

Gears without

STANDARDS

—but Tons of Fun!!

If you enjoy working with your hands—without doubt a large segment of *Gear Technology's* audience—you *must* go to *robives.com*. There you will find one of the most clean-but-serious fun websites on the Internet. It is where you will learn—or re-learn, in some cases—how to create things from paper. Origami, you're thinking? Nah—mere *child's play*.

We're cuttin' gears, baby!

And not just dainty little paper things to admire—these are fully functioning, *meshing* gears! Bevel gears! Worm gears! Rack-and pinion gears! Yes!

Rob Ives is the mad genius—the man behind the mechanisms—Willy Wonka without the drippy drama—who has elevated child's play to an exquisitely whimsical art form—form that follows function with geometric precision.

His creations exist in many shapes and movements—not just gears. But this *is* a gear magazine, after all, so...

We recently caught up with Rob in his workshop in England, and he was kind enough to do some Q&A with us.

At what age did you begin making paper mechanisms?

I remember making a series of paper models by Peter Markey and having them on my desk in my student (dormitory). So that must have been when I was about 19.

What was the inspiration for the site?

It has been an evolution. I started the *Flying Pig* (*flying-pig.co.uk*) site in 1997, not long after the Internet began. I've always enjoyed computer programming, so when the Internet came along that seemed like the logical thing to do.

What would you call or how do you categorize what you do?

I generally call it paper engineering.

Is this your day job?

It is! It is a weird way to make a living, and from time to time I miss having a regular income and paid holidays. But I love it and wouldn't want to do anything else. I used to be a primary school teacher. I stopped teaching in 2000 to work on the paper projects full-time.

Is there a staff or are you a one-man band?

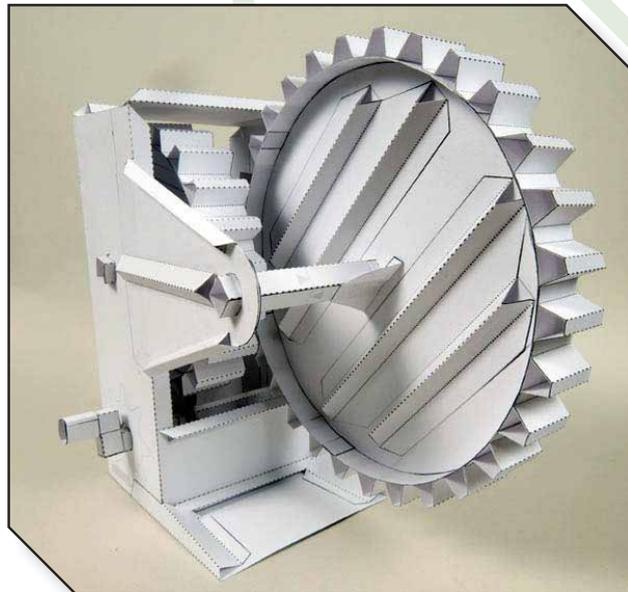
Just me.

Do you have a design and/or engineering background relative to gears?

Only in the sense that I am interested. I have no formal training, but I read a lot about science and engineering.

Do you see yourself as an educator?

Yes. I used to be a teacher, as mentioned. I think education is in my blood. I've had arguments with people I've worked with—publishers usually—where they complain that I reveal too many 'secrets' on my website. For me, it is all about sharing the knowledge and the enthusiasm.



What is the price range for the kits?

On the *robives.com* membership, the main thing I'm trying to sell is a membership. Members can download the projects from the site for free. One year's membership starts from on £9.95.

How's business?

Pretty good, actually. I had a real crisis at around the time of the banking crisis, when three big customers went bankrupt, owing me a five-figure sum. It was pretty scary at the time and it has taken ages to pick myself up. But I think I'm there now.

Any famous customers/fans?

Noel Edmonds (*British broadcaster, writer—Deal or No Deal—and executive*)! That's the only one that I know of. I have customers from all round the world.

What is the point or benefit of membership?

Members can download models for free. My aim in having memberships is that I get a loyal group of followers.

I assume this is a for-profit endeavor?

It is, though profit is not the main motive. I enjoy making things and sharing ideas. The membership lets me do that and put food on the table as well.

Do you have a favorite kit/mechanism?

Usually my favorite is the model that I'm working on currently. I'm really pleased with the Nessie project that I'm working on at the moment. That said, I have a Surly Jack on my desk which I'm rather fond of.

There almost seems to be something of a Zen vibe going on here.

Sure. Did you see the Zen in the Art of Cardboard Engineering model? Turn the handle to hear the sound of one hand clapping!

Who is your typical customer (age, etc.)?

I'm guessing, but I think there is quite a mix. I get parents and children writing in quite a lot. Several teachers, young people, retired people. Exciting, isn't it!? ⚙️