PREDATOR

READYTOFLYFUN.COM

A faster, more aerobatic 3-channel RTF

by Tom Atwood

PHOTOS BY WALTER SIDAS AND TOM ATWOOD

SPECS

PLANE: Predator

MANUFACTURER: ReadyToFlyFun.com

DISTRIBUTOR: ReadyToFlyFun.com

TYPE: Ready-to-fly (RTF), 3-channel electric sport plane

FOR: Intermediate to advanced pilots looking for portable, simple fun

FLYING WEIGHT: 13.1 oz.

LENGTH: 27 in.

WINGSPAN: 34 1/4 in.

WING AREA: 133 sq. in.

WING LOADING: 14 oz./sq. ft.

RADIO: Included 3-channel SS FM 27MHz radio with separate, hobby-grade receiver, speed control and two servos, all modular and replaceable; fully proportional rudder, elevator, and throttle.

POWER SYSTEM: 280 direct drive pusher, 4 5/16 in. dia. prop, 6-cell 7.2v 600mAh NiMH battery; also tested with FMA 2S Kokam 1500mAh high-discharge rated (8C) Li-Poly battery

FULL THROTTLE POWER: 600mAh NiMH: 7.3 amps, 46 watts; 3.5 W/oz., 56 W/lb.; 1500mAh Kokam Li-Poly: 7.8 amps, 52 watts; 4 W/oz., 64 W/lb.

TOP RPM: 15,200 (NiMH); 16,000 (Li-Poly)

DURATION: 600mAh NiMH, 5 minutes full throttle; 8 minutes mixed flying; 12 minutes casual flying; 1500mAh Kokam Li-Poly, 11.5 minutes full throttle, 15 minutes mixed flying; 20 minutes nursing it around the park

MINIMAL FLYING AREA: Large ball field—for its size, it covers much ground

PRICE: Ultimate radio and aircraft combo—$149.95; without transmitter & receiver—$119.95; optional 110v AC charger—$7.95

COMPONENTS NEEDED TO COMPLETE: 8 AA batteries for the transmitter

SUMMARY

The Predator is a ready-to-fly 3-channel airplane made of tough, damage-resistant, molded polyethelene. It is somewhat faster than the typical RTF aircraft. It has modular, hobby-grade components. Live power is key to delicate maneuvering (rudder and elevator control are sluggish in a pure glide). It performs best in breezes below 5 mph, but an experienced pilot can have a lot of fun any lunch hour in much greater winds. Included second wings, props and tail feathers mean this bird will last, and it just may find a perch in your car's backseat.

Because technology is rapidly improving in the electric flight arena, the arrival of a new 3-channel ready-to-fly (RTF) airplane really piqued my curiosity. The new Predator from ReadyToFlyFun.com is not just for beginners. It is billed as having flyling qualities that will appeal to intermediate to experienced pilots. Let's see what this new bird is all about!

ReadyToFlyFun.com has been an innovative supplier of RTF RC products for years. The company notes that the Predator's thrust is up to 50% of the airplane's weight, and that the components are industry-standard so that you can replace any of the electronics with your own gear should you so choose. Servos can be easily accessed for servo arm adjustment (not necessary in two Predators we flew) or replacement. Pretty interesting!

The polyethelene wings are reinforced with nylon-stranded packing tape on leading and trailing edges, and with an embedded wooden stiffener that extends to the wing's dihedral curve. For greater visibility, wing bottoms are white. The

Richard Baron hand launches the Predator.

radio is a high-quality, single-stick with fully proportional rudder, elevator and throttle. A removable crystal and servo reversing switches are located on the front. There is even a charging port if you choose to use rechargeable AA batteries.

The PREDATOR includes (2) Wings, (2) Tails, (2) Flight Batteries, (3) Propellers, Landing Gear set, AC Wall Charger and instructions. The Radio is included with the Ultimate Radio Combo Package. But how does it fly?

AIRBORNE

After you have cycled the included NiMH batteries a few times, the Predator will be eager to take flight. Give it a good toss directly into the wind and you'll be rewarded with a strong, steady climb out. If you have a smooth runway, the Predator has plenty of power for a classic ROG takeoff.

In the air, the Predator has a distinct personality. Because of its light weight, gusts of wind will toss it around, but if you have experienced thumbs, you can easily counter the effects of mild wind as this bird penetrates the air and flies fairly swiftly. With power on, it easily flies where you point it. Aerobatics are best performed at full throttle. With power off, it has much less rudder authority--this is an airplane that wants to be flown under power.

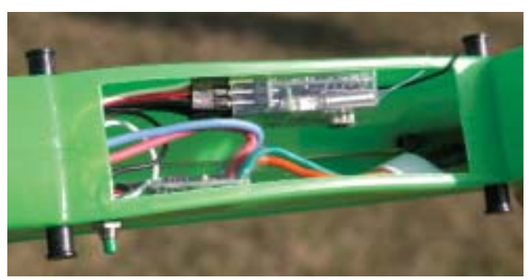
As the instructions advise, performance will be optimized if you move the control rods to the innermost holes on the control horns. Loops, short tail slides, wingovers and similar manuevers are easy to perform. Test pilot Dave Baron took the sticks for a few minutes and found that the Predator will easily fly a sequence of full-power, left rolls along a horizontal line. This is aided by slightly pushing the stick when inverted and pulling when upright (right rolls are not as easy, as is the case with many 3-channel ships of this type). See the video at ReadToFlyFun.com and you'll be surprised by the roll rate the Predator can achieve.

Top: The 1500mAh Kokam 7.4v Li-Poly pack fits nicely in the nose of the Predator. This pack offers slightly greater speed and twice the duration of the stock NiMH battery. Bottom: Extra props and rubber bands are included.

If you are on final and run into a burble of air, you may need a slight amount of power to keep your landing on course. For this reason, if you are a new pilot, practice landing in calm air and avoid breezy conditions.

ASSEMBLY

Putting the Predator together only takes a few minutes. Two bolts protruding downward from the fin are slipped through the stabilizer and the carbon fiber boom. The wire brace holding the tail wheel is placed onto the bolts, and a couple of nuts with plastic exteriors are tightened down by hand. No tools needed.



Modular components are replaceable; note the arming switch that must be pushed before you can power up the motor.

Tail assembly.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

The antenna wire runs through the carbon fiber boom. It extends into the air from the aft end. The directions advise you to take precautions not to accidentally cut the antenna when you slip the two bolts through the boom. I assembled two of these airplanes, and in one instance, despite my best efforts, I cut an antenna.

By comparison, the second build took only seconds and the antenna was untouched. In the unlikely event that you cut the antenna, it is an easy fix—pull it through the wing saddle opening, solder the cut piece back onto the main antenna wire, shrink wrap the joint, and tape the wire to the tailboom.

CONCLUSION

The Predator offers airborne agility and simple recreational fun that is a cut above the performance of a typical RTF. Although we had some rough landings in gusty conditions, we never needed to use any replacement parts. This bird is tough and destined to last. The manual is well written. The electronics include a nice safety feature that kills motor power if radio contact is broken.

If you want a cool looking RTF that can be easily thrown onto the backseat of your car for lunch hour fun, check out the Predator. Equip it with Li-Poly cells and you will have a package that would not have been imagined only a year or two ago. ✪

Links

Kokam Batteries, distributed exclusively by FMA Direct, www.fmadirect.com, (800) 343-2943.

Ready To Fly Fun.com, http://readytoflyfun.com/, (866) 472-8697 (toll free).

For more information, please see our source guide on pg. ___.