
Autobiography of WALT GETSLA

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Walt Getsla, of San Jose, California, began his aeromodeling activities in 1928. Walt became interested in competitive flying as a member of the Illinois Model Aero Club. His first contest success was with a McCoy tractor model. He converted this airplane to a canard and flew it to fourth place in the Chicago Daily News Indoor Contest. In 1934, he shipped a Wakefield model to Warwick, England where it was proxy flown. It gained the highest single flight time, but unfortunately was badly damaged during winding. In later years, the airplane was fully restored by Denis Fairlie (on the 50th anniversary of the Wakefield Cup) and returned to Walt.

In that same year (1934), he competed in the Junior Birdmen of America contests in his area. Walt led in his events, edging out the renowned Wally Simmers, and was selected to go to Washington DC, where he placed second in the National Championships. Later that year in Detroit, he took top honor in the Indoor Championships.

Unfortunately, the Depression affected Walt's life adversely. As the sole supporter of his mother and two brothers, he had to cut back on flying and competing. But Walt's active brain needed a challenge, and he put his talents to work behind the scenes. One outstanding achievement was his development of a ball bearing drive system for models. In 1936, he helped other fliers at various events and at the Nationals. Many of the people he helped went on to national prominence and big contest wins.

With the advent of World War II, Walt became involved in radar development and modification at Western Electric, staying with that company until 1974. Upon retirement, he returned to active aeromodeling and joined the Oakland Cloud Dusters, beginning a new era with them. He went on to support model aviation in California and nationally, holding many offices with the club. A listing of Walt's contributions would be lengthy; his output of letters, articles, plans, and club minutes is extensive.

By age 76, Walter drove thousands of miles each year to help at contests as a timer, jury member, team selection official, and contest director. He was highly regarded by his fellow club members and all other modelers he met.

We regret to say that Walter Getsla passed away on August 7, 1989. It was fortunate that he was told of the award before that time. We know his friends miss him. We know he will be busy helping people, wherever he is.