When we first joined forces with Phantom Flight School founder Alan Proto and the rest of the team, our intention was to find out more about the flying habits of drone pilots across the UK. There hasn’t been a great deal of research done so far, with the government’s own drone consultation period probably the most concerted effort to get a response from the UAV community. As useful as it was, it drew only 678 submissions (and more than a quarter of those from the commercial sector), so we thought we could reach more people – and we did!

With well over 1000 entrants – some no doubt enticed more by the chance to win a DJI Spark than they were invested in supporting our interest in drone use (so we accept that there might be the odd anomaly!) – we’ve got the biggest breakdown of UK drone use to date. There are some interesting results and some great feedback from the community, so take a look through our findings and see how your flying habits shape up to the rest of the nation!

Please note: All sections marked with an asterisk were open to multiple answers – which explains why the results don’t add up to 100%!
It would seem that a typical drone owner would be a 40-something male living in the South East! It will be interesting to see how things change in the coming months, as more youngsters get into FPV and an increasing number of female flyers take to the sky.

It’s not surprising to see photography as the most popular use for drones right now, but the sizeable fun factor isn’t to be ignored. The future points to UAVs as a key tool in industry, but is the casual market being overlooked as a result? It was also interesting to see a varied number of reasons for people getting into drones, ranging from work and commercial opportunities, to fun gifts and gadgets and more creative uses. And while the prize on offer might explain some of those people who don’t own a drone, a lot of them did point out they were saving up for one (assuming they didn’t win the Spark!).
Not surprising to see DJI leading the way, with the Mavic Pro just edging out the classic Phantom 3. For the other listed manufacturers, the top models were the Hubsan X4, Parrot’s Bebop and Yuneec’s Typhoon H. Elsewhere custom or home-built designs topped the best of the rest, with notable mentions for the Syma range and the 3DR Solo.

**Flying Frequency**

- More than once a week: 30%
- At least once a week: 20%
- Every 1-2 weeks: 10%
- At least once a month: 10%
- Not as often as I’d like: 10%
- Infrequently: 10%
- Never (yes?): 0%

**Different Places Flown**

- 1 place: 40%
- 2-5 places: 30%
- 6-10 places: 20%
- 11-20 places: 10%
- More than 20: 0%
It’s good to see a fair number of people flying frequently, and in a variety of locations. Though we do have sympathy with the quarter of you not flying as much as you’d like! We should also point out that the furthest flown question relates to distance, not height, so we’re not assuming that a quarter of the UK is happily flouting the maximum altitude laws of the land.

As an island nation, it’s not surprising to see a lot of you flying over water, with many of the more ‘unusual’ responses pointing to boats, beaches, rivers and so on. Other interesting venues included Easter Island, the Himalayas, the Arctic Ice Pack, the Grand Canyon and an Army Training Ground (with permission we should note!). One responder also admitted getting fired after being caught flying at work!

**Usefulness of Drone**

Average score: 7.25

**Ease of use**

Average score: 7.45

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**GENERAL HAPPINESS**

Amount of Fun

Average score: 8

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**Specific Places Flown**

- Loops
- Through trees
- Over water
- Under a bridge
- Somewhere else, unusual

**Furthest Flown**

- More than 400m: 26%
- Up to 100m: 27%
- Up to 250m: 25%
- Up to 50m: 22%
Quality of Photos

Quality of Video

Some pretty consistent answers across the board in this section, with most of you largely happy with what you're getting out of your drone and it's good to see you're mostly having a lot of fun with it. Clearly there's still some indifference though (lots of people giving ratings of 5 to counter the many 10s), so manufacturers still have a lot of work to do to improve the ease of use and quality of their craft.

ACCIDENTS
Number of Crashes (£500+ drone)

Time of Crash
Congratulations to all those who openly admitted to ‘human error’ as the reason for crashing (“I’m an idiot” was our favourite reason given) – we’d always blame the drone first! An interesting range of detailed responses were given, which could be another article in itself. Technical issues were obviously a high factor, as were environmental issues such as strong winds, as well as stray dogs, children, other drones and angry seagulls. Other accidents were attributed to a loss of orientation in flight (going left when you should have gone right) or over-cooking the landing, although quite a few people were deliberately crashing their craft to test the durability of their model – especially if it was a custom design. We’d also like to doff our collective caps to the reader who bravely put himself in front of the wayward drone to take the hit and save his pride and joy from harm. Thankfully most of you have got away with minimal damage, if any – but do take heed from these warnings!
Although the number of people unaware of the DroneCode is worryingly high, we could put some of that down to the non-drone owners mentioned earlier, or a lack of awareness of this relatively recent CAA initiative. Regardless, getting that number a lot lower is obviously important, so it was interesting to see more people were generally supportive of the proposed mandatory registration and safety training in the UK – though, of course, the concerns of the ‘not happy at all’ responders are still issues that need to be addressed.
Have your say

We opened up our final question as bit of a free-for-all, and here are some of the things you had to tell us:

“Drones are far too easily accessible for members of the public. They should only be purchased from reputable model shops and on proof of either a test certificate for UAVs or a certificate of competence”

“I love flying my drone; it fills me with joy and unleashes my full potential of being able to take aerial shots”

“Training on enforcement of legislation is required in support of the registration process. If enforcement agencies don’t prosecute breaches then the registration scheme is an empty gun”

“My current UAV is just a toy but gives me a lot of pleasure. Unfortunately I can’t really justify the expense of spending the money to get a really good drone...”

“I am a fully certified pilot which cost me a lot of money and it bugs me that people are allowed to buy drones and fly without a licence”

“I feel there is not enough said about needing land owner permissions. Why is this not part of the DroneCode leaflet?”

“Is there some sort of 12-step programme to get over drone addiction? I think I have a problem!”

“I would love to have a collaboration between the police drone department and experienced drone pilots, and also for there to be local regular meets”

“The cost of being legal is for very little benefit and increasing legislation means I am probably going to sell my drone. Morons flying dangerously have ruined it for everyone”

“Why don’t I fly as much? Because I feel stigmatised, even though I’m probably not. Most of the public are friendly and interested, but the bad press we get just gives me ‘that’ feeling”

“More designated areas for practice flying and open skill practice would be good”

“I have found it very difficult to find somewhere safe to fly, or to find like-minded drone people who simply wish to fly as a hobby”

“The more I learn about drone flying the more I realise I don’t know. It seems extraordinary that people can buy these from Argos and then be flying them an hour later with little or no idea about they are doing!”

“The law needs to be more straightforward. I find I am unable to fly my drone due to worries about the law”

“It’s not all about the pre-built big manufacturers. There are custom self-build FPV-ers in the UK as well!”

“I’m all for drone registration and legislation, and I would hope that more favourable insurance options will become available for those who register and pass the flight tests”

“Although I will abide with the new regulations I think that they will prove to be pointless as they will not stop the people that are flaunting the DroneCode as it stands”

“Almost every time I take off, I am in wonderment at the new sights and views that become available and can be recorded with my drone”

“I feel the general public need educating regarding drone usage, if that’s possible. I have had a lot of interest whilst flying, usually hostile. Not all drone flights are sinister”

“The National Trust and English Heritage should allow sensible drone flying near their rural properties”

“Can you do anything about the weather?!”

Responding to the results of the survey, our partner on this project and founder of the Phantom Flight School, Alan Proto, also had this to say: “What strikes me immediately is how much fun people have with their drones. 40% rate their drone as being “huge amounts of fun” and nearly a third rate their drone as being “hugely useful to them”. How often they fly, with 40% of respondents flying at least weekly, was also interesting, with 20% having flown in more than 20 different places.

“I am also pleased to see that the majority of people completing the survey understand the DroneCode well and are happy with the rules it contains. Just as encouraging is the broad support from drone users for mandatory drone registration and safety awareness training. More of a concern is that nearly half of the more than 1000 people who completed the survey have had a crash or a near miss with their drone. Making sure people know how to fly their drone safely and effectively is what we are all about here at Phantom Flight School. It looks like there is plenty of work for us to do!”

With over 1000 people getting involved, sharing their flying habits as well as their opinions on the drone industry, it’s been a fascinating and hugely rewarding survey. Some of you might feel aggrieved or bewildered as to why your responses sit within a minority, but there’s a wealth of intriguing information that’s sure to trigger some interesting debate – and not just in our office!

We had no real intentions for this to be considered any kind of authoritative overview of the UK drone market, but it’s certainly as close to a snapshot of the current UAV community as you’ll find – and if we can repeat things around the same time next year, it will be great to see how things shift over the next 12 months!