



## PILOTS OF ANOTHER KIND



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They met on a parking lot.

Ben Glidden and Jason Farrell both have a passion for planes. They are pilots — amateur pilots. On most Saturdays, they come to the Navarre Beach east side parking lot to spread their wings. Though the maximum span on those wings does not exceed 65 inches, the model planes they fly look very realistic.

There is a Cessna Sky Trainer, a B25 bomber, a Zephyr glider, a red Fun Fighter Sky Raider, a F4 U-Corsair, a black thrust jet Vector F35 and other missile carriers, cargo monsters and a few more lying in the back of a truck, each awaiting its turn to show off in the air.

The remote-controlled planes made of expanded polyolefin foam run on a battery for several minutes, then need to be recharged. Both men have a small charger hooked to their car batteries that refuels the models' batteries. They buy them online from China for about \$10, as opposed to a cost of about \$50 in the United States.

They say the lot is an ideal takeoff and landing strip, as it's very wide and open, with lots of air space and few people in the way. They make sure the safety of their practice is a priority. They sometimes land in the sand, and on



Saturday, Farrell's small red plane took a nosedive into a dune. He said it's very easy to fix and will fly again soon.

They attract some attention: Kids have questions, and adults stare with envy, blinking in the blinding sun.

A former Army nurse who served during Iraqi Freedom and was in post at the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad, Glidden got out of service in 2005 and now works as a nurse in a Pensacola hospital. He is 32 and has an 8-year-old son who is not yet able to fly the model planes, which can reach 70 miles per hour.

Farrell is a 26-year-old former Air Force staffer who served for six years and was in Afghanistan. He now wants to go to college, possibly for automotive classes. His Fun Fighter replica reaches 120 miles per hour.

The men said they don't belong to any organized club, noting they would much rather have fun on their own, each happy to have met a kindred buddy to share the enjoyment of the craft.

A third man on the parking lot watched the pair fly. Jason Rubinstein, 36, is an active Air Force pilot stationed at Hurlburt Field. He flew E3 AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) planes in Afghanistan. After seeing the model planes, he said he is tempted to get one too and come join the others on Saturday mornings.

They all served in foreign lands, but it took a parking lot on a white sand beach to bring them together.



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