



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of ORVAL CHRISTY (O.C.) STEWART



August 26, 1929 - August 14, 2023      Started modeling in 1935  
AMA #L86

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Written & Submitted by OCS (11/2002); Transcribed & Edited by SS (11/2002), Reformatted by JS (02/2010); Updated by JS (08/2023)

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## Career:

- Started trying to build models before he could even read
- 1938: joined a model airplane club sponsored by a local UFW Post
- 1938: Joined the AMA
- Built most of his models from scratch; some original designs as well
- Has flown in 38 states
- Won the 1946 and 1950 West Virginia State Championships, the 1975 Tennessee State Championships, the 1976 Alabama State Championships and the 1985 Kentucky State Championships
- Attended the 1947, 1948, 1949 and 1950 Detroit Internationals
- Flew all Free Flight events at his first Nationals in 1957
- Flew in the FAI team trials in 1956 and again in the late 1960s or early 1970s; once missed making the team by only 15 seconds
- 1979: Served as an official timer at the Taft, California, World Championships
- 1974: Contest director with Tom Helper for the FAI Team Semi-Finals
- 1955: Became the model aviation director for the Clarksburg (West Virginia) Exchange Club
- 1956: Started the Morgantown (West Virginia) Model Club and a University of West Virginia Model Club
- 1970-1985: Director of the Nashville (Tennessee) Free Flight Club
- 1943: Served as airplane building instructor for the West Virginia 4-H clubs
- November 2000: Started volunteering at the National Model Aviation Museum
- AMA life member, contest director and leader member
- 1980: Set the AMA national record in the Jetex rocket-powered event; donated the plane he flew to the National Model Aviation Museum

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*The following was written by O.C. Stewart in November of 2002.*

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## The Beginning

I was born in Clarksburg, West Virginia, a town of about 30,000 people at the time (1929). It was the heart of coal mining in West Virginia.

I was born to build model airplanes. I started trying to build them before I could even read. For 10-cents, one could get a complete kit. I'd guess by the third grade, mother was approving a model for the next one. The first approval was a 10-cent kit Curtiss Robin. I launched it out of the barn hayloft and it went down into flames!

The local UFW Post 573 sponsored a model airplane club that had begun in 1928. Carl A. Hopkins was the director of the club until 1955 at which time it was terminated. I joined the club in 1938 and also joined the AMA (the cost was 50-cents a year then).

Most all of my models were scratch built from magazine plans.

The first gas model I built was a Comet Mercury (a Carl Goldberg design) powered by an Ohlsson 23 engine. This was in 1941. It was such a poor construction job that it never flew.

## **Competition**

My first contest was the West Virginia state meet in 1938. Since then I have flown models in 38 states. I won the 1946 and 1950 West Virginia State Championships.

I attended the 1947, 1948, 1949, and 1950 Detroit Internationals sponsored by the local Plymouth-Chrysler dealership (Barrett Motors, Inc.) All our expenses for the trip were fully paid by the dealer. The Fort Shelby Hotel was the contest headquarters.

I flew in the FAI team trials in 1956. I flew Wakefield and FAI Power; I placed sixth or so in power.

My first Nationals was in Philadelphia at Willow Grove Naval Air Station in 1957. I flew all Free Flight events. Most of the models I flew were original designs. (As I recall, I invented the rectangle.) I never placed well, but scared the heck out of all the competition.

Then in the late 1960s or early 1970s, I competed in FAI again. I flew a Nordic Glider (FAI) at Bong, Wisconsin, and placed 23<sup>rd</sup>, placed 12<sup>th</sup> at Albuquerque, New Mexico, and placed fifth at Caddo Mills, Texas. I missed the team by only 15 seconds! I flew a model Dove designed by Bill Schieman.

I won state championships, including the Tennessee State Championship in 1975, the Alabama State Championship in 1976, and the Kentucky State Championship in 1985.

## **Leadership**

After serving in the military, I returned to Clarksburg, West Virginia, in 1955 and became the model aviation director for the Clarksburg Exchange Club. We sponsored competitions and the Exchange Club Model Auction.

In 1957, I became an instructor at West Virginia University located in Morgantown, West Virginia. I started the Morgantown Model Club and a University of West Virginia Model Club. There may be some derivatives of these clubs left. I was director of the clubs there in 1961.

I became an honorary life member of the Lexington (Kentucky) Radio Control club in 1964.

From 1970 to 1985, I was the director of the Nashville (Tennessee) Free Flight Club. We sponsored 30 contests during this time span.

In 1974, I was a contest director with Tom Helper for the FAI Team Semi-Finals held at Courtland, Alabama.

I participated in the Taft, California, World Championships as an official timer. That was in October 1979 as I recall.

All I ever flew was Free Flight until the September of 2001 when I started flying Radio Control gliders.

## **The Present**

In November of 1999, my wife, Mary, and I moved to Muncie, Indiana because the AMA Headquarters and flying field are located here.

In November of 2000, I started working as a volunteer at the National Model Aviation Museum. I give tours and work on restoration or model building for the museum.

I have been an AMA life member since 1982 and am also a contest director and leader member.

In 1980 I set the AMA national record in the Jetex rocket-powered event. I donated the model that I flew to the National Model Aviation Museum.

I have one son, Orval Christy, Jr. who resides in York, South Carolina and is a used car dealer.

*(signed) Orval C. Stewart  
November 2002*

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*This passage was written to a friend by O.C. Stewart in 2005. It is transcribed and printed here with permission from O.C.*

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**O.C.Stewart  
1929-2029**

“Some dogs are born to chase cars. I was born to chase Free Flight model airplanes.

Before learning to read I was trying to build models. Mother would give me ten cents to buy ice cream at the local grocery. They had an area for the ten-cent model kits (Glue - tissue, etc. complete kits). I'd guess I was five years old before starting first grade.

By the fourth grade, I'd built the first mother-approved model.

By the fifth grade I'd built a satisfactory Korda. My father was going to test fly it with a 24" fan. The fan sucked instead of blowing. So much for that model!

I'd joined AMA in 1938. It was fifty cents per year.

I won the 1946 West Virginia State Championships for free flight. Luckily, I attended the 1947 through 1950 Plymouth Internationals. In 1950, Bob (Doctor) Perkins and I flew team. We're still good friends.

From 1970-1980, I flew in the FAI Free Flight program in the Glider event.

By high school, I'd flown in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Detroit, Cleveland, and all over West Virginia. West Virginia's average wind [speed] is three miles per hour.

I was born in Clarksburg, West Virginia in August of 1929. My parents were totally supportive of the hobby. The VFW Post 573 sponsored the Model Airplane Club from 1928 through 1958. Carl A. Hopkins was the director of the Club.

I moved to Muncie in November of 1999 because the AMA is headquartered here. Being a museum volunteer is one of the highlights of modeling, not forgetting my Presidency of the CIA.



*1949: Don Perkins (left) and O.C. Stewart with car to Fourth Annual Plymouth International Model Plane Contest.*

After moving to Muncie, I started flying Radio Control Gliders – Free Flight with no chase.

When I was in the service, I built U-Control stunt models (1952-55) in the front seat of a 1941 Buick.”

-O.C. Steward  
October 2005

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