
Biography of RON PETERKA

Began modeling around 1943
Written and Submitted by RP (01/06)

Birth Date: October 29, 1934

AMA# 241794

Transcribed and Edited by JS (05/06)

Ron Peterka submitted the following autobiography in January of 2006.

Ron Peterka
AMA #241794

The Beginning

My interest, no, *obsession* with model aviation began at about the age of nine or so as I watched a neighbor working long and hard to start an ignition engine mounted on a very large Free Flight model. This would be about 1943, and the place would be a neighborhood of Los Angeles, California.

By the time I entered junior high school, I was building solid models carved from vaguely shaped balsa or pine blocks. Moving on, I built stick and paper rubber-powered models. Occasionally one would even fly for a short distance.

The advent of the inexpensive and small glow engines allowed me to purchase a K & B .035 engine, and then an Anderson *Spitfire* (.045 displacement). Buddies and I built and flew small Control Line models in a neighborhood vacant lot.

A highlight of that wonderful era was having Jim Walker see us flying one day and stopping to watch. He gave each of us a *Flybaby* model and we were in heaven. We flew the heck out of those models.

During high school, Free Flight became a possibility and I built a number of 1/2A Free Flight models. We flew at the Sepulveda Dam basin and at the open field that existed at that time at the intersection of Rosecrans and Western Boulevard. Both fields were active flying sites for southern California. I remember flying Free Flight at night a few times. We fastened a single AA battery to the bottom of the fuselage and hung about 18 inches of wire to a small penlight bulb. It was a little hairy chasing in the dark, but we could see the models light clearly.

Time marched on and I married, raised three children, and began attempting to fly primitive Radio Control models; build a model, [fly once], build another model...

Competition

My first competition experience was flying indoor rubber band scale models in a moderately sized gymnasium. I cannot remember ever placing, but I had a good time. Much, much later, I entered in my first RC Scale competition, in the Fun Scale class of a local contest. A local flyer had to explain the horizontal eight mandatory maneuvers that I never practiced before. The engine quit on almost every flight and I had a great time.

The plane was a Harold Krier *Great Lakes Trainer* with a .60 Super Tiger engine. I still have that engine.

Some years later (I am in my seventies now), I began competing in the Team Scale class at the U.S. Scalemasters contests. I built a large-scale model of the Stinson *Gullwing* that looked pretty good, but my piloting skills had not gotten much better. I could take-off and land with a few elementary gyrations in the middle. The main [problem] was that my shop was [filling] with models that had not crashed badly enough to throw away. A good friend and excellent pilot flies for me even today in competition.

In any case, after a few years of upgrading the *Gullwing*, we qualified for the Scalemasters National Championships in 2003. We placed sixth in team scale to my great delight. In 2004 and 2005 we qualified, but did not do as well. We scored ninth in 2004 and eleventh in 2005. We expect to qualify in 2006.

Experimenting

In the past few years, I have enjoyed drawing my own plans and scratch building a number of scale and sport scale models. *RC Modeler* magazine published two of those models, a sport scale Weddell Williams racer for a .25 engine and a 1:7 scale model of a Stinson SR-5E. That is exact scale since I had access to the full size aircraft to measure every detail. Both flew, and I received letters from modelers who built from my plans.

Leadership

Over the years, I belonged to a number of clubs. In Los Angeles, I belonged to the Lake Area Radio Kontrol Society (L.A.R.K.S.). I had very limited RC success at that time. We formed an impromptu club in Alhambra, California, but I cannot remember if we had an official name.

When I retired, I joined the Palomar RC Flyers in San Diego County. I am still active in that club, as well as in the Miramar Radio Control Flyers, the International Miniature Aircraft Association (IMAA), and the U.S. Scalemasters.

I served as club librarian for many years in the Palomar flyers, and was Contest Director for three sanctioned fly-ins and two scale contests. I [continue to be] a Contest Director.

My location, living outside a country town 35 miles from San Diego, makes it difficult to accept an office in a club. [It is] just too much traveling for the meetings and such. I am an active community volunteer to make up for the lack of working with the club.

Publishing experience

In 1963, after taking a community college writing course, I joined up with a buddy and we submitted a 1/2A scale Free Flight Bucker *Jungmeister* construction article. [My friend] built the model and I drew the plans and wrote the text. To our surprise and pleasure, [they] accepted [the article] and we shared the payment.

Since then, I have written a number of articles and model construction projects. I am fortunate enough to have a number of 'how to' articles published in two national model magazines. (I included a list of the major projects [at the end of this article. Copies of the three published cover photos are in the AMA History Program's biography files])

I write a fairly regular column for two club newsletters in an attempt to increase interest in scale modeling, which is my favorite interest. The National Association of Scale Aeromodelers (NASA) newsletter, *Replica*, published several articles on scale modeling subjects.

Educational involvement

Around 1992, I became involved with the San Diego Aerospace Museum, working in their model shop as a volunteer. The model shop builds various display models for the museum. I worked on subjects as diverse as a full-scale model of the Apollo II Moonlander to a 1:6 scale model of an old time Free Flight model for the museum's "History of Model Aviation" display. Some assignments were team efforts and a few involved starting from a simple three-view [and ending with the completed] construction. I am particularly proud of the Boeing P-26 "pea

shooter” that is displayed in a case at the museum entrance. The model portrays the finished appearance of the full-scale replica built in the museum shops.

One model club I am a member of [presents] a number of educational [programs]. The club puts on an annual “Flights of Fancy” aviation program at the club field in conjunction with the San Diego Aerospace Museum, where the kids attend classes [teaching] different aspects of aerodynamics and modeling. The day winds up with buddy box flights with RC trainers. I am an active participant in that effort, as well as giving occasional talks to other groups about model or full-scale aviation.

Personal background

Born in 1934, as I write this I am 71 years old. I have been married 52 years now, and have three grown children and six grandchildren.

I operated a Shell gas station in Los Angeles for fifteen years, and then obtained an Aviation Mechanics A & E license for a career change. I worked for TWA for a short time and then spent seven years at a jet engine overhaul facility where I rose to inspection foreman in the quality control department.

From there, I accepted a teaching job at Glendale Community College teaching in the aircraft mechanic program. I retired from that job in 1990.

I hold a pilot’s license for single engine lands (SEL) with an Instrument rating, and for a long time owned a Cessna 182 in partnership with my best friend. We flew the Cessna all over the U.S. (Alaska, Mexico, Central America, Haiti, and Canada), [what] I estimate [to be] 250,000 miles [total]. [I also] have about 30 minutes [of experience as] pilot in command in the Goodyear Blimp thanks to a former student who worked on the blimp ground crew.

Publishing Experience (byline articles)

- **September 1963** - *Model Airplane News*/ Construction article/ 1/2A-FF Scale Buker Jungmeister/ Plans & photos/ Partnered with Kingsley Kau
- **May 1993** – *Scale R/C Modeler*/ Letter & photo/ My first serious scale model, Gee Bee Model Y
- **September 1996** - *Scale R/C Modeler*/ One Way to Share the Fun/ “Why not volunteer your model - building skills for display in a local aviation museum”
- **March 1997** - *RC Modeler*/ Sport Scale Weddell Williams construction article/ Plans & photos/ *Cover photo*
- **October 1999** – *RC Modeler*/ Article/ “It didn’t have to happen”/ Dissecting ways to prevent model crashes
- **January 2000** – *RC Modeler*/ Article/ “Scale details”/ Making lightweight simulated screws/ photos
- **December 2000** – *RC Modeler*/ Product review/ Stinson SR-9 *Gullwing*/ Photos/ *Cover photo*
- **May 2001** – *RC Modeler*/ Article/ “Flights of Fancy”/ reporting on San Diego Aerospace kids program put on by Palomar RC Flyers model club/ photos

- **August 2001** – *RC Modeler*/ Article/ “Top Dawg 2000”/ Photos/ Report on Palomar Flyers Scale Fly-in
- **June 2002** – *RC Modeler*/ Article/ “From the Shop”/ My history in modeling, autobiographical
- **April 2004** – *RC Modeler*/ Construction article/ Stinson SR- 5 ‘Reliant’/ Plans & photos / *Cover photo*
- **October 2004** – *RC Modeler*/ Article/ “Success at last”/ Photos/ Story about my first Scalemasters Championships participation.

Numerous articles for at least three different model club newsletters. Includes “How-To” and comment articles, as well as many “Planes and Pilots” reviews of historical aircraft or pilot combinations.



Ron Peterka with his Stinson *Reliant* SR5.