



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of JAMES "DALE" KIRN



**Modeler Designer, Competitor, Manufacturer,  
Technical Consultant, Club Organizer**

June 9, 1930 – March 21, 2012      Modeler since 1936  
AMA #L630

Written & Submitted by JDK (06/1997); Transcribed by NR (06/1997); Edited by SS (2002), Updated by JS (10/2008), Reformatted by JS (10/2009);  
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## Career:

- 1954: The U.S.A.F. European champion
- 1954: In Dallas, Texas, set two speed records using Mono Line
- 1954: Started working for Vic Stanzel demonstrating Mono Line
- August 1962: Went to work for L.M. Cox Manufacturing Co. Inc. and worked there until 1968
- 1971: Started own business called Kirn-Kraft
- Founded many model airplane clubs and is past president of, Salina M.A.C., San Antonio M.A.C., Wiesbaden Wing and Wheel Club, Orange County Thunderbugs and the Anaheim M.A.C.
- He rebuilt Vic Stanzel's original Tiger Shark that was exhibited at the National Model Aviation Museum at Muncie, Indiana

## Honors:

- 1982: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
  - 1999: AMA Fellow
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*Dale started  
building in 1941 at  
the age of six.*

To be born on a farm in the midst of the Great Depression was considered a good fortune by many city dwellers because they believed that living on a farm assured that food and shelter would be available. Dale Kirn was born June 9, 1930 on a farm four miles west of Solomon, near Salina, Kansas. Dale was unaware of his perceived good fortune of being born on a farm, just as many city-born American's were unaware of the continuous toil to scratch out a living on the farm.

There was the threat of floods that seemed to occur every few years on the Kirn farm; there were the summer dust storms, the locust threat, and the danger of tornadoes. One spring a tornado actually passed within a few hundred yards of the Kirn farmhouse.

Dale's father was a no-nonsense person and the responsibility of providing for a wife and four sons did not allow much time for amusement. Teaching the boys the value of money and the importance of hard work was two of his responsibilities that he did not take lightly.

When Dale was 6-years-old his oldest brother Ralph (then 13) built a Free Flight model powered by a Roger's 29. He got the engine to run twice and actually made a successful flight in the farm

pasture. That flight sparked Dale's interest in model aviation, an interest that would last a lifetime and achieve goals that could not even be imagined at that time.

When Dale was in the first grade, he would receive 5 cents each week for successfully completing all of his farm chores. He saved his money and bought a 10-cent Curtiss Robin kit model, most likely an Ace Whitman Kit from the drug store.

School was in a one-room building and when the Boeing P-26 Pea Shooters would escort the Martin B-10 bombers for a low pass over the school. Dale's teacher found it impossible to keep him in the classroom. When he was a little older, he sold two sheep he had raised for the 4-H Fair and was allowed to keep the money. He purchased his first engine in 1944, a Super Hurricane 24, for \$24.95 and says his dad "had a fit."

He built a Bill Winter Free Flight design called the WOG. Dale's mother was supportive and would keep newspaper clippings of Dale's accomplishments in a scrapbook, but Dale's father's only support came when he paid the \$1 entry fee so Dale could fly his B-25 at a local contest. Dale's first Control Line model was a Baby Shark on G-Line built in early 1945. His first flight was successful but his father made sure he never flew it on the farm again because he "scared the h--- out of the chickens."

Dale did receive a lot of support from his older brothers. Ralph, the oldest, would go on to win first in flying scale at the 1947 Nationals with his P-51 Mustang. Bill, his next oldest brother would become well known in the Control Line speed event. Dale's brother Don never had the patience to build model airplanes.

Dale attended the 1946 Nationals and entered the senior Free Flight event. He estimates that there must have been over 100 entries in that event. He was elated when he caught his first thermal and put in a four and one half minute flight. He placed 14th. Just watching fourteen year old Davy Slagle and Jim Walker fly their airplanes at the 1946 Nationals and the sight and sound of a model jet engine ignited Dale's interest in Control Line flying.

Dale attended the 1947 Nationals and placed second in flying scale with his Boeing F4B4, just behind his older brother Ralph, who won first in flying scale with his P-51 Mustang. Dale became interested in all the Control Line events. Flying inverted was a real challenge but once he mastered it, he never lost the touch. After decades of not flying two-line stunt, and at the age of 66, he picked up a Control Line handle and flew like a professional.

At the 1948, Nationals Dale flew a Monogram Piper Cub powered by a Madewell 49. He won the Senior Flying Scale event. For the 1949, Nationals Dale purchased a Cleveland Kit of the Mitchell B-25 and extensively modified it to handle two Atwood 49 Triumphs. He did not have the money for the two glow engines, but his big brother Ralph was there with a loan of \$36. It took Dale a year and one half but he paid Ralph back. The test flight of the B-25 was on the farm. The inboard engine stopped shortly after takeoff, but the airplane flew perfectly and never required any adjustments. Dale won the 1949 Nationals flying scale event with the highest points of any of the 57 contestants. After Dale's winning flight, an airline pilot who wanted the B-25 approached him. The pilot offered Dale his full-sized Aeronca Champ for an even trade. Ralph,

Dale's brother, encouraged Dale to make the trade but Dale's love for his airplane was greater than his desire for an Aeronca Champ. Dale went on to win the 1950 Nationals with the same airplane. He went to the Plymouth Internationals the same year and placed third due to a small part of the cowling that came off during his first flight. His second flight was very short and would prove to be the last flight of the B-25. He flew only about one fourth of a lap when he attempted to level off and hit the deck. He broke both three-blade props. Dale retired the airplane after that flight. He refinished the airplane in 1993 and donated it to the Planes of Fame museum in Chino, Calif.

### **Dale Joins the U.S.A.F.**

Dale joined the Air Force in 1950. He heard a rumor that the Special Services was looking for someone who could run a hobby shop. He found out it was not a rumor, so he volunteered for the job. He got the job and after about six months, he learned that the U.S.A.F. held its own Nationals every year. Anyone in the Armed Services was eligible to compete. The top 20 winners would be sent to the Nationals each year to represent the Armed Forces. Dale won a place on the team each of his three remaining years in the service and was the U.S.A.F. European champion in 1954.

### **Dale Meets the Stanzels**

Dale had become well known to the model world for his record-setting speed flights, flying Control Line stunt and his national winning flying scale airplanes. Dale was doing some test flying in San Antonio, Texas and Vic Stanzel was present, flying his new invention, a single-line Half-A plane. Dale was not too interested and did not pay a lot of attention to the airplane, but he was approached by Vic Stanzel and asked if he would try flying the airplane. Dale reluctantly agreed and flew the airplane. It was much too sensitive and Dale wasn't at all impressed. Dale tried to be polite, changed the subject, and asked Vic if single-line would work on a speed plane. Vic said he did not know why it would not and went home to build a speed plane. The next time they met Vic had a brand new Dooling 29 speed airplane that was about twice the size of Dale's airplane and equipped with single-line control. Joe Stanzel, Vic's brother hand launched the airplane. Vic flew it and Dale clocked it. When Vic landed, Dale went over and asked him to fly it again because he could not believe the time. Vic flew it again and the times were right!

The airplane was about seven mph faster than Dale's smaller airplane with the same engine. Dale furnished Vic with one of his jet designs and Vic installed a Mono Line control unit in the plane. Vic flew the airplane and again Dale clocked it. The speed was increased about 10 mph. Dale was sold on Mono Line and from that day forward all of his speed airplanes were Mono Line. Vic and Dale established a relationship that was closer to a father and son than anything else. Over the years, Vic tried to get Dale to move to Schulenburg, Texas and work with him, but Dale's family ties were in Southern California. Dale built or rebuilt most of the model airplanes for the Stanzel Family Foundation (Museum). He also rebuilt the original Tiger Shark that is now on exhibit at the AMA Museum at Muncie, Indiana.

## **The Team**

At the Labor Day Contest in Dallas, Texas 1954, Dale Kirn set two speed records using Mono Line. His Class-A airplane flew at 134+ mph and his jet flew 154+ mph. Jim Clem and Sam Beasley attended the same meet. They were a two-man team that had firmly established themselves as the team to beat in speed flying. Dale's Class A airplane was flying faster than their Class A airplane and the team did not have a jet airplane. They invited Dale to join their team and he accepted. They became the first three-man team and the relationship seemed to work better than they could have imagined. Sam was the engine man, Jim took care of the fuel, and Dale installed the Mono Line units and did the flying. From 1955 to 1957, the team was very active and won most of the events they entered.

Dale was discharged from the Air Force Dec. 6, 1954 and went to work for Vic Stanzel demonstrating Mono Line. They bought a new 1955 Chevrolet and went on a tour of the United States. Dale was accompanied by Bill Murray, the contact man who knew every hobby distributor in the country from his experience working with Testor Corp. They put 80,000 miles on the Chevy odometer, in 1957 started again in a new station wagon, and continued their touring until 1958. Dale would normally put on two demonstrations on Saturday and two more on Sunday. The tours would end about Thanksgiving time each year and resume in early March. The winter months were used to build new airplanes.

Dale went to work for L.M. Cox Manufacturing Co. Inc. in August 1962 and worked there until 1968. He tried to stay away, but they kept calling him back. He started his own business called Kirn-Kraft in 1971 and he sold the business in 1974. He went back to work for Cox Hobbies two more times, the last time ending in June 1987. Dale founded many model airplane clubs and is past president of Salina M.A.C., San Antonio M.A.C., Wiesbaden Wing and Wheel Club, Orange County Thunderbugs and the Anaheim M.A.C. Dale was inducted into the [Model Aviation] Hall of Fame in August 1982.

## **The Kirn Family**

Dale entered college in 1958 where he met Carolyn. They were married in 1961 and raised five children – Mary born in 1962, Kathryn, 1963, Joe, 1964, Teresa, 1966 and Sandra in 1968. Dale's father's attitude toward model airplanes was not going to be passed on to Dale's children. Dale resolved to be very supportive if they showed any interest in model planes and they all did except Sandy who was more interested in softball. The other four children all went on to win first place at national model airplane contests - some of them several times. Some writers have called Dale “Mr. Mono Line.” but it would have been just as accurate to call him “Mr. Speed,” “Mr. Flying Scale,” “Mr. Jet,” “Mr. .049” or “Mr. Dad.”

## **Dale Kirn Publications**

1. *American Modeler*, Jan. /Feb. 1956, “How to Build Winning Speed Model”
2. *American Modeler*, March/April 1956, “How to Build Winning Speed Models, Part II”
3. *Young Men*, July 1956, “Worlds Fastest Flyers”

4. *Young Men*, Oct. 1956, "Shock Wave," jet speed
5. *Flying Models*, Dec. 1957, "Mono-Line Controls"
6. *Air Trails Annual*, 1958 "Single-line Stunting is a Cinch"
7. *American Modeler*, May 1958, "ZeroEtte," one line stunt
8. *Model Airplane News*, Oct. 1959, "Proportional Engine Control"
9. *Model Airplane News*, Nov. 1959, "Stuntacular"
10. *Flying Models*, Dec. /Jan. 1962, F.A.I. "A-Burner" Speed
11. *American Modeler*, Oct. 1964, "Lil Pronto" Proto-Speed
12. *Model Airplane News*, May 1966, "Quiet Zone," 1/2A Engines
13. *Flying Models*, July 1966, "Mono-line Mystery"
14. *Flying Models*, Sept. 1966, "Torquette," 1/2A Proto
15. *Rod & Custom*, Nov. 1966, "140 Plus On the End of a String" Model Cars
16. *Model Airplane News*, June 1967, "290 Special," 1/2A Proto
17. *American Aircraft Modeler*, Feb. 1968, "Engine Starter Something New"
18. *American Aircraft Modeler*, Sept. 1968, "Santana," 12A Proto Speed
19. *Model Builder*, Nov. 1972, "Torky," 1/2A Proto
20. *Jr. American Modeler*, July/Aug. 1973, "Drag Race Your Plane"
21. *Model Aviation*, Oct. 1980, "Spullet," 12A Speed




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*The following review of Dale's Stinger model kit ran in Air Trails in 1950.*

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### **Stinger: F&B stunt model features unusual butterfly tail**

Stinger is a large stunt design intended for engines in the B-C-D classes. It has a 47-inch span and wing area of 480 square inches. The overall length is 33 inches and the finished model should weigh around 34 ounces. A design of Dale Kirn, Stinger is marketed by F & B Aircraft (Denver, Colorado) and the kit retails for \$6.50. The plane is a butterfly tail job with symmetrical

section wing, which should be able to do all the stunts in the book.

The fuselage is entirely [made] of balsa, and practically a square box, but the top and bottom pieces are rounded on the edges so that the boxiness is not objectionable; in fact, the model is very attractive in appearance. There are two full-length sidepieces of 7/32 inch balsa sheet, with slot cut out for the wing to slide through. Three formers of 1/4-inch balsa sheet and a 1/8-inch ply firewall are used to hold the sides in alignment. When these pieces have been assembled, the shaped 3/8-inch balsa top and bottom covers are added to achieve final shape. Wings, landing gear, control arrangements, etc. are installed before the fuselage is closed in.

The L.G. is in two halves that are bolted to a heavy plywood block cemented to the fuselage. The two-inch rubber wheels are fitted with long eyelets.

The engine is completely cowled in, and “apple cheeks” on the fuselage add to appearance. Cowling blocks in the kit are hollowed out, but must be shaped on the outside. Engine bearers are 1/2-inch square hardwood.

The wing ribs are all die-cut; wing has a moderate amount of taper in both plan form and thickness. It has 1/4-inch square top and bottom spar, and both leading and trailing edges are sheeted. Tips are balsa blocks cut to airfoil shape. The control horn mounts on the wing center planking and a large size Kap-Pak horn with hardware is included in the kit.

The plan sheet features a large exploded view showing every part of the plane as it should be assembled. There are 32 drawings of various assembly steps, and 2 photos of the finished model, which looks very smart with its finish doping and large plastic canopy.

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