

The Emu Launch

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Originally in ancient times there was hand launch. Then came towline and high-start, followed by low-start, upstart and slingshot. Power launch and piggy-back were occasionally used. Ultimately winch launch became the way to go, and then back to 1 1/2 meter hand launch. Full circle. Hey, time and technology march on. I now propose a better way. Let's call it the emu launch.

The emu is a flightless bird from Australia. It is in the Ostrich family, and it resembles an ostrich, except that it is smaller and has a blue neck. It is about 5 1/2 feet tall, weighs about 100 pounds and, most important of all, can run at 35 mph. A few years ago, some Texas entrepreneurs decided that emu burgers would be a big hit in USA, since their meat was tender, tasteful and very low in fat and cholesterol. They imported some of these birds from Australia, paying as much as \$50,000 for a breeding pair and proceeded to establish emu farms. However, emu never quite made it to American menus, not even McDonald's. Now there is a surplus of emus in Texas, and some farmers have simply turned them loose on the plains to forage for themselves. So here is the bottom line: we can get an emu for nothing. All we have to do is go to Texas and catch one.

Here is my proposal. There must be someone in our club who lives on a couple of acres where an emu could be kept. We form a committee (what else?) to drive to Texas in a van or sports-ute and obtain an emu. We build a harness to which we attach a tow line, aim the emu upwind and let him run at 35 mph. After the launch, we could bring him back with a retriever line, or maybe just train him to turn around and trot back. Emus are not known for their intelligence, having rather small brains, but high intelligence could be a disadvantage to a creature tasked with a somewhat boring activity such as pulling a sailplane into the air, time after time. Nevertheless, how to get him do this is a detail that I'm sure the committee can work out. I mean, I am proposing the broad outlines of a whole new launch era for our beloved hobby of RC sailplanes, let us not quibble about details but get on with the big picture.

We might even bring ESL into the scheme. They now provide winches and retrievers for ESL-sanctioned contests. Why not emus? I can see it all now. Aside from providing the ultimate in launch techniques, it would attract visitors and new members to our hobby. We could advise the local newspapers who never cover our events now that running emus could be viewed at our contests. Think of the publicity! Our emu-based contests would be written up in all the model magazines. We could no doubt get support for our endeavors from AMA. Maybe even NAA and FAL This could be the start of a world-wide movement and make the RC sailplane niche of aviation the largest of all. Hey, gang, it's time to think big. We'll be the famous club with the very first emu-launch contest. What honor and glory for BASS. The name of the Baltimore Area Soaring Society will go down in history for its innovation and pioneering spirit!