



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of JACK R. SHEEKS

August 30, 1933 - May 29, 2018

Began modeling in 1942

AMA #L-330



Written & Submitted by JS (04/1997) and transcribed by NR (5/1997), and written by JS (10/2016); Edited by SS (2002), Updated by JS (10/2008, 06/2018, 08/2021); Reformatted by JS (01/2010, 11/2016)

Career:

- Contest director and Leader member
- Involved in teaching kids and adults how to build Control Line, Radio Control and Free Flight models, as well as how to fly them
- Qualified three times and finished in the top 20 of precision aerobatics
- Competed with the U.S. Scale team six times
- Individually placed 10th, 11th (twice), and 13th in the world competition

Honors:

- 1998: Pioneers Award
 - 2002: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
 - 2002: Precision Aerobatics Model Pilot Association Hall of Fame
 - 2018: Control Line Scale Hall of Fame (posthumous)
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I began modeling in late 1941 to 1942, between the ages of eight and nine years. In our neighborhood, as in most, there was a tough kid, or bully if you wish, who felt that he or she was to lead all the other kids. If they resisted, he would push them around. Since I was a kid who had been taught not to fight, he found it easy to control me. That is until one day he pushed too hard and hurt me. I found myself putting him on the ground. We decided to be friends after that and he invited me to his home to see his model airplane.

It was only a 5-cent stick model, but in those days, it came with a rubber band, propeller, and wheels. Wow! This was great, and I had to have it. "No," he said, but he would teach me how to build one of my own. This was the beginning of my quest to build every model airplane I could get hold of. The beginning of World War II made razor blades hard to get hold of. But mom convinced dad to let me have his old ones before he had to turn them in to get new ones. Mom said I could use her sewing machine top to build on, but not to scratch it. Big mistake on mom's part. When mom saw her sewing machine top after a week of building, I was ushered to the basement with the old card table to work on. Aaahhh! My first workshop. Of course, it was a little tender sitting for a day or two (sewing machine scratches)!!!!

It took another two years before I heard or saw my first engine. My cousin had an O&R 60 and invited me to see it. I was amazed and very curious and wanted to see it run. He flipped that propeller for what seemed like an eternity, but when it fired, it scared the daylights out of me and off I ran. Wow! Was that thing noisy, but I had to have one.

It took me another two years before I saw or heard my first engine. Girls had come into the picture and it took most of my cash for movies and popcorn on Saturday nights. But I finally got an engine called the Thor B. I'm not sure whether it was the thought of Vikings (Thor) or that it was within my budget, but I still have a Thor B. By the time I could afford the ignition for the engine, glow plugs were in and I was a convert. My friends and I were very excited that we could now run it, so we mounted it on the railing in the stairwell in my attic bedroom. We had a finished attic with half bedroom and the other half attic was storage.



Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time, but after cranking that thing for the next hour, we were beat. "One more time," I said, "and then if it won't run, we will use it for nose weight and glide the intended model." Well, that thing fired, burped, and spit crap all over the stairwell wall, which ran down to where my mom was standing Oops! Now, my mom was a good church going lady who never said bad words, but she sure knew enough other words to describe what I had done Never knew mom could yell that loud. Seems she was scared, too. I had a couple of weeks to think about running engines in the house again, cause the walls had to be scrubbed and the entire attic had to have a new coat of paint. The engine seemed to vanish in thin air after dad got home from work. Back to rubber models again.

While in high school I got to solo on an O&R 23 and some solid wing trainer that Guillow's put out. A friend swapped it to me for my old bike. That engine had to be half farmer, because it sure plowed up a bunch of dirt. That ball diamond we were using was never the same again.

After graduation from high school, a bunch of my school friends and I joined the U.S. Navy. You see the Korean War was on. We could buy engines for less at the PX, but had very little room to build aboard a ship, so we began building 1/2 A models. We had built this beautiful 1/2 A Free Flight model and were going to fly it on the beach.

Well, we did not want it to fly away to sea, so we cranked a little too much offset in the rudder. We thought it would circle. Wrong! That thing flew about 50 yards, made a U-turn, and began chasing us up the beach. I never realized how fast I could run until then. Lucky I found the sea wall just before "bang." Well, back to rubber again.

Met my first top modeler in 1956 after discharge at a club meeting in Indianapolis. We were called the Gofer Hunters, so you can tell how good we were. The modeler's name was, and is, Charles Mackey. He had brought a beautiful stunter to the club and was trying to teach us a few things. He did too, and he influenced us enough that we wanted a stunter like his also. So I built one, and then another, and so on.

Flew in my first contest not long after that and won second place with Sterling profile and a silver McCoy 29. By 1961, kits were not enough of a challenge, so I began designing my own. By this time, I was a member of the Grounded Gremlins and it had upwards of 70 members. You

may have heard of some of them. They were Charlie Mackey, Charlie Lichlighter, Bob Randell, Jim Vernholt, Bernie Ash, John Davis and the list goes on and on. Believe me these guys made you try harder.

During one of our weekend flying sessions, Charlie Lichlighter brought out a beautiful Stuka stunter he had designed and built. After ogling this beauty, I asked Charlie why the straight wing? Stukas have bent wings. Well a long discussion ensued and Charlie challenged me to prove that a bent wing would fly. So, I did, and I published my first design in Flying Models Magazine in 1963. It was called the Stuka Stunter, thanks to Bob Randall's insistence that I publish it.

Since that time, I have published almost 70 articles and designs for stunters, sport scale, and scale models in both Control Line and RC. I have competed in the Nationals for most of the last 35 years, in one way or another. I have judged at the Nationals in both stunt and scale, including static, received trophies over 25 times in the national competition including first place in precision scale and in F.A.I. team trials. I have placed second, third and fourth in other scale events many times. In Old-Time Stunt, I have won twice, placed second three times, third one time and fourth one time.

Three times, I have qualified and finished in the top 20 of precision aerobatics. I have competed with the U.S. Scale team four times; 1990 in Poland (fourth place for the team), 1992 in Muncie, Indiana (third place team), 1994 in Holland (third place team), and 1996 in France (third place team). As an individual, I have placed tenth, eleventh twice and thirteenth in the world competition.

[2021 Editor's note: Per Jack's widow, Shirley Sheeks, Jack was on two more teams: on the U.S. Scale team with Steve Ashby and Ralph Burnstine at the 1998 World Champs in Africa (second place team); and on the U.S. Scale team with Steve Ashby and Dale Campbell at the 2002 World Champs in Canada (fourth place team).]

I have been the contest director at the Nationals in Control Line scale event, and the FAI stunt team trials and many local and regional Control Line events. I have been involved in teaching kids and adults how to build Control Line, Radio Control and Free Flight models, as well as how to fly them. For 11 years, I owned a hobby shop where we had club meetings, building sessions, and classes.

And at the age of 63, I am still trying to influence people to build and fly models, and am presently building a new F.A.I. model to try out for the U. S. Scale team again. I still want the U.S. to win first. Wish the team luck!

(Signed) Jack Sheeks, AMA I-330

By the way, many thanks to a guy called Vern for starting me on modeling. He was the tough guy.

Note: Jack Sheeks may be the most recognized name in Control Line flying. Jack's contributions to Control Line flying were recognized and rewarded by the members of PAMPA

(Precision Aerobatics Model Pilots Association) at Tucson, Arizona in 1997. The best way to introduce Jack may be to repeat the speech that was given to introduce Jack that night. Below is that speech.

This award is for someone you all know and love. He has been called a legend; many of you have built his designs. Some of you have built his designs and did not know it. You see, this guy has had so many articles published that he had to start using different names on them. At last count, there were 68 published articles in magazines. Can you imagine? And to think that he has had many, many more that were not published. There has been some speculation on why he started to use pen names on his articles. He claims that it was to protect the magazine editors; others suggest that it may have something to do with the IRS and a few have suggested it was for his own protection.

A few of his designs were, The Sheik, The Panic, The Spitfire, and The Sea Vixen. Of course, you all know whom I am talking about, Jack Sheeks. Jack has helped so many model builders with his advice and support on the flying field, at his home, from his hobby shop and through the mail. He enjoys his hobby and he passes his enjoyment to those around him.

Jack is quick to give credit to those who helped him. In the May/June 1996 issues of Stunt News, Jack listed those fliers in Indianapolis who inspired him - John Davis, Charlie Lickliter, Bob Randall, and Bernie Ash. I am sure some of you noticed, as I did, that there seems to be a missing name here! I am sure Jack meant to include Jimmy Vornholt. We older modelers understand how these omissions sometimes happen.

Jack is a leader in his church, a true legend in the Control Line world and deserves every honor that could be bestowed on him, and he is a fun guy to be around.

Thank you, Jack.

Jack Sheek's Published Designs

1. Stuka Stunt, Flying Models magazine, August 1963
2. LaDonna Stunt, Flying Models magazine, February 1964
3. Beechcraft Stagger Stunt, Flying Models magazine, June 1964
4. Skyrocket Stunt, Flying Models magazine, August 1964
5. Drink from a Tanker, Experimental, Flying Models magazine, April 1965
6. Shiek Stunter, Flying Models magazine, June 1965
7. Stuntliner, Flying Models magazine, October 1965
8. Sea Vicon Stunter, Flying Models magazine, April 1966
9. Demon Stunter, Flying Models magazine, August 1966
10. Swinger Control Line Stunter, Flying Models magazine, January 1967
11. Ryan SC Stunt, Flying Models magazine, July 1967
12. FW 190 Stunter, Flying Models magazine, January 1968
13. Freedom 45 Stunter, Flying Models magazine, May 1968
14. Spitfire Stunt, Flying Models magazine, September 1968
15. Torino Stunt, Flying Models magazine, January 1969

16. Scottsman, Flying Models magazine, February 1969
17. Knight Stunter, Flying Models magazine, June 1969
18. Swinger RC Version, Flying Models magazine, March 1970
19. ME .109 Stunter, Flying Models magazine, April 1970
20. Wing Derriger RC Twin, Flying Models magazine, October 1970
21. Old Glory Stunt, Flying Models magazine, February 1971
22. Raider RC Semi Scale, Flying Models magazine, March 1971
23. Magister Profile Stunt, Flying Models magazine, August 1971
24. Indy 500 RC Sport, Flying Models magazine, October 1971
25. D.D.T. RC Sport, Flying Models magazine, February 1972
26. Bewitched Stunter, Flying Models magazine, July 1972
27. Flybaby Stunter, Flying Models magazine, October 1972
28. Sea Vixon, RC, Kitted by Dively Models, Flying Models magazine, November 1972
29. ¼ Midget ME 109 RC, Flying Models magazine, February 1973
30. Kit review of large RC ME 109, Flying Models magazine, July 1973
31. Corsair Profile, Bent Wing Stunt, Model Builder magazine, March 1973
32. Hurricane Stunter, Flying Models magazine, August 1973
33. ¼ Midget Racer, RC, P40 Warhawk, Flying Models magazine, September 1973
34. P 26 A Peashooter Stunt, Flying Models magazine, March 1974
35. SIG Chipmonk Kit Review, Flying Models magazine, August 1974
36. Bishop Stunter, Flying Models magazine, September 1974
37. Kit Review of Spitfire RC, Rex manufacturing, Flying Models magazine, December 1973
38. Moondust Stunter, Model Builder magazine, December 1974
39. Panic Stunter, Flying Models magazine, April 1975
40. Rough River Contest Review, Flying Models magazine, August 1975
41. Miss Jill, Profile Stunter, Flying Models magazine, December 1975
42. Akromaster Kit Review, X-Cell Models, Flying Models magazine, January 1976
43. Squirrel Stunter, Flying Models magazine, April 1976
44. AT 9 Jeep Twin Engine Stunter, Flying Models magazine, August 1976
45. Indy Retrainer RC, Flying Models magazine, January 1977
46. ME 109 G Stunter, Flying Models magazine, May 1977
47. Bi Baby RC Semi Scale, Flying Models magazine, November 1977
48. Care Stunter, Flying Models magazine, April 1978
49. Corsair Full Body Stunter, Flying Models magazine, November 1978
50. Sea Fang Stunter, Flying Models magazine, April 1979
51. Mitsubishi A5M Claude, RC Scale, Flying Models magazine, September 1979
52. Heinkel HE 100 Stunter, Model Aviation magazine, January 1980
53. Vamp RC Sport, Flying Models magazine, October 1980
54. Kit Review Stafford Twin Commance (second place at the Nats), Flying Models magazine, February 1981
55. Mosquito Stunter, Flying Models magazine, August 1981
56. Teacher RC Trainer, Flying Models magazine, October 1981
57. Stuka Stunt II, Flying Models magazine, July 1970
58. P-38 RC Sport Scale, Model Airplane News magazine, February 1983
59. SIG Kit Review of Magnum Stunter, Flying Models magazine, March 1987
60. P-26 A Peashooter Control Line Scale, Flying Models magazine, April 1987

61. Control Line Scale Worlds Champs Report, Flying Models magazine, May 1995

62. Spacewalker Stunter, Flying Models magazine, December 1993

The following models were my designs and were published under other names. I designed the models and did the plans, but they built the models. Some of these are out of print and I am unable to locate the dates.

63. Citabria Pro, RC Scale, under Bob Godfrey, Flying Models magazine

64. Challenger, RC Sport, under Bob Godfrey, Flying Models magazine

65. Spirit of Saginaw, Stunter, under Dick Pacini, Flying Models magazine

66. ME 262, Stunter, under Jim Vornholt, Flying Models magazine

67. P-51 B, Stunter, under Joe Berry, Flying Models magazine

Other designers I have assisted include Steve Ashby, Bernie Ash, and Jerry Caldwell.

Some of my favorite designs are as follows:

- Panic Control Line Stunter
- Spitfire Stunter
- Stuke II Stunter
- Mosquito Twin-Engine Stunter
- RC Sea Vixon
- Mitsubishi Claude
- the Re-Trainer

They were all my favorites at the time or I would not have built them. There has been a magnitude of designs that I have not published but built and enjoyed.



Jack Sheeks 4/97

The following was written by Jay Smith, printed in the October 2016 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

I Am the AMA

Jack Sheeks, Longtime CL modeler and prolific designer

by Jay Smith

Jay Smith: *How did you get involved with model aviation?*

Jack Sheeks: Believe it or not, the neighborhood bully got me started. When I was about 10 years old, after many altercations, I finally won one. After that, he took me into his home and showed me his yellow airplane. I said I would love to have it.

He would not sell or give it to me, but he would teach me how to build one. Thanks to Vern Schoolcraft, I have been building model airplanes for more than 70 years.

Jay: *How has model aviation impacted your life and/or career?*

Jack: Modeling has been a part of nearly my whole life. When I was young, my first workbench was [at] my mother's sewing machine. That got me into more than a little trouble. While in the Navy during the Korean War, I built models on the ship in the battery locker.

After an honorable discharge from the Navy, I married, started a family, and became an Indianapolis policeman. While I was a motorcycle policeman, one morning on the way to work, I saw a model airplane contest in progress. When I got to work, I talked my sergeant into assigning me to that area as traffic control.

I met Bill Malloy, another policeman who owned a hobby shop and had club meetings in his garage. I attended, liked it, and joined. At one of the contests, Charlie Lickliter brought a Stuka Stunter. I criticized his straight wing and he said that a bent wing would not fly correctly. I said it would and he said, "Prove it."

That led to my designing, building, and publishing more than 70 designs for model airplane magazines. It was a welcome supplement to my policeman's salary for the next 16 years. After retiring, I was able to open a hobby shop, which I had for 11 years.

Jay: What disciplines of modeling do you currently participate in?

Jack: I compete in Control Line (CL) Scale because I am too old to fly Stunt [CL Precision Aerobatics]. My club has a chair that I sit on while my airplane pulls me around the circle and together my chair and I can still do pretty well. I still enjoy building all kinds of models from small rubber band ones to good-size scale aircraft.

Jay: What are your other hobbies?

Jack: I enjoy playing golf, but I no longer play as well as I used to. My wife and I love football and spend hours watching games. We watch whoever is playing, but of course, our favorite team is the Indianapolis Colts. I try to attend at least one game every year.

Jay: Who (or what) has influenced you most?

Jack: The modelers in the first club I joined were the most influential. They were Bernie Ash, Charlie Lickliter, Charlie Mackey, Bob Randall, and a little later, Jimmy Vornholt.

They were all excellent builders and fliers and they made competitions really stiff, but they were also willing to share their knowledge and were great instructors. I learned to fly the Old-Time Stunt pattern and they taught me the new pattern.

Jay: What advice would you give someone looking to design a CL model?

Jack: First of all, watch closely the top 10 or so CL competitors. When you get a chance, measure the moment arms on their airplanes. Use those moment arms and draw your own design around them.

Also, talk to modelers with good planes. Pick their brains. Modelers love to help other modelers.

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AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

