



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ROBERT (BOB) KOPSKI



Written by BF (2018); reformatted by JS (04/2019)

The following was submitted by Bruce Fenstermacher for Robert (Bob) Kopski's nomination for the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame. Kopski was inducted in 2018.

March 19, 2018

Dear Model Aviation Hall of Fame Selection Members:

You may remember a time not so long ago, when there was no electric powered aircraft. Hard to believe isn't it? Suffice it to say, if you flew electric powered model aircraft any time from the late '70s through and well past 2005, you recognized the name of Bob Kopski, as you likely read and followed his monthly *Model Aviation* column.

Keith Shaw, 2002 Hall of Fame member, recognized for his contributions pioneering electric flight, in an interview in 2015, named Bob Kopski, as well as Bob and Roland Boucher, Jim Zaremski, and Mitch Poling by name, as being one of a handful of pioneers of electric flight in the '70s with him.

Here is Bob's story as best I know it.

Robert Kopski, AMA #36511, or Bob, as he is known, has been a modeler since his teens, building free flight aircraft, eventually competing in the AMA Nationals under AMA #4860, his first AMA number when phone numbers only had three digits. His interests eventually lead to building and flying powered models, and then into radio control. Bob, an electrical engineer by trade, built his own radio equipment to fly in the very early days, and his interest in all things electric lead him to experiment with electric powered model flight in the early '70s, when few components were commercially available.

As motor and battery power technology advanced in the '70s, Bob had more and more success, eventually converting to flying nothing but electric powered RC by the late '70s. As a leader in the Keystone Radio Control Club, Bob was always sharing his aviation modeling expertise with fellow modelers young and old. It was only natural that these folks, with Bob's help and encouragement, would also dabble in electric powered flight, unheard of at the time. Soon Bob was not the only modeler showing up at the flying field with a successful electric powered aircraft. Successful of course meaning a one or two-minute powered flight. I was one of those fortunate people Bob helped teach to fly RC even though I used smelly, oily gas engines, but I also eventually flew electric power under Bob's guidance. Many lessons I still remember and use today.

In 1978, Bob approached the Keystone Radio Control (KRC) club with an idea to hold an electric powered RC meet. The club agreed and with a budget of \$25 Bob proceeded to make

plans for the event, thought to be the first of its kind. With just three participants other than KRC members, the event was deemed a huge success. Who knew so many flew electric power? Bob then approached KRC, asking to double the budget and hold the second annual KRC Electric Fly. Bob was the Director of the first four Electric-Flys, which were eventually simply known as KRC. The annual event grew so large over the next 20 years, drawing hundreds of people from around the world each year, that KRC could no longer manage it. Over these years KRC, and Bob promoted electric flight to thousands through this event. If it were not for Bob Kopski, the KRC Electric Fly would never have existed.

Through his AMA contacts in the early days of the KRC Electric Fly, Bob was recognized as a pioneer and leader in electric powered model flight. In 1983, he was asked to write an article for *Model Aviation*, which he did. A 10-part series started in September 1983 and was spread over 10 months, ending June of 1984. It chronicled everything one would need to know to be successful building and flying electric power RC airplanes. In July of 1984, at the conclusion of the 10-part series, Bob started writing a monthly Electric column for *Model Aviation*.

Over the course of the next 21 years, until May of 2005, Bob faithfully shared his countless thousands of hours of electric flight experimentation and meticulous documentation on a monthly basis with thousands of modelers. Bob is likely the longest continuously published columnist our hobby has ever had. What few know was the dedication Bob had along the way to also answer hundreds of letters received from modelers. All answered on paper via the old-fashioned U.S. Post, as during most of this time there was no email.

Besides equipment of his own design shared, Bob would use the growing list of “off the shelf” electric power equipment and accessories. His use helped to promote those products to be used successfully, thus assisting manufactures being successful, thus growing the hobby with newer and better products into what the hobby has become today.

Of course, along the way Bob also designed and shared many electric powered aircraft plans. There were no electric powered kits available at the time, so he shared tips on how to successfully convert existing kits. At least one of Bob’s original designs, the Skyvolt, was kitted and sold commercially.

Bob, now in his early 80s, continues to be a leader in the modeling field, though his audience is a much smaller group. He is still very much actively flying electric power on a regular basis, often being found guiding his Horizon Hobby Champ about the sky. He is probably one of only a handful of people who have qualified for AMA’s All Season Flyer patch every year since its inception over 30 years ago.

Today, in a return to his teenage modeling roots, you’re likely to find Bob at the KRC field, leading a pack of fellow modelers building and flying all sorts of rubber powered free flight and even an occasional electric powered free flight design. And as always, Bob is sharing his wealth of knowledge teaching and encouraging all who are interested.

I would like to nominate Robert “Bob” Kopski, AMA # 36511, for consideration to the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame class of 2018, for his tireless efforts pioneering electric powered

model flight. His continuous dedication in a span of over 30 years gaining knowledge through meticulously documented experimentation in the realm of electric powered model flight and sharing that knowledge with thousands of fellow modelers.

Whether through the KRC Electric Fly, which he originated, or through his *monthly Model Aviation* column of 22 years, there is no doubt that Bob set the path to what electric powered model flight is today.

I hope you will agree and select Bob this year for inclusion in the Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

Sincerely,

Bruce Fenstermacher AMA # 89760

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