

# In The Air

So you want to do for a living what you now do for a hobby?

[Terence C. Gannon](#)



Iñaki Elizondo Casado's *Weberschock* 'Radical' amidst a backdrop of balsa-hungry wind turbines at the world famous Bwlch in South Wales, UK, at the 2017 Welsh Open F3F. (image: Kevin Newton)

A number of years ago, I had the good fortune to see Chris Anderson, the former editor of *WIRED* magazine, speak at Mount Royal University here in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Amongst his many accomplishments in addition to his time at the helm of *WIRED*, he founded *3D Robotics*, an early entrant into the commercial drone business, and he's the author of a number of bestselling books including most notably *The Long Tail* and *Makers: The New Industrial Revolution*. I have thought for quite some time that Anderson

is very capable of Gladwellian insight into popular culture, but doesn't seem to get the same kind of credit Gladwell himself does, which always surprises me.

Anderson spoke on many topics that night (his thoughts on LEGO have also stuck with me to this day — it's nice to encounter a fellow fanboy) but in particular I was intrigued by his comments about his '*tendency to industrialise his hobbies*'. I'm sure I am hopelessly mangling his words but I believe the essence was along these lines — so often we enjoy doing something so much we seek to turn that hobby into a profession. Anderson has done it at least a couple of times and the impression with which I was left was it was a decidedly mixed blessing for him. While I am now lapsing into pure speculation as to what was in Anderson's mind that night, my sense was along the lines of '*sure, do it, but be prepared to pay a price*'. Not the least of which is that even the most compelling subject can be made a drudge if we *have* to get up and do it every day.

I started thinking about this when I read the third part of Bob Dodgson's autobiography *The Implementation of a Dream* in this issue. In particular, that with a quarter of a century of producing some of the best glider kits around, Bob eventually wrote: "after we closed *Dodgson Designs* I did very little glider flying. I had lost my boundless passion for it — having turned my great hobby into my job for 25 years." Clearly that many years is a good run, by any standard, but his comment still made me a little sad. Actually, a *lot* sad. I would hate to think a stiff breeze blowing straight up a seaside cliff, or a booming thermal sucking up everything in its path would ever become — well — boring. Just another crappy day in paradise.

Make no mistake about it — I doubt many, if any, of us would take a pass on the opportunity to hit the slope for a couple of hours for a living as opposed to working on the killing floor at the local slaughterhouse. Or, much less

bombastically, even a stuffy office with all the nonsense which goes along with that. But, let's be realistic, there's a pretty good chance no one, any time soon, is going to pay you to carve up the ridge while polishing up a perfect eight point roll.

That said, it's never going to be a choice which is so black and white. There are a millions shades of grey between those binary extremes where at least some of what we enjoy about our collective interest can be used to put bread on the table and maybe a little money in the bank at the end of the day.

What strikes me, in particular, is the skill set that is so intrinsic to our hobby just happens to line up with some pretty important trends in broader society. For example, I don't know where you're likely to find a higher concentration of people who know more about making things fly with extreme efficiency. Most of the time, consuming no fuel at all — as exemplified by the fascinating work described in *Like Soaring on Mars* in this issue. But even those pursuits such as F5J (as ably described by Mike Vos in *South Africa F5J Team Qualifier*, also in this issue) which actually *do* involve the consumption of energy, it's amazingly little, and green energy at that. It's then converted into a *lot* of flight time. The doing-a-lot-with-a-little ratio is pretty outstanding.

I enjoyed the recent NOVA episode entitled the *Great Electric Airplane Race*. They did a good job at painting a fairly accurate assessment of where things really stand in this area. Progress has been impressive, for sure, but they certainly didn't claim that we'd be flying the transpacific routes on a batch of lipos and a couple of outrunners any time soon. In fact, they were fairly candid that was a long, *long* ways off — with much of the technology still needing to be invented or requiring unobtainium as the primary building material. But the important point is this: we are at least on right trajectory

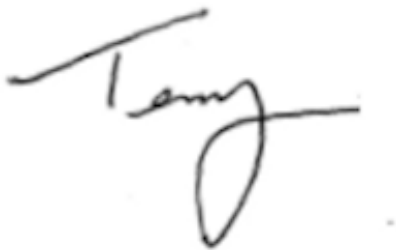
that will eventually, in the **distant** future, include flying lots of passengers great distances without blowing big holes in the only atmosphere we have.

Here's what I know for sure. If I was one of those talent-hungry companies featured in that recent NOVA episode, or some other greentech industry like wind energy, and I was looking for people who have relevant domain expertise, knowledge of advanced materials, an ability to set up efficient and effective R&D programs and possess a can-do attitude while working and playing well with others...

I would look no further than the readers of RC Soaring Digest.

We have now reached that critical mass where there are now too many great articles to enumerate and summarize them here. I simply encourage you to dive in with the link below. I hope you enjoy what we have been able to put together for you this month.

Fair winds and blue skies!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terence' or 'Terry', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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*The out-of-this-world (literally) cover photo is of Stratodynamics' F5J-based HiDRON™ high altitude research platform as it cruises around the New Mexico desert at over 80,000 feet. For the whole story, check out Like Soaring on Mars, the [first article](#) in this issue. Or go to the [table of contents](#) for all the other great articles. A PDF version of this article, or the entire issue, is available [upon request](#).*

