

TOPMODEL



Jean-François Boudet : a passion has reached it's peak

Topmodel is very unique amongst the RC Model distribution companies in France for two reasons: Firstly, it was founded by a true aviation addict who had attained the Holy Grail of his career by becoming a fighter pilot. He has however never forgotten (dismissed) the joy of his model-making pastimes and this hobby has truly opened the magic doors.

Secondly, at present, it may be one of very few, if not the only company, distributing scaled ARF RC models.

Many of these models are designed here in France by Jean-François Boudet himself or in close collaboration with famous modellers who have vast knowledge in their specialised fields. They may be constructed in Asia, however quality control has to satisfy the rigorous tests JF insists on.

In short, one has to admit that Topmodel is a rare nugget in the wonderful world of 3D modelling.

Only the sky is the limit !

Born in 1962 in the French province of Rouergue, young Jean-François Boudet later became what we could call a "spontaneous modeller" even though this highly technical hobby is not so common amongst his peers.

By the tender age of eight to nine years, his passion for all things flying and aviation in general is deep-rooted and, astonishingly, he manages to build a beautiful control line replica of a single-seat Curtis P40 Warhawk powered with a Cox 0,8cc engine. He practises his aircraft relentlessly and later moves his focus and skill onto another... Immelmann equipped with a Webra 1.5cc diesel engine which he proudly bought by mail order from the "la Source des Inventions" in Paris.

Later on he built the Sioux and other aircraft of the times, always in the control-line category.

It is the year 1975 and thirteen year old Jean-François manages to save

enough from his pocket money, to buy his very first RC set. It is a basic Lextronic 3 channel, but he quickly replaces it with a more advanced Futaba, which he bought at Claude Kieffer (Model Service).

He now spends no time building his first true RC model airplane, the Taxi from Graupner.

Not dissuaded by the lack of money to buy the proper kit, and combining his technical knowledge and raw talent he skilfully builds the aircraft



Jean-François Boudet and his most valuable assets: his flight logs!

using only printed plans. Anyway, in those days it was much more economical to build from "blueprint" than to buy a kit, which, if memory serves me, did not exist anyway!

Next came the Affreux Jojo, Razmot, and later larger gliders like the Cirrus 3 m, "Ridge Racer."

As Jean-François mentions himself, the gliders really showed him the subtleties of piloting.

Countless hours at the controls, pre-

paring, testing and flying. Enduring the summer heat or the winter cold on a chilly morning when the runway needs to be cleared of snow for yet more flights.

As a self learner with enormous hunger for knowledge, followed closely by a never-ending supply of energy, you can't but admire his dogged determination to succeed and excel. The preference for gliders brings young Jean-François to the slopes of Panat, next to Rodez, he is only fifteen. By the time he reaches the age of seventeen, he participates at the famous slope-soaring meeting at the hills of La Banne d'Ordanche, arriving on a motorbike!

The hobby has now turned to a complete addiction and watching the astounding and unforgettable piloting skills of the Germans Euge Helle, Helmut Müller and Bernard Dolle's SB11, he is now truly hooked.

Our enthusiastic young modeller will come back here in 1980, this time with a shining new MULTIPLEX Flamingo, entering his first true competition !

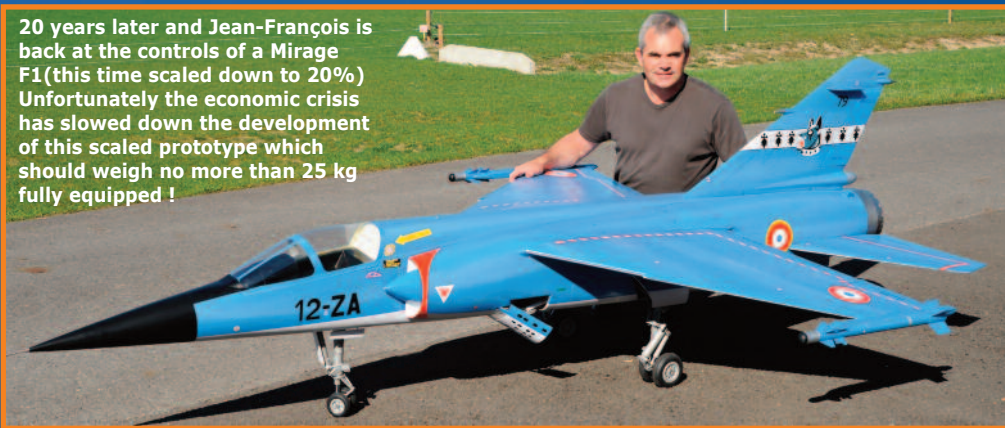


JF Boudet's first big model : a Bücker 133 Jungmeister (Finimodel?)



Jean-François Boudet fighter pilot version: to the left at the fighter school in Tours, to the right at Operational Air Defence Squadron on Mirage F1C at the base in Cambrai.

20 years later and Jean-François is back at the controls of a Mirage F1 (this time scaled down to 20%) Unfortunately the economic crisis has slowed down the development of this scaled prototype which should weigh no more than 25 kg fully equipped !



A "broken" aviation career

Although he has very little means to do so, he bravely registers himself in the local Air Club and is officially licensed to fly solo in a Jodel D112 (a taildragger plane). He achieved this in five hours and eleven minutes which is a true record!!! It also shows his enormous talent and a true sense of flying. Since then he had a new purpose: becoming an airline pilot.

With little cash to fund private training and reach his ultimate goal, the choice is clear: a short career in the French Air Force, though this option is against his taste for all things military. Passing high school exams, then prep-school and finally at the age of nineteen he is admitted to the ranks of the fighter-pilots. Calling upon his admirable capabilities and the sheer desire to succeed, he is finally awarded his "wings" in December of

1983. Note that these selections are notoriously difficult and one has to possess a right character and nerves of steel. A career follows which sees Jean-François pass through flight instructor school on a Fouga Magister during 6 months, then as a flight instructor on this plane, completing a course of two and a half years and finally returning to fighter school in Cazaux for three months training on the Alpha Jet and later continues by



Djibouti, 1992: the end of an era...



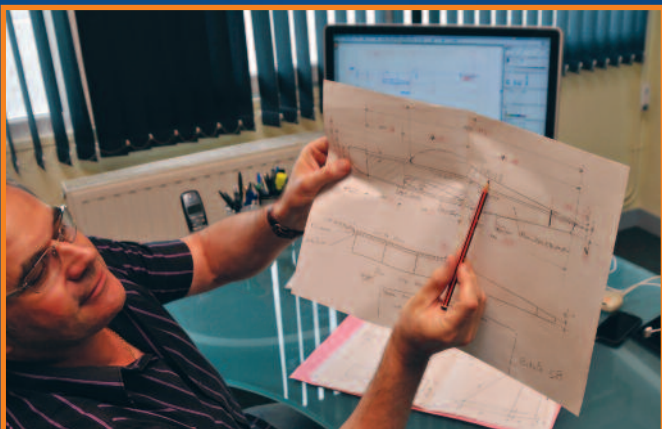
It was not until 2008 when he again held the controls, here with his "faithful lieutenant" Jean-Philippe Binet.

flying the prestigious Mirage F1 air defense jet from the end of the year 1987.

In the meantime, after passing his glider licence in Cambrai, he is amongst the first pilots to complete a 400 km cross country flight in the north of France.

He completed his career as a Chief of Patrol in Djibouti in 1992 after having flown for five consecutive years and clocking up an enviable 1300 hours in the cockpit of the F1. He decided to leave the Air Force after a disagreement regarding his transfer to Solenzara moreover because the airline pilot career is grinding to a halt.

From 1992 to 1994 he decides to invest most of his savings into various theoretical and practical courses (A price for a one year course in the National French Civilian Aviation School or "ENAC", after passing the entrance exam, the practical instrument licence and Airline pilot licence on Beech King Air 200 costs the "round sum" of 500 000 French Franks or about 76 000€ (£65 500 today) ! All this is compulsory if one wants to be hired as an airline pilot. At this time though, the airline companies are in a state of serious crisis and have no interest in recruitment. In spite of sending hundreds of CVs, Jean-François is forced into a long period of unemployment lasting more than two years, casting a shadow of uncertainty over



From the first sketches to the finished kit, this is a colossal job. Here is an example of the towing plane "BIDULE 58" designed by some famous modellers from the Gers. From the original rough sketch, but enough to produce a prototype, Jean-François had to make a final construction plan for the production series (in the background). To the right we see the first prototype of the kit on the Chinese soil !



The full development team of Ecotop kits in Chinese subcontracting factory

his future and his beloved family. Our pilot is now completely disgusted with the world of aviation, to the point that he refuses to fly for thirteen long years and only briefly clutches the controls of a Microlight in 2008. Before long, he will however return to his true passion and first love: the RC model aircraft.

The Topmodel saga

Returning to his homeland of Villefranche-de-Rouergue with minimal financial backing, he single handedly launches the Topmodel Company at the beginning of 1994. This is to be an "upmarket shop" differentiating itself from all the other general modelling shops. The idea is to attract the upmarket and demanding modeller who seeks out quality over quantity and has a desire to achieve outstanding results using more exotic products. As he closely follows Guy Revel's magazine reviews appearing in the press at that time, Jean-François is immediately interested in the Czech artisans. To him, the perfectionist, the work that these craftsmen produce is exactly what he needs. He soon starts importing the sleek gliders with moulded fibreglass fuselages and covered wings made by Karel Vagenknecht. Such a high degree of craftsmanship is very new



Rare document: the shots of the maiden flight of a prototype, in his case the big Ecotop ULTIMATE. Of course, Jean-François Boudet will travel to test the models by himself, whenever this is possible due to his busy schedule.



A long friendship binds JF Boudet to the Japanese Tom Takamatsu, President of OK Model with whom he developed joint products you may find in XPower range.

then and he soon finds it generates high demand. Jean-François now moves onto JR Models, PG, GERASIS and soon other models follow.



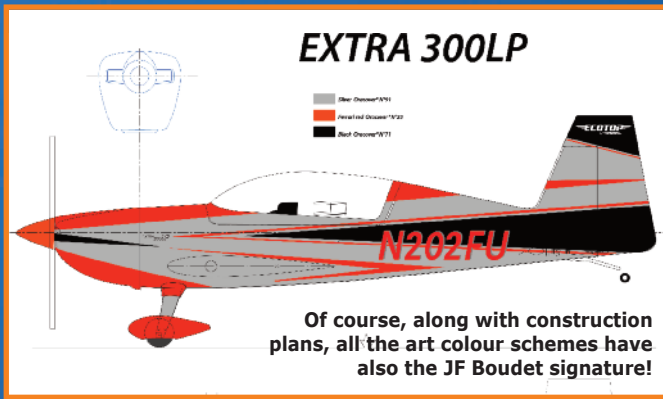
First flying tests of XPower range of jets powered by Electric Ducted Fans.

From the very beginning Topmodel is therefore unique, defined by the range of imported kits all of which are completely ARF. From the year 1995 to 1996, Topmodel extends its range of products to the engines with MVVS, ZDZ and Mega... The collaboration of Lionel Mlinaric and Jeans-Luc Boehm with Topmodel opens the doors to achieving a great competence in electrical flight and

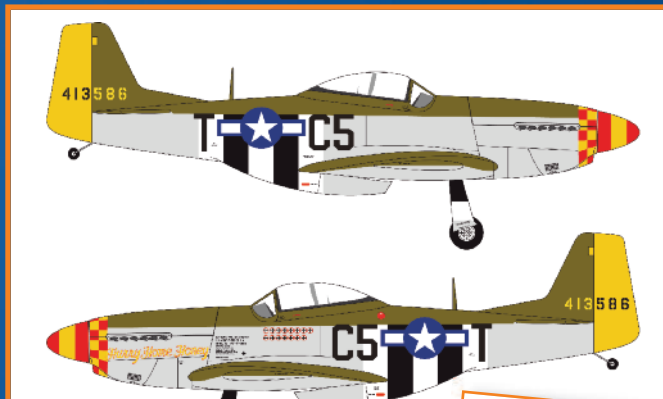
together they clock up many hours of tests using different configurations of components and kits. These test flights keep Jean-François on yet another learning curve. The year 1999 is very important for Topmodel, as it sees the launch of the DIABLOTIN, designed by Stephan Laurens. This is "FUNFLY" ARF with a rigid airframe and it will lead to brilliant success. Within the reach of unexperienced beginners, it is capable of incredible things at the hands of skilful pilots. The DIABLOTIN Cups of 1999 and 2000 will only confirm this. JR Models, constructor of DIABLOTIN (at this point Topmodel still does not have its own brand yet) will sell several thousand worldwide. A true turn for the better. In 2000 the brushless motor revolution is raging and Topmodel gets involved right from the start reaping all the benefits. In 2004 another innovative product is born: the LiPo battery, and in October that year Topmodel will be amongst the first to import the Kokam cells in large quantities. Mid



From the initial drawing to the finished product.... The Precision Product airfield pit box, delivered in kit form for self assembly, it is a particularly economical and well designed product.



Of course, along with construction plans, all the art colour schemes have also the JF Boudet signature!



Always a perfectionist and moving the hurdle higher, JF Boudet reproduces the Hamilton Standard stickers on his recent Mustang by hand, using Illustrator software.

2005 sees the appearance of the first parallel charger dedicated to XPower LiPo, avoiding any unbalanced packs. Sold for only 49,90 € (approximately £43.00), it will be a huge success, with more than 6300 units sold (and it is still available).

From then on Topmodel was always at the peak of technology, in electric flight or elsewhere.

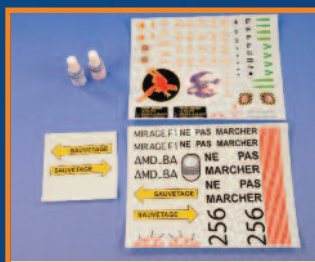
Innovation is the "buzz word" here and to give but one example, Jean-François latest "invention" the electrical double bladed speedbrakes with an integrated motor are unfortunately always sold out.

On top of all this Topmodel now offers 150 exclusive models!

Let us now turn our attention back to the kits themselves. Indeed, even if Topmodel is a "multi brands" distributor who offers the big brands



such as Graupner or products from smaller but technically advanced manufacturers like Jeti, what we are more interested in, in this review, is what makes it unique. Specifically, concentrating on its exclusive items production. In 2001 Jean-François

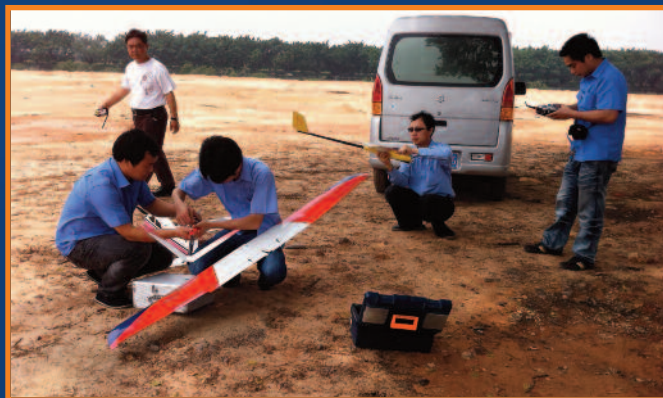


All the kit stickers are also drawn by the boss himself! Had any doubts?

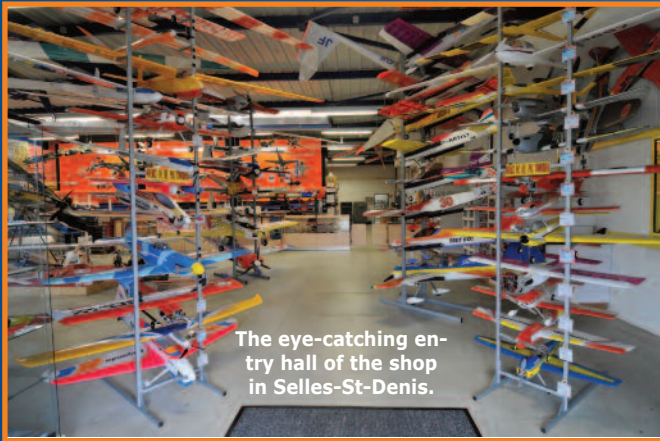
Boudet indeed decides to set up a manufacturing branch in the Czech Republic to fabricate his own line of ARF models. These will be conventional all-built up structure construction and/or in fibreglass. This is the birth of Topmodel Cz, which will have a 49% share and it will employ up to 20 employees. About fifty different models will be produced in 7 years, all designed entirely by Jean-François. The first of them was a CAP 232 "Reebok" art colour scheme and a wingspan of 2,07 m, do you remember it? ▶▶



The construction manuals, and all the photos in them are drawn and shot in the Topmodel studio, and these are also laid out by Jean-François himself!



Top secret: the first fly tests of the next GEM 2!



The eye-catching entry hall of the shop in Selles-St-Denis.

▶▶ However some years later the situation changes, due to the strong Asian competition, and the Czech company has to reduce staff levels to no more than 10 employees (Jean-François Boudet is not a shareholder any more, but remains the exclusive importer for France). Towards the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2005, maybe a bit later, Topmodel decides to take advantage of the Asian market to remain competitive and to fill the missing gaps in its catalogue, using training planes and planes for beginners, but always as an exclusive importer.

With the very well priced import of the Copacabana, made in Vietnam and offered at a street price of 79 € (£68 in today's prices) this was a true record! This model, although relatively cheap, exhibits a very high level of quality, ARF and ships with a very comprehensive manual. It is definitely amongst the best in the world. These excellent and very well illustrated manuals are but one of many strong points Topmodel has to offer. In mid 2006, bending under the commercial pressure of the day, Topmodel is forced to turn to China. Reliable suppliers are very difficult to find, minimum orders are hugely inflated and to be successful in securing a profitable future Topmodel will share some references with Aeroworks (mainly in the field of large aerobatic models). The main goal is to quickly find and offer exclusive models that Jean-François will either design himself or work with some internal or external partners to completion. So to help his designs see the light of day, Jean-François teaches himself how to use CAD!

It is now necessary to properly differentiate the distinct ranges of products, and Topmodel now press hard to launch several trademarks:

- Topmodel Cz regroups with new models fabricated in the Czech Republic.

Ecotop regroups the top of the range models fabricated in Asia, but developed by Topmodel.

X Power is a range of products dedicated to electric flight (motors, controllers, chargers) among which many are linked to exclusive models, such as indoor aerobatic aircrafts designed by Nicolas Pietu.

Precision Products is finally a range of small kits of models or accessories to build, all laser cut (micro-gliders, Tx trays, airfield pit box...). So to this day, there are more than

150 models which were designed internally, in all possible categories, from small racers (Petit Chelem, Cavallino...), to the large scaled models (Beaver, Midour III and later DALOTEL DM 165 and Spacewalker...) Others were performance gliders, scale or competition (Vz Max, Grob Twin III Acro, Discus 2a and on and on and on). We should not forget the famous Mirage F 1, still in development, although not very profitable, but probably still holding a special place in Jean-François's heart. This is the essence of true and undiluted passion!

When we asked Jean-François Boudet which are his favourites amongst his creations, he points to the Cap 232, his first personal debut, also the Vz Max (with undisputed flight qualities) and also there is the PILATUS PC 6 series (1400 kits sold in varying versions) and lastly the GEM (selling in excess of 1400 pc in various versions but only 33% in France) a motorized glider equipped with flaps for which an updated version is in preparation ...

When you'll have to choose....

You can find these exclusive models in the famous Topmodel catalogue is a true and complete "modelers Bible" and on the E-shop created in the year 2000 and quickly becoming a main reference point for many enthusiasts, not forgetting to mention that it was a "one of a kind" in France then.

Unfortunately it was also a target of large-scale piracy recently, although all is now secure in the trenches and the security loopholes have been plugged shut.

To summarize, there are some 80 models designed internally now, and all these are therefore immediately available to the customer, as they are part of the broad range that Topmodel offers.

Therefore Topmodel offers the customer a wider choice than any larger name European RC distributor! Rather impressive track record, don't you think? I have to say that I definitely applaud Jean-François for his skill and determination in such times of economic hardship!

So, are you ready for a new KIT? As Jean-François would say: COME FLY WITH US!



Immaculate stock-keeping.....



Always at the top of the game, Topmodel was the first company in France to use Dynamic Storage and Retrieval Systems in our activity sector...

And why not, to me this makes perfect sense. Why indeed choose a model without a soul, designed by someone in the middle of Asia, who has a very faint idea what makes a real plane and has no real meaning of true craftsmanship. Open your heart and go for a kit devised and designed here in France!

It may be cheaper, but, what is more important, it will be backed by Topmodel's legendary attention to detail and determination to offer their customers the best in the field.

Jean-François Boudet's austerity may also be legendary and not too welcome in the boardroom, however to the customer, it is a bonus and can only be an asset appreciated at the level of monitoring the quality-control of his products.

Anyhow, all the Topmodel kits have an irreplaceable added value: and that is the touch of an unquestionable competence doubled by passion to achieve the best!

These days those are all very rare qualities!

We hope that you found our review interesting and that we have managed to help you discover a very different and passion-driven modeller, Jean-François Boudet, a man with outstanding qualities, heading a design and distribution company that is definitely NO just another "box pusher"!



COME FLY WITH US!