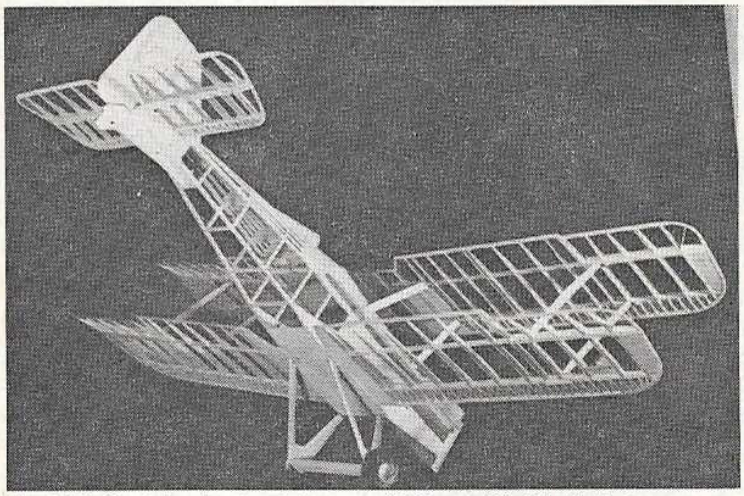


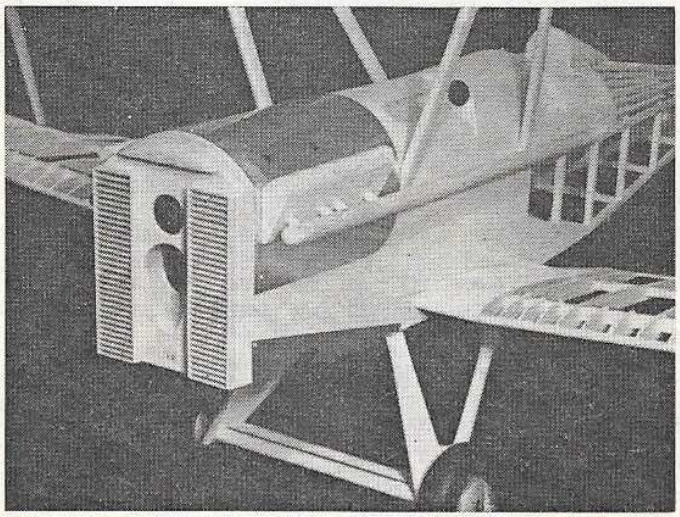
R.C.M.&E. kit review No. 26

TOP FLITE S.E.5a

Built by Mick Charles

MY first look at pictures of Dave Platt's S.E.5 were shown to me by Don Baxter on his return after his visit to the U.S.A. where he saw Dave. A few months previously, Dave had written to inform me about the S.E.5 that he was designing for Top Flite and promised me a sample when the kit was released. But I was to get my sample sooner than I expected, for when I arrived at my Club (Eastcote) one night, there was Tony Dowdeswell (Editor) with other members, eagerly studying the best kit drawing of a scale model that I, for one, have ever seen. Not only did it have three $\frac{1}{4}$ model size scale drawings of the full-size aircraft, taken from the book 'S.E.5.A' by Charles L. Bourget, the plan was also waxed to prevent one's work sticking to it. Before I could ask Tony who was going to build it, he informed me that I was! Well, my answer – seeing as he had not brought the kit with him – was that I would let him know when I had a look at it the following day. It goes without saying how I reacted. The quality of the wood in the kit could not have been bettered, even if one had gone to the model shop and selected it oneself; it was graded according to the job it had to do. The only criticism I have to make is that the machined trailing edge sections could have been a lot harder, because when I had covered and doped the wings, I found that after a couple of days they tended to bow slightly. The die cutting was exceptionally clean, even through the $\frac{1}{4}$ in. ply parts.

Also in the kit are a partly-shaped scale propeller and an aluminium top cowl which, although cut to an outline shape, was not formed to the top radius; I found that by bending it round a 1 pt. milk bottle, it produced the required radius. The bottom aluminium cowl was preshaped with louvres already pressed in. The *Williams Bros.* 5 in. dia. vintage wheels, the 2 in. scale *Lewis gun* and the



Vickers gun are not supplied but are now available in this country. (Henry J. Nicholls Ltd-Ed.)

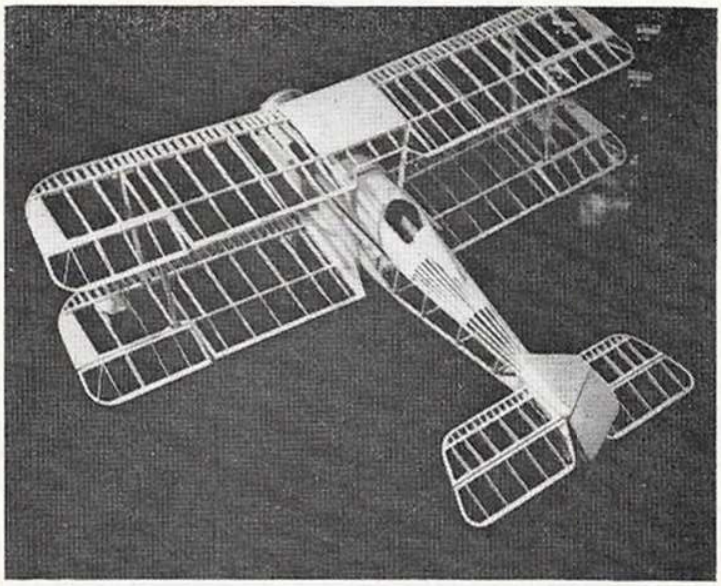
The nylon ball joints supplied, which work like snap fasteners, are fitted to the cabane struts and inter-plane struts and save an awful lot of time in assembling the model. These, I am informed, will be available shortly as a Top Flite accessory. The nylon wing mounting screws supplied are supposed to screw into a bass wood block fitted in the fuselage, but unless you have an 8-32 thread tap, these are not of much use. I personally, always use the common old wood screw which has never let me down. Where the *Vickers gun* protrudes through the top decking, the 1/8th balsa sheeting has to be bent rather sharply. To achieve this, the inside should be clear dopes (shrinking variety) and the outside wetted quite liberally. You will find the sheet will then bend to almost any radius demanded of it.

When covering the model, I used jap silk on the wings and tailplane. These components have scale section and structure and are too fragile to take nylon. When doping, only use one thin coat of shrinking dope (as any more will tend to cause the wing fabric to split when stressed – as I found to my cost) and three or four coats of non-shrinking. The fuselage I covered in lightweight nylon.

To colour the model, *Kingston Diamond* polyurethane was used, mixed with cellulose thinners (quick drying), as this not only makes it dry in about one hour, it also makes it more fuel-proof. I achieved the actual colours by using colourisers and matching to the colour scheme in the S.E.5.A *Profile No.* 1. The transfers are supplied in the kit and are fuel-proof.

I didn't think it necessary for me to explain the construction in detail, being as the instruction book and the

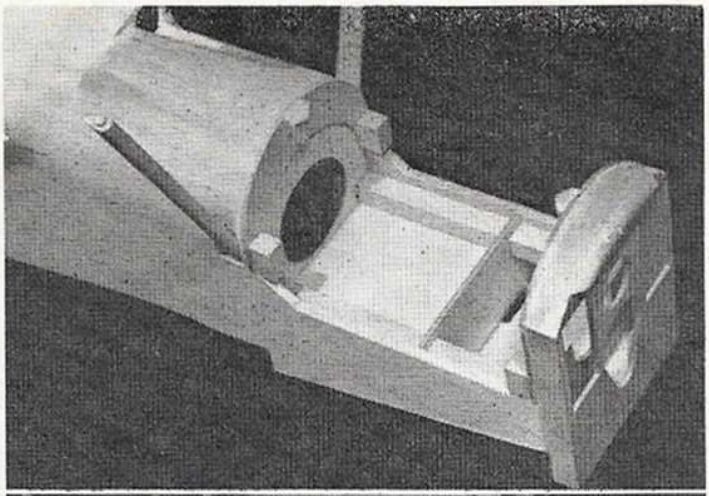
Left : view of the nose section of the uncovered air frame showing simulated radiator grill, and metal top cowl with dummy exhaust pipes. Heading shows views of the uncovered airframe, and completed model.

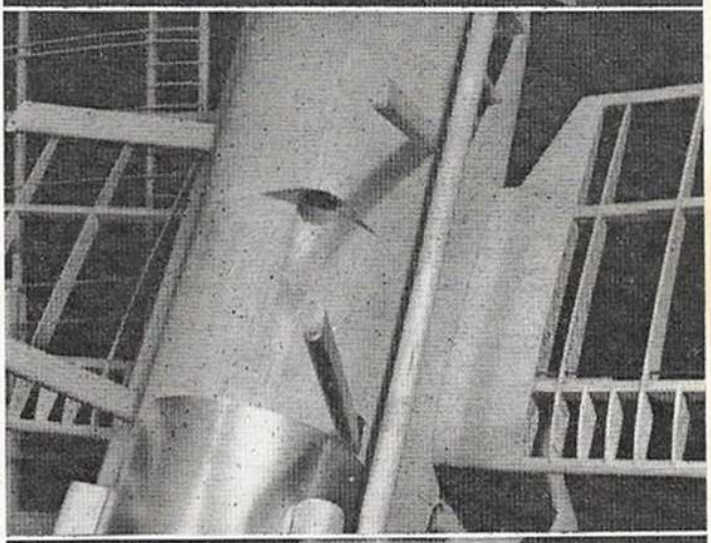


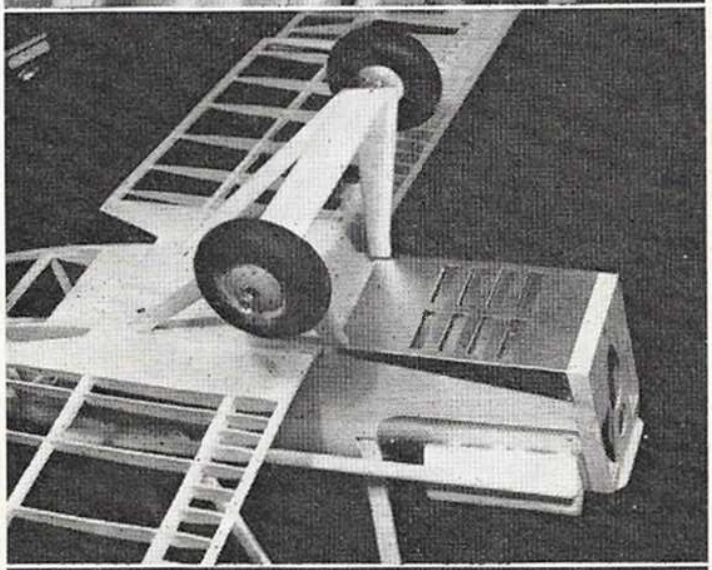
plan supplied are more than adequate to build this model, and anybody who has built one or two multi kits, could probably tackle this one with ease. This is the first kit with die-cut parts that I have managed to construct without having to re-shape or alter them in any way to make them fit. Hence, I managed to complete the airframe in the first week and had it ready for flight by the end of the second – a total building time of between 60 and 70 hours.

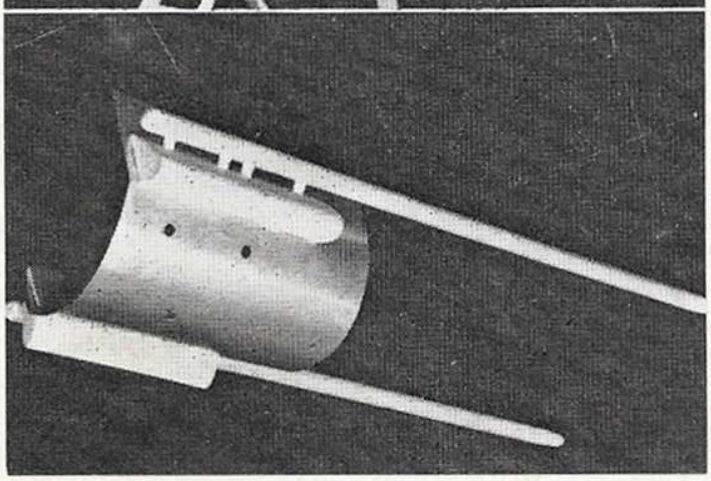
Before taking any model for a test-flight, I tune the engine up in my back garden, which I find saves a lot of bother when reaching the flying field. This I did with the S.E.5.a, with the aluminium top cowl removed. This proved to be my undoing for when I got to Duxford to fly the model for the first time, I started the engine, reduced it to half throttle, did the usual radio checks, and nodded my helper to release it. With half-right rudder on from the start, and still on half throttle, the model did a perfect and very realistic slow take-off and proceeded to fly at about three feet altitude, but refused to climb because as I opened the throttle, instead of the engine picking up, it seemed to get worse and the model touched down on rough ground. All the rigging wires immediately sprung out, but no other damage, so having re-assembled the model and re-run the engine, which again seemed perfectly O.K., I replaced the cowling and proceeded as before. On doing another scale-like take-off, it emulated its first flight, except for touch-down which happened to be into a large slab of concrete, breaking the bottom wing spars and, once again, all the rigging wires left the model. On getting the model back to the workshop, I found the fault to be the so-called heat-proof rubber tubing that I had used to deflect the exhaust out through the bottom cowl was getting soft and closing up, thus causing the engine to throttle back, but it was quite apparent this only happened when the cowling was on the model. I therefore deflected the exhaust through the side with ½ in. copper pipe and repaired the wings where the only parts broken were the dihedral braces. These I replaced with 1/16th Tufnol, which might be worth remembering when building the kit. And so to the flying field again . . .

The model doing its usual impeccable take-off, this time responded to the throttle beautifully and climbed a little too fast to be realistic, so having reduced to half throttle, I proceeded to try a few manoeuvres. These it







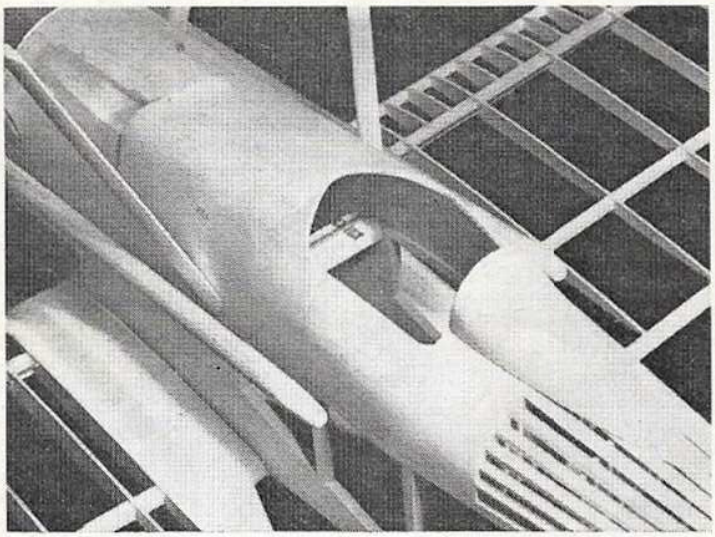


Top right : view of the engine bay with cowl removed. Plenty of room left there to work on the engine and tank systems.

Second right : close-up of the cabane struts. Note shape of orifice for machine gun.

Third right : close-up of the fuselage underside, showing undercarriage strut arrangement, and louvred metal cowl bottom.

Right : the complete engine top cowl assembly.



proceeded to do with relative ease, probably due to its low all-up weight of 6¼ lbs., and at that on half throttle, making the model a good proposition for anybody with a 35 or 40 size engine. This time the model landed at my feet without so much as a nose-over, and will probably now give me many hours of very pleasurable flying.

In conclusion, I should like to congratulate Top Flite on a well British-designed American kit! Engine: Merco Mark II. Radio: Skyleader SL6.

Finally, here are some important notes from Dave Platt:

'I'd like you to pass on a bit of information to *R.C.M. & E.* readers about the rigging wires. We have found a more reliable way of holding the upper end of the wires to the tab; which also has a side benefit too.

'Instead of making a Z-bend at the top end, make a hook. Then you can close the hook up after the length is correct, which is more reliable and additionally means that the wires stay on the top wing when the model is disassembled, obviating the necessity for coding the wires. We are putting a note to this effect in current kits.

'It is *vital* to use the rigging! We had one guy write to inform us that his model broke up in mid-air – needless to say he'd ignored the warning in the instruction book. Incidentally, a .40 or .45 is *ample* power. One last thing, the model is rather left-y, so allow for plenty of right trim-throw – don't bother with having any left trim-throw, it won't be needed.'

British Importer Ripmax Models & Accessories, 80 Highgate Road, London, N.W.5. *Price* £27 10s.

Above are more structural close-ups, showing cockpit area, tail cone, and wing structure at the aileron.

Right and below are shots of Mick's model taken during first test session. The result at bottom right was soon made good.