saw something that blew my mind and I wanted to share. It was my good fortune to get the opportunity to visit the Deutsches Museum in Munich, Germany, which turned out to be by far the coolest technical museum that I've ever visited. They had a massive collection of all kinds of neat things, but I never made it out of the aerospace wing. Even more exciting than the cool airplanes and rockets was the quality of the displays and interactive exhibits that demonstrated a wide variety of concepts ranging from lift and drag (with a working wind tunnel model) to the rigidity of various spar arrangements, beam cross-sections, etc. The quality was extremely high, and they somehow managed to connect with everyone from children up to experts.

To my amazement, among the halls of this museum of national pride, full of opened up 747 engines, WWII fighters, homemade airplanes intended for use as escape vehicles from East Germany in the 70s, and a room dedicated to explaining the history, development, and operating principles of ejection seats (no rides here), was a serious exhibit devoted to aeromodelling (sponsored in part by UHU it seems). Never in my life have I seen something like that. They had a wide range of free flight, control line, and radio controlled models, as well as rockets on display. In each section they had detailed information about how the planes work, and what types of competition events are flown. There was even an FAI speed (F2A) ship hanging up, complete with lines and handle, though unfortunately no combat planes. At one end they had a large display case set up with probably 50-60 engines of all sizes, including a few familiar Coxes and a Super Tiger 0.35 combat engine. On the other side was a display about materials and construction techniques, describing the merits of different types of woods, laminated materials, carbon composites, and adhesives. It was truly brilliant, and hopefully I'm not just saying that as an enthusiast.

More broadly, this experience tied into a theme that it seems is of more importance now than ever before: our [aeromodellers'] relationship to the greater community around us. Pressure has steadily been growing for us to reduce noise, our friends in California have been threatened that their field could be converted to electric only in order to reduce air pollution in LA (really? I mean seriously? ...) and now, quite unfortunately, we have to deal with the fallout from a Massachusetts man's intended plot to use radio controlled planes to carry out some kind of terrorist attack. Never mind the fact that his plan was ridiculous, it has brought our community into the spotlight – in a bad light.

It seems that these days we are in a holding pattern of trying to stay out of society's way just enough to keep our hobby alive. But what are we giving to society? Do people at large have any way of knowing how interesting and exciting our hobby/sport really is? Seeing that exhibit in Munich, I got the feeling that maybe we need to get more up in the face of society, and to increase the number of chances for people to be exposed to the fun of what we do. For example, the Wingbusters in Middleboro, MA recently held an open house in which people from the community could come out to the field and talk to friendly modellers, see all kinds of models flying, and even get a chance to fly with an instructor. It was a great, well-attended event, that was fun for all. It was even a good opportunity for modelers from different disciplines to interact and learn about what others are up to (and to remember that we're all in this together). This is exactly the kind of community involvement that we need to pursue if we want our hobby to flourish (or even just to hang on).