



Dennis McFarlane

# R/C Report

## Great Planes Zlin Z-526 Akrobat

**This compact version of a rarely modeled aerobatic superstar of the 1960's is certain to be popular.**

The original Zlin Trenor was designed in response to a Czechoslovakian government requirement for a two-seat basic trainer for flying school and military use. The first production Z-26 featured all-wood construction and was powered by a 105hp Walter Minor 4-cylinder engine. Development of the Zlin series of aircraft resulted in many improved variants. The first Akrobat, Z-326, was an all-metal two-seat aircraft powered by a 160hp 6-cylinder Walter Minor engine. Introduced in 1968 the Z-526 Akrobat continued to up the horsepower race with 180hp Avia M 137A engine.

Although rarely modeled in this country, the renowned Zlin series of single-seat Akrobat aerobatic aircraft was a great success. Flying against such competition as Art Scholl and his famous DeHavilland Chipmunk, an airplane that also began its career as a military trainer, the Zlin series of aerobatic airplanes won numerous world aerobatic championship titles during the 1960's.

The Great Planes Z-526 Akrobat was designed around the ever-popular .72 four-stroke or .46 two-stroke motor. The Great Planes Z-526 Akrobat can also be powered by an ElectriFly RimFire .55 (42-60-480) outrunner electric motor.

The wingspan of the Zlin is 58 inches with a projected weight of six pounds. The wing is constructed of a foam core sheeted in a thin layer of balsa. As shipped, the



wing is a two-piece affair that can either be left as is or assembled into a one-piece structure. Both options are described in the assembly manual allowing for the Zlin to fit into the trunk of almost any vehicle and thus easily transported to the flying field. The fuselage of the Zlin is a time-honored box frame to which formers are added, and the whole structure is then sheeted in balsa. This form of assembly, which had gone out of fashion, makes for an extremely lightweight yet rigid structure. The entire airframe is covered in an attractive high-visibility scheme of red, white and blue Monocote. Included with the Zlin is a nice decal sheet allowing for three different scale renditions of the aircraft as it would have appeared during full-size aerobatic competition in the late 1960's.

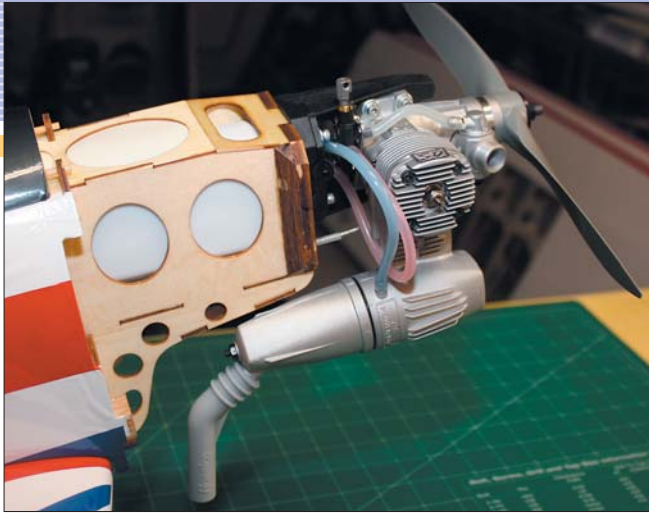
The Zlin Akrobat is packaged by Great Planes with eye-catching box art featuring a photo of the completed model against what appears to be a full-scale runway. Many times I read reports of an airframe being completed in a certain number of hours. I've never

felt this to be in a race against time. I often repeat to customers, there are no rewards in this hobby for finishing an airplane first, but there are huge punishments for being careless and forgetting a critical detail.

Once the airplane was unpacked and found to be damage-free, it was time to take a look at the instruction manual. I easily spent a couple of hours going over the



*Packaged complete and damage free, everything needed is included in the kit except the engine and radio control system.*



*For ease of maintenance and tuning, a decision was made to side mount the motor using the supplied hardware instead of using it to make the recommended inverted installation.*

manual comparing assembly steps to the unpackaged product on the work table in front of me. The manual is clear and easy to follow. I don't like any surprises during assembly, and I've found this to be the way to complete a project without mistakes. Once I was completely familiar with the manual, a checklist was made. I determined the only things I would need from my local hobby store other than the basic engine and radio requirements were three feet of fuel tubing and a 1:5 scale civilian pilot, GPMQ9063. It was also suggested in the manual to "chase" the aileron to wing hinge glue joints with foam-safe CA, so a bottle was added to my list.

Once assembly began, everything went smoothly. Making sure all the necessary components are on hand before beginning a project always makes for easy progress. With an airplane of this size, all that is needed are standard servos for the control surfaces and throttle. Selected were four Futaba 3004 standard ball bearing servos—one each for the rudder and elevator and one for each aileron. A Futaba 3003 standard servo was used on the throttle. This aircraft was equipped with an OS .46 2-stroke glow motor, which is the lower end of the suggested power requirement. The .46 size glow motor has been the industry standard for many years. For reasons of tuning and maintenance I mounted the engine on its side instead of in the suggested inverted position. This led to me having to whittle away much more of the beautiful molded fiberglass cowl than would have been necessary had I gone with an inverted installation.

This choice was not a recommendation of the instruction manual. If I were to do it again, I would have to rethink what I did, at minimum changing the stock muffler to one of the many "in cowl" aftermarket designs. Considering the long winter ahead there is every reason to believe the engine installation will be improved upon. I have not received any negative comments, quite the con-

trary, but the side-mounted engine with stock muffler does not look as clean as I would have liked.

The Great Planes Zlin Z-526 Akrobat has presence on the flight-line and is a distinctive departure from the many Extras and other aerobatic airframes. My first trip to the flying field was on a very windy day with gusts to 25mph, so it was decided to postpone the test flights until better weather conditions made for a safer first flight. There were 10 club members present that first trip. After explaining the features of the aircraft to those present, even with the less than attractive engine installation and not making any test flights, I placed a call from the flying field and put two on order—a really good showing for the first time out.

Several days later the weather forecast indicated reasonable temperatures and, at least for late fall, moderate winds. A phone call was made to my photo pilot, and we agreed to a meeting at the flying field. Both Cliff Fullhart and I were pleasantly surprised by the performance of the Zlin. Considering the airplane to be relatively large for a .46 two-stroke glow motor, the Z-526 grooved quite nice-



*Often times overdone, the high visibility red-white-blue scheme works very nicely on this aircraft, making for an easy-to-see and attractive model in the air and on the ground.*

ly, with little tendency to drift out of a maneuver. Once trimmed, all of the "basic" IMAC maneuvers were performed with ease.

The Great Planes Zlin Z-526 Akrobat is a good looking airplane in a compact platform. In the Chicago area there is a trend back to smaller airplanes that can be fitted in a vehicle trunk and don't need a huge amount of support equipment to fly. Outfitted with economical standard servos and a fuel-sipping glow motor, this is an aircraft that is certain to be a good seller. **HM**