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# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of ROBERT (BOB/BOBBY) A. BIENENSTEIN



September 26, 1926 - February 8, 2023  
Modeler starting in 1935      AMA #268

Written & Submitted by RB (03/1998); Transcribed by NR (04/1998); Edited by SS (2002); Updated by JS (10/2007, 02/2008, 12/2017, 02/2023);  
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## Career:

- National Perpetual Trophies
  - 1947, 1949, 1993, 1996, 1997 and 1999: Mulvihill
  - 1954: Wakefield Aero Cup
  - 1947, 1954, 1960: Stout Indoor
- National Record
  - 1996: Outdoor, Free Flight Moffett, 43 minutes
- Consultant & Designer for Manufacturer
  - Midwest Model Company
- Consulting Work
  - Did consulting work for Education Development Center, Inc. and Society of Automobile Engineers for Aero Science Program for 8th graders in public schools
- Contest Director
  - 1971, 1976, 1984, 1987: Committee member for Michigan State Meet
  - 1994: Director for U.S. Indoor Champs
  - 1995: Director for a U.S. FAI Team Selection Program, Muncie, Indiana

## Honors:

- 1985: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1990: AMA Outstanding Award, World Champs
- 2000: AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 2000: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame

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I started building solid models in the mid-1930s and worked my way into 10-cent Comet models. In 1939, I built my first gas model, the Comet *Clipper*, then the *Zipper*, the *New Clipper*, and the *New Ruler*. Brown Jr. Model D powered them.

In 1941, I joined the Detroit Jr. Chapter of AMA. I did not have much success with gas models in local competition, but I took first in junior gas in a non-flying event with an original design. It was a Class A model with a one wheel retractable gear, silk covered pylon, ala *New Ruler*. During this time I built a few rubber jobs – the *Cloudhopper*, *Korda* and rubber scale *Cub*.

In 1942, I joined a new model club just starting out, the Detroit Balsa Bugs. Five out of the original group are still active, namely, Joe Macay, Ed Stoll, Wally Hartung, Jerry Wylemski, and me.

During the war years, I spent most of my time building and flying indoor models, H/L gliders,

small stick, cabin, and scale. At this time, I got interested in U-Control speed. I built a Class A speed model powered by an Ohlsson 19. With many repairs and a little luck, I did learn to fly. I also built a spearhead junior. I flew this in some local meets. I remember one meet in Windsor, Canada: no trophy, first place was a pound of Canadian bacon and second was a pound of butter.

When the Detroit modelers came back from service I made up my mind to learn all I could from the experts. I started with George Sass, National Champion in 1940. He was a classmate of my older brother and when George returned from service, we got together. What a talent he had! I spent many hours in his basement leaning all I could. He was an artist when it came to indoor building and prop carving. His outdoor rubber models were a study in lightness and wood selection. All my early indoor models were George's designs. About this time, I renewed my friendship with Ed Naudzius, the 1939 Moffett winner, who had also just returned from service. Ed was another good designer and prop expert. He even carved his gas props and showed me how to lay out a prop. Ed's big talent was adjusting models and contest strategy. With this background under my belt, it was time to build and fly. I was not satisfied with being an expert in one event, I wanted to build and fly everything.

One of my first original rubber designs was a 300 square inch Mulvihill model. After several modifications, I came up with the model that won my first and second Mulvihill trophy. The model was called *The Challenger*. My big contest wins began in 1947 when I won the Michigan State Senior Championship, making me eligible for the first Plymouth International Meet, in which I placed second for Senior Championship. The 1947 Nationals followed this contest, where I became Senior National Champion.

Listed below are some of my major wins at the Nationals. At most of these meets, I usually flew in at least 10 events.

**1947 Nationals - Monticello, Minnesota (Senior National Champion)**

Class	Placing	Event
Senior	First	Indoor Stick-Stout Trophy
Senior	First	Indoor Cabin
Senior	First	Indoor H/L
Senior	First	Outdoor Stick-Mulvihill Trophy

**1948 Nationals - Olathe, Kansas**

Class	Placing	Event
Open	First	Outdoor Stick
Open	Second	Outdoor Cabin

**1949 Nationals - Olathe, Kansas**

Class	Placing	Event
Open	First	Outdoor Stick-Mulvihill Trophy
Open	Second	Outdoor Cabin

**1950 Nationals - Dallas, Texas**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Placing</b>	<b>Event</b>
Open	First	Outdoor H/L Glider
Open	Third	Indoor Cabin
Open	Third	Indoor Stick
Open	First	Team Championship, Detroit Balsa Bugs

**1951 Nationals - Dallas, Texas (Open National Champion)**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Placing</b>	<b>Event</b>
Open	First	Flying Scale Rubber
Open	Second	Outdoor Stick
Open	Third	H/L Glider Indoor
Open	Second	Indoor Stick
Open	Second	Indoor Cabin
Open	First	Team Championship, Detroit Balsa Bugs

**1964 Nationals - Chicago, Illinois**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Placing</b>	<b>Event</b>
Open	First	Wakefield Rubber-Aero Cup Trophy
Open	First	Indoor Cabin-Stout Trophy

**1957 Nationals - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Placing</b>	<b>Event</b>
Open	First	Outdoor H/L Glider
Open	First	Wakefield Team Championship

**1960 Nationals - Dallas, Texas (Placed 2nd. for National Champion)**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Placing</b>	<b>Event</b>
Open	First	Indoor Cabin-Stout Trophy
Open	Second	Indoor Paper Stick
Open	Second	Outdoor Rubber Stick

Open	First	Team Championship, Detroit Balsa Bugs
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### 1961 Nationals - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Class	Placing	Event
Open	First	½ A Gas
Open	Second	Indoor Cabin

During these early National contests is when I met all my boyhood heroes. To list a few recognizable names: Henry Cole, Dick Korda, Joe Bilgri, Sal Taibi, Henry Struck, Carl Goldberg and Joe Elgin – I could go on and on. A number of these great modelers became close friends of mine. They were very free with their information.

At one National meet, Joe Bilgri not only gave me the plans for his indoor glider, but he also gave me the wood to build it. Another interesting story about Joe is that after one of the National meets that we attended together, he left his tennis shoes in my car, and they later became an award at our annual Balsa Bug banquet for outstanding performance of the past year. The shoes were passed around for a number of years.

At the Second Plymouth International meet, I tried to hustle Joe Foster in a game of pool; I never got a shot. I came to find out he could shoot pool as good as he could fly model airplanes. He was a senior pool champion (what talent).

While attending a full-size glider wave camp in Petersburg, Virginia, sometime in the 1980s, whom do I run into but Dick Korda? We celebrated his 70th birthday and talked about old times.

I gave Joe Elgin his first glider ride and he later went on to get his glider rating. I received from Carl Goldberg a handpicked Viking kit that I built and flew in 1/2A at the 1961 Nationals. I had high time and ran first place in Open. This was my last Nationals until the late 1980s.

In the 1960s, I was busy raising a family and building an HP 11 all metal sailplanes, which I completed in 1969. This was a highlight for me. I have been active in glider competition and record flying and hold 100K, 200K, and 300K speed triangle records along with out and return records for the state of Ohio. I was the recipient of the Region 6 50th Anniversary Soaring Society of America Award for the fastest 300K triangle. I hold a private S.E.L. seaplane and glider rating, and have a Gold “C” Badge with two diamonds. My model flying during this time was local and limited to mostly indoor flying.

In the late 1960s, Ed Lidgard and I formed a model company to produce and sell balsa, entry-level models that could be simply built and capable of good flights. The company was called Craft-Air. There were four model kits in the series: *Flip Jr.*, a beginner hand launched glider, *Flip*, a small hand launched glider, *Rogue*, a Rise Off Ground (ROG) stick model and *Zip*, a sheet wood, small rubber model. These models came about from giving demonstrations in the Detroit Public Schools, Boy Scouts, and Canadian Air Scouts in Windsor, Canada. They were our teaching tools. These kits were produced and distributed by Midwest Models. Several are still in production by Midwest and used in their teaching program.

After retiring from Chrysler Corporation in 1987, I also retired from glider competition and went back to model contest flying. My major wins since returning to National competition were winning the Mulvihill in 1993, 1996 and 1997 and the Moffett in 1992, 1993, and 1996. I also ran the Mulvihill team event with George Perryman and Sandy Downs in 1993, 1994, 1996, and 1997. We also won the Moffett team event in 1994, 1996, and 1997. Our team was called The Young Upstarts.

I flew in FAI competition from 1947 to 1955. In the central elimination meets, my two best placings in Wakefield were second in 1952 and second in 1955.

### **First Place Wins at the AMA Nationals**

#### 1947: Monticello, Minnesota

- Indoor Stick
- Indoor Cabin
- Indoor Hand launched Glider
- Outdoor Rubber Stick
- Senior National Champion

#### 1948: Olathe, Kansas

- Outdoor Stick

#### 1949: Olathe, Kansas

- Outdoor Stick

#### 1950: Dallas, Texas

- Outdoor Hand launched Glider
- Team Championship, Detroit Balsa Bugs

#### 1951: Dallas, Texas

- Outdoor Flying Scale Rubber
- Team Championship, Detroit Balsa Bugs

#### 1954: Chicago, Illinois

- Wakefield
- Indoor Cabin

#### 1957: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

- Outdoor Hand launched Glider
- Wakefield Team Championship, Detroit Balsa Bugs

#### 1960: Dallas, Texas

- Indoor Cabin
- Team Championship, Detroit Balsa Bugs

#### 1961: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

- 1/2A Gas

1992: Muncie, Indiana

- Moffett

1993: Muncie, Indiana

- Mulvihill
- Moffett
- Team Mulvihill, the Young Upstarts

1994: Muncie, Indiana

- Team Mulvihill, the Young Upstarts
- Team Moffett, the Young Upstarts

1996: Muncie, Indiana

- Mulvihill
- Moffett
- Mulvihill, the Young Upstarts
- Team Moffett, the Young Upstarts

1997: Muncie, Indiana

- Mulvihill
- Team Mulvihill, the Young Upstarts
- Team Moffett, the Young Upstarts

1999: Update

- Moffett, 3rd Place
- Mulvihill, 1st Place
- F1G, Also ran
- P-30, Eighth Place

Michigan State Champion

- 1947: Senior State Champion
- 1949: Open State Champion
- 1985: Indoor State Champion
- 1986: Indoor State Champion
- 1987: Indoor State Champion
- 1988: Indoor State Champion
- 1989: Indoor State Champion

National Perpetual Trophies

- 1947, 1949, 1993, 1996, 1997: Mulvihill
- 1954: Wakefield Aero Cup
- 1947, 1954, 1960: Stout Indoor
- 1992, 1993, 1996: Moffett

National Records - Indoor

- 05/01/1994: Indoor Standard Class, Catapult Glider, Category III, Open Class
- 05/07/1995: Indoor Standard Class, Catapult Glider, Category III, Open Class

- 06/05/1996: Indoor Standard Class, Catapult Glider, Category III, Open Class
- 05/01/1994: Indoor Unlimited Class, Catapult Glider, Category III, Open Class
- 05/06/1996: Indoor Unlimited Class, Catapult Glider, Category III, Open Class
- 01/19/1995: Indoor Standard Class, Catapult Glider, Category I, Open Class
- 01/19/1995: Indoor Unlimited Class, Catapult Glider, Category I, Open Class
- 09/01/1995: Indoor Unlimited Class, Catapult Glider, Category I, Open Class

#### National Records - Outdoor

- 07/22/1996: Free Flight Moffett, Category III, Open Class (43 minutes)

#### NFFS Model of the Year

- 1994: *Bandit*, Small Rubber Powered Model (Moffett)
- 1996: *Feather Shooter*, Catapult Glider

#### AMA Outstanding Award

- 1990: World Champs, Johnson City, Tennessee (Timer)
- 1985: Inducted into the NFFS Hall of Fame

## **Model Designs Published**

### ***Challenger - Air Trails*** (July 1950)

### ***Challenger - Air Trails Annual*** (1952)

1947, 1948, and 1949 National Outdoor Stick Winner and two-time Mulvihill trophy winner; this model also held the Senior Stick National Record; this model qualifies for SAM events in England and is very popular still today.

### ***High Climber - Air Trails Annual*** (1952)

Outdoor Rubber Cabin and Wakefield model; Paul Simon held Senior National Cabin Record with this model; this model is also being flown in SAM events in England.

### ***Cabin Winner - Zaic Year Book*** (1955-56)

1954 Nationals Indoor Open Cabin winner

### ***Low Down - Model Airplane News*** (August 1961)

Nationals Indoor Open Cabin winner; this design set the trend for this event; three National records and many National wins by other builders; the current record in Category 11 of 21'-57" was set by Bill Shailor at the 1987 Nationals

### ***Zip - Model Airplane News*** (late-1960s)

Free Flight small sheet wood Outdoor fun flying model

### ***Boston Beany - Model Builder*** (September 1984)

Outdoor all sheet wood Bostonian

### ***Boston Beany - National Free Flight Digest*** (1985)

This was the indoor version that won the event at the NFFS Indoor Champs 1985

**Bandit** - *Model Aviation* (November 1993)  
Free Flight Moffett winner

**Bandit** - *NFFS Free Flight Symposium Report* (1994)  
Small Rubber Model of the Year; national record holder

**Big and Little Shooter** - *NFFS Digest* (January 1995)

**Big and Little Shooter** - *Indoor News and Views*  
National Category III record, Indoor Catapult Gliders,  
Standard, and Unlimited Class

**Feather Shooter** - *Fly off* (winter 1995)  
Standard Indoor Catapult Glider, National record holder

**Feather Shooter** - *NFFS Free Flight Symposium Report* (1996)  
Catapult Glider Model of the Year



## **Model Designs (Manufactured and Kitted)**

**Manufacturer** - Midwest Model Company

- *Flip Jr.* - Small indoor hand launched glider
- *Flip* - Indoor/outdoor hand launched glider
- *Rogue* - ROG indoor model
- *Zip* - Small sheet wood rubber-powered model
- Revised plans for the *Gollywock* and *Jabberwock* for Midwest

## **Consulting Work**

Did consulting work for Education Development Center, Inc. and Society of Automobile Engineers for Aero Science Program for eighth graders in public schools; scheduled for 1997

## **Contest Director**

Committee member for Michigan State Meet, 1971, 1976, 1984 and 1987 Director for 1994 U.S. Indoor Champs Director for a U.S. FAI Team Selection Program (Muncie, Indiana, 1995)

My model building experience has proved invaluable in my vocation as a design engineer and opened up many doors throughout my career. The most rewarding thing for me, and hopefully for others, are the very close friendships I have made through modeling. I have met the best, learned from them, exchanged ideas, and I hope in some way have returned some of this knowledge to my fellow modelers and friends.

**Robert Bienenstein, AMA 268**  
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## Personal Stats

### Employment:

Retired from Chrysler Corporation in 1987 as a Senior Engineer in the design office

### Memberships:

AMA 268 - CD and Leader Member

SAM and S.A.M. Chapter 39

NFFS - Inducted in Hall of Fame in 1985

Experimental Aircraft Association

Soaring Society of America - Life Member

Charter Member of Detroit Balsa Bugs (1942 - present)

*-Robert Bienenstein AMA #268*

*Bienenstein with his Bandit and the  
Moffett trophy, which he won at the  
1992 U.S. Outdoor Championships in  
Muncie, Indiana.*



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