



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JIM SILHAVY



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## Career:

- Competed in stunt competition from 1958 to 1972
- Selected for the U.S. Team going to the 1962 World Championships; placed eighth individually, which was the highest American individual placing that year
- Won two Walker Cups
- Won the 1964 Nationals
- Participated in 12 Nationals total and had at least nine top 10 finishes
- Placed second in the 1966 World Championships
- Developed two planes called Gypsy using the Nobler design
- Designed the Magician kit on which many modelers learned to fly stunt

## Honors:

- 2002: Precision Aerobatics Model Pilot Association Hall of Fame
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*Wynn Paul, historian of the Precision Aerobatics Model Pilot Association (PAMPA) submitted this biography that PAMPA had on file about Jim Silhavy.*

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Jim Silhavy was one of the premier stunt competitors in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. Twice Nationals Champion and Walker Cup winner, he also flew in three World Championships for the U.S.

He attended the 1957 Nats in Willow Grove, Illinois, to look over the types of planes, trying to decide between the Thunderbird and the Nobler. At the time, he was flying with some of the east side Cleveland flyers, such as Bob Winks (first in junior in 1957), Abe Cipra, and John Havel.

Jim was one of the 15 finalists in the 1958 Nats flying a red, white and blue Nobler design; his final placing is unknown at this time as only the top five were listed in the magazines. He also saw how well the trio of Art Pawloski, Steve Wooley, and Bill Werwage flew in the senior division at the Nats – first, second and third. Werwage lived across town in Berea, Ohio, and Jim began flying with Bill.

After passing up the 1959 Nats, Jim came on strong at the 1960 Nats in Dallas, Texas, with his exquisite blue Nobler as he beat some of the big names of the times such as Rolland McDonald, Milton Boos, Don Still and some neat dresser named Bob Gialdini. He beat senior Artie Meyers and junior Jim Vornholt for the Walker Cup.

In 1961, Jim crashed his plane before qualifications, but did qualify with his backup as 10 were picked for the finals; his final placing is unknown as results from this year are very sketchy. However, he did finish first in the East region of the FAI Team Trials (one person was to be selected from east, central and west). He then went on to finish eighth in the 1962 World Championships as the U.S. team finished in third place; he was the highest placed U.S. team member.

Jim went on to win the 1964 Nats and his second Walker Cup, beating a field that included Jim Kostecky, Larry Scarinzi, Mario Rondinelli, Gene Schaffer, and David Gierke. He also had these Nats finishes: second in 1962, fifth in 1959, two sixth, an eighth, ninth and 10<sup>th</sup>. In all, he participated in 12 Nats with at least nine top 10 finishes.

He finished second place in the World Championships of 1966 with Lew McFarland and Steve Wooley helping out to win the team trophy. He was again a World Championship Team member in 1968 along with Bob Gieseke and Steve Wooley; Jim finished ninth place. In Team Trials competition, he had one first, two seconds, two fourths and a seventh place.

“Although Gialdini and I beat up on him a lot, I really respected his building abilities and his flying,” said Bill Werwage. Jim and Bill did fly together during these times and Bill said he used to go over to Jim’s house as he was building planes.

Jim’s 1966 to 1969 plane was a red Nobler, slightly larger in size (600-square-inches) that he called Gypsy. It was the definition of a stunt plane – workmanship and finish of the highest order (“Jim and I painted that thing in the attic,” said Werwage. “It must have been 120 degrees!”). Jim then switched over to a second Gypsy (the white plane) that was a 600-square-inch foam wing version of the Nobler with a rounded tail fin and the ST-40 (later the ST-46). He used this airplane until his last competitive flying in 1972.

Jim did design the excellent profile, the Magician, and it was kitted in the mid-1960s by Midwest. Many used this profile to learn how to fly the stunt pattern.

In spite of his success and beautiful airplanes, no magazine published any of his planes since they were basically Noblers (except for a plan view of the first Gypsy in Model Airplane News magazine’s August 1968 issue). Even the white Gypsy, which had a sleeker look, did not warrant an article.

Said George Aldrich, “Jim had infinite patience. He was a great craftsman – the inside of the cowling was as smooth as the outside. He was a great competitor.”

Jim Silhavy’s contribution to stunt was that during his competition career of 1958 to 1972, he flew some of the most beautifully finished airplanes ever and flew them well enough to win two Walker Cups and be a member of three U.S. teams, two of which were World Championship Teams. He also designed the Magician kit.

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