The AMA History Project Presents:
Autobiography of
DOUGLAS (DOUG) A. DAHLKE

July 21, 1936 - November 20, 2012 Started modeling in 1944
AMA #24114

Written & Submitted by DD (02/2003, 06/2009); Transcribed & Edited by SS (02/2003); Updated by JS (06-07/2009, 10/2011)

Career:

- Early 1950s: Served as secretary of the Oshkosh Aeronuts
- 1950s: Co-organized the Mather Air Force Base Globugs in Sacramento, California
- Late 1970s-: Has conducted design experiments on the subject of massive, balanced, lateral area for Control Line Stunters
- Late 1970s - 1980s: During eight years of competing, won 110 awards
- 1982-1983: Designed and kitted the *Card Bird II*, a ½A Control Line kit
- Early 1990s: Began judging Stunt in competition
- Has a personal aviation library of about 3,000 books and magazines
- Has collected over 650 plans and 450 motors
- Member of various modeling organizations
- Published in *Model Aviation* magazine, *Stunt News* magazine and *Air Lines*, the newsletter for the Milwaukee Circlemasters
- Has given demonstrations in local malls and schools
- A volunteer worker and article writer for EAA Kidventure
- Has served as a contest judge

The following was submitted by Mr. Dahlke in 2003.

The Making of a Modeler

By Doug Dahlke

The year 1940 had just arrived and for my fourth birthday, Great-Grandmother had spent $1.98 at Kresege's to buy me a paper *Spitfire* display model. It was the most beautiful thing I'd seen in my short life. Cousin Bobby was later to show me that paper airplanes could be folded in such a way as to fly – which my beautiful model would not do despite repeated throws. By that age, I had learned that sometimes things would change with the passage of time and, although I had indeed waited several hours, my display Spitfire still stubbornly refused to fly.

During 1942, while visiting Cousin Bobby, who always had neat stuff, I saw my first commercial model fly. This was a Morton's Salt promotional glider – third version, I was later to learn. As a wartime product, of course, it had no balsa. The fuselage was a solid pine, red-dyed affair with a catapult notch under the belly that I did not understand. The fuselage rear was tapered and slotted on the top for the fin, which dictated that the stabilizer (stab) be rubber-banded on the bottom where nicks and dings quickly collected during landings on all but the smoothest surfaces. The estimated eight-inch-span wing, like the tail, was colored on one side only and rubber-banded to the fuselage. A black rubber suction cup with cast-in screw turned into the nose. This was both

weight and bumper to prevent household damage. This suction cup had another advantage, when licked just prior to flight it would stick to smooth surfaces, depositing exact, clear moisture rings on windows and varnished furniture. This quickly endeared us to the meticulous housekeeper portion of my grandmother. But making the glider stick to a surface, quivering, look so cool! Due to the glider's high wing loading, it had to fly pretty fast – fast enough to knock over a vase and result in prompt, permanent banishment to outdoors for all future flying.

In school, I began drawing profile views of aircraft that were posted on the classroom display board. When the class went to drawing other things, I continued to draw airplanes. The Morton's Salt glider eventually folded a wing, becoming un-flyable. Our attempts to make a replacement wing were unsuccessful – back to square one.

Cousin Gale built complex models of innumerable sticks that were beyond my comprehension. If he ever flew one, I was unaware of it.

A year or so later, while playing in a vacant lot across from my home, Donny, a neighborhood boy, had what looked like a smaller copy of my now-battered paper display *Spitfire*. His didn't look as good as mine did, but holy cow! It flew! It even out-flew the folded paper ones in school. One problem was you had to eat three boxes of Wheaties cereal and send 25-cents to get a pair of them. How could I get all of this together? Also, they had to be built using glue! You needed a penny in the nose, either one of those ugly steel pennies from last year or an ordinary one. Donny had a great throwing arm and sometimes it seemed his *Fairey Fulmer* would never return to earth. Each time he hurtled it up, my imagination went along for the ride; it neither recovered nor returned to earth. After this Wheaties promotion ended and no more gliders were available, my new hunger for models was but partially filled by the cardboard display models from Kellogg's PEP. The problem was that they did not fly.

One June morning during summer vacation there was this strange buzzing sound coming from the far side of town. Having never heard such a sound, I was curious as to its cause. So off I went, furiously peddling my Monarch bicycle to the local ballpark where this sound came from. Incredibly, it was a model airplane contest! I had never seen nor heard of such models before. Some of these models nearly spanned my five-foot height, dwarfing my tiny eight-inch span gliders. Still better, they actually used gas-fueled motors that hurtled them through the air at speeds as fast as a car! Not only could they stay in the air for up to five minutes, they were loud! (Loud is a great device to help kids focus their attention.) Once I understood what "that sound" meant, all activities were instantly dropped to go watch models fly. Typically, I could be on my bicycle and peddling in less than a minute. Any offers of treats, breakfast, or other distractions were quickly brushed to one side. As the initial rush of excitement subsided, I began to wonder if it might be possible to acquire one of these wonderful creations. I had heard talk of booster batteries and pitted points and 70-weight oil, all of which were unfathomable mysteries to me. How was I to figure out how to fly one of these models, to say nothing of being able to afford one?

One day, I saw Dicky in another, larger, vacant lot take a strange-looking model and do something to the wings that then folded. He hooked up a long rubber catapult into a nose slot, pointed it straight up, stretched the rubber, and released it. It rocketed upwards, nearly disappearing from sight. Upon slowing, the wings popped out and then began a skull-numbing glide such as I had never seen! We all began the chase. Dicky said it was his second such glider,

the first one having flown away and been lost! This was easily believable, for as the son of a building contractor, he could spend the needed quarter for a second model without problems from his parents. This magical model carried the name "404 Interceptor" boldly on the wing and which it truly seemed to be. Although unable to afford the needed quarter for this glider, the same Portland, Oregon firm also made a cheaper chuck glider, styled after the new *P-80* jet fighter. It sold for a dime. This cheaper version was to remain a benchmark and staple for many years later. It carried the number "74" on the right wing and "A.J. Manufacturing" on the stab.

About that time, a new boy named Walter moved into the neighborhood from a large city in Virginia. He and his father were to change both my modeling life and outlook in general, profoundly and forever, proving over and over that knowledge was indeed power. Walt's father was a CPA, quiet, thoughtful and a reader. It was he who discovered the existence of model airplane magazines! Unlike my stepfather, who loved sports and tried mightily to involve me in them, Walt's father encouraged us to experiment, think for ourselves, try new things and read – with the understanding that not everything in print is true. He was perfectly comfortable saying, "I don't know," but usually he would have an answer in a week or so.

The results of reading were amazing! We learned of companies that sold model kits you could assemble and fly! Then one day, an ad told of a magical motor that could be purchased and run using only a common battery and fuel! Wow!

Hey, Maybe I Can Do That!

With school out again for the summer and my birthday coming, my grandmother helped breach the price gap between my finances and the $7.95 needed to purchase this new Baby Spitfire. Worse, extra money was needed for fuel! (Reader needs to understand that there were many things that would "spit-fire" – full-sized fighter airplanes, model airplane motors, people with red hair and young, short-tempered females of any age, especially if they also had red hair!)

As finances improved, I was able to purchase an Austin Craft *Civy Boy 24* for my Baby Spitfire. Although it had a great glide, it never saw powered flight for two reasons: 1) Recalling Dicky's loss of his glider, I was deathly afraid it would be lost and I would suffer a financial blow, which would destroy me for life; but more important 2) I couldn't start the engine! Having no concept of a flooded engine, bloodied fingers painfully soaked in high nitro fuel and lovely multi-hued blood blisters became my lot. I assumed they were a normal part of flying models. Unable to convince my friends of how stylish finger pain was, I contented myself with gliding my "gassie" from our garage roof until the inevitable happened: it landed in the street and the fuselage was run over by a car. Although we could build simple chuck gliders, what we really wanted was power models. What to do?

Walt pointed out that the obvious futility and inconsistency of power models having new, unrunable engines. Our efforts were then directed toward learning how to run engines, back again and again to the hobby shop dealer trying to learn how to start my Spitfire. During one of these trips, with the motor on a test block held in one hand, I bumped the curb and fell from the bicycle, breaking my first prop in the process. Not very romantic! Ed Libowski, owner of the Hobby House, knowing I was not overly keen to lose my motor in a Free Flight model, showed me a Joy Products *Stunt Runt*. An incredibly beautiful biplane with only 11 parts and costing one buck!

Once able to consistently start and run my motor, there was a good likelihood I might actually experience powered flight! Since *Runt* plans showed no wingtip counterweight, none was installed as I followed the instructions to the letter. The endless series of crashes that followed soon had my cute little biplane looking like a jigsaw puzzle with a couple of pieces lost. I was frustrated nearly to tears. All had been done according to plans and still I hadn't achieved powered flight. What to do?

Walt and his father had approached things differently, purchasing a beginner's package by mail order from American Hobby Center in New York City. This was an O&R .23 side port motor and Testor's *Freshman* of 36-inch span. Thinking then that probably bigger was better and the key to flying success, I opted for a maximum performance Stunt model, a *Stuntwagon 3*0 by deBolt and powered by the then-new and very powerful Veco .31. Although I had learned that wingtip counterweight was a must, one minor detail remained - no one had taught me how to hold the control handle! This resulted in my holding the handle horizontally rather than the correct vertical position! My flights – if one could call them that – were a violent series of climbs and dives punctuated with interesting crashes of greater or lesser damage. Only the lightning reflexes of a young teen prevented my destroying the *Wagon*. On the other hand, Walt was able to fly consistently flight after flight. Taking pity on me, Walt and his father asked if I wanted to learn to fly using their model - with one condition: I must agree to fly their *Freshman* while holding the handle vertically, not horizontally. Walt was ready to move on to a more advanced model and was not bothered by the possibility of crash damage. What's to lose? As the cliché says, "the rest is history."

(signed) Douglas A. Dahlke
February 3, 2003

Personal History

Born July 21, 1936 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, mother encouraged me to play the piano in 1941, having failed to interest me in tap dancing the year before. In 1942, I flew my first commercial model glider – and still fly them. I began playing drums in 1949 – and still play them. I began shooting air guns in 1950 – and still shoot them. I began drag racing motorcycles and cars in 1951. I enlisted in the Army National Guard in 1953 and went active Air Force in July 1954 after graduating from high school. After I was discharged in 1958, I attended UW-Milwaukee until enlistment in the Army from April 1960 to 1963 for the Berlin Crisis. I was stationed in Nuremberg, Germany until discharge.

I became an "A" rated chess player in the early 1970s and graduated from UW-Oshkosh in December 1979 with a B.B.A. – a depressing waste of time, money, and effort. In 1986, I began touring via a BMW motorcycle, eventually covering 49 states, 10 Canadian Provinces, Mexico and 17 Western European countries – I still tour after 240,000 miles to date. In the late 1980s, I began teaching 1950s/1960s dancing – and still do. (Believed to have one of the last working pair of blue suede shoes, eat your heart out!) By the early 1990s, I had developed an unquenchable taste for horrid puns and their associated "pun"-ishment. I started with EAA Kidventure in the late 1990s and retired from work in 1999.

Competition

My first competition was while I was stationed at Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento, California. We were flown down to San Antonio, Texas - to Fort Sam Houston if memory serves. I placed third in Class A Speed, flying a Megow *Flying Clown* with K&B .19 power.

Competition flying resumed in the spring of 1977 after returning to Wisconsin. I attended contests in Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa, competing in PAMPA classes of beginner, intermediate, and advanced level. Categories of competition were precision aerobatics, Old-Timer Stunt, ½-A Stunt, Biplane Stunt, Balloon Bust, and Mouse Racing. Additional awards were won for collector display in MECA. During these eight years, 110 awards were won.

Purely for experience, I entered the 1979 U.S. Nationals in Open Stunt as an intermediate level flyer using a much-modified Midwest *Magician* with OS .40H power. I placed third in Old-Timer Stunt (glow) using a Veco *Warrior* with K&B .19 power. As a sidebar, I loaned this model to a friend, Jim Renkar of Justice, Illinois, who wanted to fly the event but lacked a model. My efforts to help Jim were rewarded by him beating me out of second place with my *Warrior* by two points! No good deed goes unpunished.

At the 1982 Nationals, I again flew Open Stunt (now as an advanced level flyer) using a Gieske *Nobler* with OS 35S power. In ½-A Stunt I flew a Mathis *Pinto* with TD .051 power. When the event was over, I forgot I'd shaded the model under the car and drove over the wing. I received third place in Old-Timer Stunt (ing) with my *Super Duper Zilch* using a Super Cyke .60. In Old-Timer Stunt (glow), I entered an Andrews *Barnstormer* with Fox .35. Although I failed to place, this ship became the basis of a feature article in the December 1984 issue of *Model Aviation* magazine.

Finally, in competition, I began to judge Stunt in the early 1990s and still judge as of 2003.

I am a member of AMA, Precision Aero Modeler Pilots' Association (PAMPA), MECA, Kits and Plans Antiquitous (KAPA) and AMCA, with a personal aviation library of about 3,000 books and magazines. As a collector, I have over 650 plans and 450 motors, as well as various sub-collections of props, handles, accessories, model cars and model boat engines, etc.

Experiments

My first experimental model(s) was a series of six-inch diameter chuck gliders in circular wing format. Split maple clothes pins added as skis degraded the performance by a large amount! These were built in 1948, the year after the first United States saucer scare. By 1950, I had designed a 12-inch diameter flying saucer Control Line model powered by a Cub .049. After allowing one hour for the final coat of paint to dry, it was then immediately flown, which happened to be 11 p.m. at night during a typical Wisconsin January snowstorm! It flew fine.

By 1955 my building skills, flying ability and general modeling comprehension had much increased. The result was my design of a 30-inch diameter flying saucer powered by an Anderson .65. This was featured on the front page of the second section of the *Sacramento Bee* during mid- to late-1957. As of 2003, a still larger saucer is under design.

During 1981 and 1982, I experimented with indoor CO2 Control Line Stunt. This became a feature article for *Model Aviation* magazine during June 1983.

During the late 1970s and up to the present (2003), I have conducted design experiments in the subject of massive, balanced, lateral area for Control Line Stunters. The intent is to reduce model lap speed while maintaining line tension and to improve overhead line tension of heavy Stunters.

In conjunction with this, I have experimented with very long aft moment arms in Control Line Stunt models, the final design being my *Sandbagger*.

In the Balloon Bust area, experiments were conducted with a forward inboard ½-canard assembly to increase control at ultra-low speeds.

Leadership

I was secretary of the now defunct Oshkosh Aeronuts, circa 1952.

I co-organized the Mather Air Force Base Globugs in 1957 in Sacramento, California. The base has since been closed.

Hobby Industry

I designed and kitted the *Card Bird II*. This was a ½-A Control Line kit produced from 1982 to 1983, when production ended.

Publishing Experience

1. *Model Aviation* magazine (June 1983), *Humm Bug*, an indoor, CO2, Control Line Stunt/Sport model.
2. *Model Aviation* magazine (December 1983), *Beginners' Boomerang*, as covered in the Ed Whitten column of the period.
3. *Model Aviation* magazine (December 1984), Andrews *Barnstormer*, a how-to-build, simplification of Old-Timer Stunt winner
4. *Model Aviation* magazine (August 1977), *Freshman II*, an updated redesign of the old Testor's *Freshman* trainer for Control Line
5. *Stunt News* (January 2000 to present), *Beginner*, columnist
6. *Stunt News* (mid-1980s to present), continual contributor to various departments, e.g., Clubs, Powerplant, etc.
7. *Air Lines* (mid-1980s to present), continual contributor to this newsletter of the Milwaukee Circlemasters
8. *Flying Models* (May 2003), "Cap Strips of Other Stripes," a construction article, p. 74-75

Education

1. Display/taught at various local mall exhibits
2. Flew demonstrations at local schools
3. Volunteer worker and article writer for EAA Kidventure – the largest model event in the world, which is also the largest beginner model event in the world. Despite the scope of this educational event, it is totally ignored by all but one of the modeling press.

4. Continue to function as a reference source for other authors doing historical work, e.g., Wynn Paul's upcoming tome on Control Line Stunt.

(signed) Douglas A. Dahlke
February 2003

The following was submitted to the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program) by Mr. Dahlke in 2009.

Wee Wings around Oshkosh

By Doug Dahlke

I'd like to share a glimpse into some of the experiences and activities, plus a few artifacts of Oshkosh's early miniature hobbyists. We bought, designed, built, and flew model airplanes starting from the very early days. I enlisted in the Air Force, leaving Oshkosh mid-1954. This first half-century of modeling was a time of learning, excitement, and fun. Let's revisit this world of flying things that floated about in a strange stew of balsa and paper, heated by youthful hormones.

Background

Model and full-scale aviation have always been mixed together, with models leading to progress in their larger brothers. When they are not scientific models, they are some of the most interesting learning-during–entertainment devices ever conceived. As of 2009, this remains true. Here is the context in which model aviation was inspired, grew, and developed in Oshkosh.

As school kids once knew, the Wright brothers' powered flights began in 1903, but at that time, kids flew only kits in Oshkosh. By 1905, the world mostly knew of powered flight, but very few crude, rubber-powered models were being built and flown. By 1911, [one of] the first U.S. model catalog offering model airplane motors was available from the Ideal Company. For perspective, this was the same year that the U.S. horse population would peak.

Art Leupold and Harry Powers completed construction of Oshkosh's first home-built, man-carrying airplane in 1912. The Leupold and Powers airplane was flight demonstrated at Eweco Park, which was located on the far south side of the South Side, certainly inspiration for kids interested in flight. Son Richard Lutz of local quarry fame bought and brought the first factory-built man-carrying airplane to Oshkosh in 1919. Lutz was also partly responsible for the purchase and location of our current airport. The

Ideal Aeroplane and Supply Company Catalog, 1914-1915: Just three years earlier, the Ideal Company begat their very first model airplane catalog. (Period humor: "These catalogs are like hen's teeth – hard to find!"

man Lutz hired to manage this new airport was a self-taught, successful air racer whose 1921 flying license was signed by Orville Wright. His name was Steve Wittman. (Period humor: “It’s like Wilbur said to Orville, ‘You’re ‘Wright’!”.)

During the early 1920s, a new (to us) Central American wood was introduced into the U.S., and appeared in Oshkosh. It was called balsawood and was the lightest of any wood anywhere. Basically, it doubled, even tripled the performance of existing model designs. By 1927, you could purchase a balsawood model kit in a store. That same year, “Lucky Lindy’s” New York-to-Paris flight ignited a firestorm of interest in flying things of any size. (As a sidebar, 40 years later, makers of 1000-foot supertankers would discover the insulating advantages of balsa, as would GM’s *Corvette* division for early millennium products.) In the early days, razor blades were the sharpest tool to cut balsa, so modelers became known as “razor blade carpenters.”

The Great Depression of the 1930s was a difficult time for hobbyists and improvisation was king. Despite this, the first small model motors, as we think of them today, were available for purchase and winning model airplane duration contests. By the mid-1930s, nearly one in four American youth belonged to the national body of model airplane builders. Airport manager Wittman’s fame in air racing was such that one of his early designs still hangs in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. He allowed modelers to fly at the airport until growing traffic prevented this in the 1950s. Always friendly to modelers, he was an outstanding local aero role model. By the mid-1930s, some modelers were able to build and fly models again. Around that time, the Oshkosh Model Club was formed.

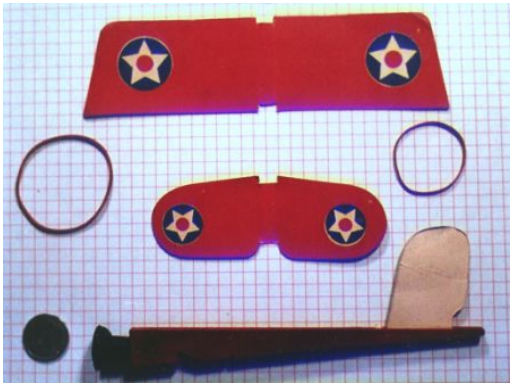
South Park School Goes to War

With the onset of World War II, balsa became a war priority item due to its great buoyancy, making it perfect for life rafts that could not deflate. The remaining scraps were sold to model kit makers and many used them to make identification models for our pilots and gunners as training aids. This was very serious business, as it just would not do to continue to shoot down your own airplane because you didn’t know friend from foe. If balsa was not available to make identification models, you used the softest white pine you could find. All over the nation, kids responded eagerly to the government’s request for 500,000 identification model airplanes. Although this was a temporary measure, it was critical until these models could be put into production. This was the invention of what we now know as 1/72nd scale. This size represented what an enemy airplane looked like at 1000 yards,

Young modelers jumped at the chance to help their Uncle Sam’s war effort by building ID model planes. Here’s a typical example of the appeal that went out in national magazines by May of 1942, and what the desired product looked like. [From author’s home collection]

the maximum effective shooting distance of our standard .50-caliber machine gun. Suddenly, the thoughtless absurdity of calling model airplanes “toys”, or laughing at those who built them, was embarrassingly obvious. Oh, yes, the military uses two different types of unmanned air vehicles in combat in the Iraq conflict now.

Since balsa of any usable length was basically gone, model kits could only offer pine sticks that we tried to cut with our worn out razor blades – a questionable project at best and an excellent producer of nicked fingers and thumbs at worst. With only pine and paper being available for flying models, here’s a typical example of what was given out as a promotional model during early 1942 by the Morton’s Salt Company. (see photo)



By merely adding their name to the top of the wing, this became the Morton’s Salt promo glider (their second model). Designed and patented by an Appleton man, it was distributed nationally. Made of non-critical, red-dyed pine and cardboard, the front suction cup stuck nicely to smooth surfaces, like windows, especially after being licked. Mom’s hawk eye spotted these residual rings far sooner than Junior’s impatient eyes did. [1943 steel penny, lower left, photo from author]

This rubber catapult model featured a “safety,” a black rubber suction cup sticker on the nose to protect household items from breakage. In a few nanoseconds, kids discovered that by licking the suction cup to wet it, it would neatly stick to smooth surfaces – like windowpanes – without harm. However, it did leave a neat little circle of saliva wherever it stuck, much to the ire of mothers who thereafter shooed us out of the house for our flying activity. Drinking Kool-Aid made these saliva rings more colorful of course. But those models ***did*** fly! At least until we used too many rubber bands for power in our catapults and the wings folded up. “Old age” for these models varied between 7 and 14 days.

We ate *lots* of Kellogg’s PEP for the metal pin back buttons that came inside their cereal boxes, which carried the insignias of U.S. aero squadrons. Later, we ate more PEP for the neat, non-flying cardboard display models which you carefully cut out from the back of the cereal boxes.

Amidst this fierce competition for youthful tummies, Wheaties played their potent trump card by offering flying paper models, which also looked like the real airplanes in the news. Two box tops and 25 cents brought you a pair of these nine-inch beauties. During 1944, the disliked 1943 steal pennies often ended up as the required nose weight in these models. The best of these was able to stay aloft for perhaps five to eight seconds, an eternity to our youthful minds. With this modest flight duration, our front or back yards served well as “flying fields.” Parents were little concerned as Junior raced about the yard retrieving his model and burning up energy that Mom would not have to deal with when he returned to the house. Well-intentioned dogs soon learned they were ***not*** welcome to fetch these delicate paper models in their drooling muzzles. Expecting a pat on the head, they instead received a puzzling slap on the rump for their efforts to be a good pooch. Such was the appeal of these models that they were reissued in the early 1980s.

Arguably, the pinnacle of flying paper airplane design was reached when these semi-scale models were offered, circa 1944, by "WHEATIES! The Breakfast of Champions! ...and Jack Armstrong, the ALL-AMERICAN BOY!"

A few months after I turned nine, the conflict ended - much to the relief of war-weary parents - and balsa was available again. Also, by that time, being older, it was fairly common to have a dime available to spend on the luxury of a model airplane glider. However, things had changed more than most realized. For example, the new balsa gliders were a full foot in wingspan, and being far lighter than paper models, flew far, far better. This in turn meant that your front or backyard was no longer a suitable place to fly your model. The joke was that they should be sold as decorations since so many rooftops and tall trees had these gliders stuck in them. Nor were moms receptive to Junior's attempt to climb such trees. Truth be known, as high up as some of these gliders were stuck, it was not uncommon for prudent lads to admit, "It's just too high to get back." As of 2009, some of these smaller, cheaper balsa gliders are still available.

At the time, model-flying contests were held in the former Sawyer Avenue Ball Park, now Titan Stadium. Given a favorable wind, those flying models broadcast their "come hither" call, audible at least out to 14th and Ohio Street. As such, they were the magnet and we kids were the iron fillings. As the years passed, there was less toleration of these noises and the motors eventually needed mufflers.

The War had decimated model clubs. Many members were in the military service, balsa was not available, nor were motors or fuel. The prewar Oshkosh Model Club was gone, as was the North Grove Model Airplane Club, Grove here meaning Grove Street. In April 1947, a new model club was formed and it was called the Oshkosh Aeronuts.

Earl's 50 Foot Rubberband

This decal adorned many a club member's model. It was seen both locally and around much of Wisconsin during flying contests. [From author's home collection]

During our very early modeling days, we learned the advantages of applying more and more power to our models to increase flight duration. We were about to discover a concept called "limits." Here's how it came about.

We had recently begun flying what's known as "catapult models." With this method, a notch is made in the bottom front of the model. A large rubber band, perhaps eight inches long, is looped around one end of a common dowel and the other end inserted into the notch in the model. One hand holds the dowel while the other holds the tail, while stretching the rubber back to maximum length. The model is then released to shoot forward and up into the air. They can reach 100 feet in altitude before starting their descending glide. The height reached

depends on model size plus quality and length of launching rubber. At that age, our reasoning went something like this: “If some is good, then more is better and probably too much is just right.” (Unfortunately, a few were to hold to that philosophy far too long.) Catapult rubber was available from a spool for a penny a foot. Earl splurged and bought a whole dollar’s worth of rubber! Tying the two ends together produced a fifty-foot rubber band. It was The Mother of All Rubber Bands. I was awestruck, imagining such power being unleashed on a half-ounce glider! Mein Gott! The usual hand-held dowel was replaced with a broom pole, the rubber band inserted in the model’s notch and the rubber stretched by walking back about 200 feet or so. Look out moon, here we come!

Past experience has taught us that there was no way you could turn your head fast enough to see such a model, nor could you rotate your eyes in their sockets that fast. Only by backing up perhaps 100 feet or so could the entire event be observed. Earl released the model.

Rushing forward in a smooth arc, the glider rose slightly as it just cleared the broom pole launcher. As speed increased, the now fluttering, vibrating wings gave up the ghost so to speak, folded in half and lay back against the sides of the fuselage. Without working wings, the model effectively became a balsa dart with no point. This reduced its air resistance and helped it retain its now unneeded speed.

Onward it hurtled, striking the outside brick wall of South Park School’s swimming pool, causing the fuselage to split its full length. Earl walked over to examine the shattered, quivering remnants of the balsa hulk, shrugged, gathered up the rubber band, and then walked away as there was little worth salvaging. This image remains clear to this day. Unknowingly, we had learned about limits. Within a year, we were able to purchase and fly small gas-powered models.

…And in the Winter?

So what’s a guy to do when Wisconsin’s winter snows come? How do you go flying with your little motor? Hard-core flyers would still go out in temperatures down to 10 degrees Fahrenheit. We found that ice rinks made smooth but hard, unforgiving flying surfaces. Skaters there usually enjoyed watching us fly. Looking at our clothes, which were more for “being cool” than for warmth, skaters knew we wouldn’t be there long. Besides, they could use that time to seek heat, so things worked out well.

Gayle Bodoh skillfully demonstrates how to hide shivering with a smile. Winter flying hammered home new lessons, such as cold weather engine starting methods, dressing in layer to keep warm, plus just how hard and unforgiving ice is compared to soft grass, should a crash occur. [Bodoh Photograph]

But there were other problems, to wit, the temperature. Our small, mostly aluminum motors needed heat to start, so by definition, they were never designed for winter running. One common means of generating heat to start them was to wrap a tiny strip of rag around the cylinder, pour engine fuel on it, and set it afire. Usually this worked ok provided you paid close attention to what was going on. You see, the alcohol these little motors operated on had no visible color when burning. The only warning you

had that things were amiss was this quickly growing brown spot on the model that wasn't there when you built it. This meant your model was on fire!

And then there was the cold that attacked you from all quarters. You kneeled on ice, as cooling alcohol spilled on your hands, cooling things. Additional cooling came from the blast of winter air generated by the propeller, should your engine start. What fun! Oh lucky you! Yes, a few even rode their motorcycles over icy streets, carrying their models in the other hand to get to the ice rink. Some have opined that this was the origin of the term "cool cat." Unfortunately, things did not always work out as planned. In a few cases, the collision of frustration with balky engines and hormonal rush was too much to bear. Normally, frustration such as this took but a tiny toll on models.

While events may sometimes conspire to breach a modeler's patience, actually completing such a rash action would present additional issues to deal with. Here's Gary Horton at South Park School's football field with his tiny racing model capable of speeds way over 100 mph. Racing motors were notorious for their cantankerous starting procedures and finger-biting ill manners in the best of times, to say nothing of winter operation. [Bodoh Photograph]

The Great Chase

Shortly after we began flying very small gas models, my friend Walt built a free-flying gas model from the plans in a magazine. This was how we learned to read blueprints of course, in this case at age 11. With the model's basic adjustments in place, we pedaled our single speed Monarch and Hawthorne bicycles out to where the 44 Outdoor Drive-In would be built. I held the model while Walt started the motor. As he turned to set the batteries on the ground, I thought it would be a great practical joke to add some extra fuel to his tank. Badly underestimating how much such a tiny amount of fuel would increase flight time, I watched him launch the model. Instead of the predicted 20-second motor run, it went on and on and on…higher and higher this circling balsa bird climbed, while the motor noise became fainter and fainter. As Walt neared cardiac arrest, I dolefully watched my practical joke go very, very sour. If this model, with its expensive (for us) motor, were lost, I would naturally have to buy him a new one that I could ill-afford.

F-i-n-a-l-l-y, the little beast's motor quit as it ran out of fuel. By now, it was just a dot in the clear sky, barely visible even to keen 12-year-old eyes. As the model began to settle into a glide, near-disaster struck as it entered a rising current of warm air called a thermal, which elevated the model yet further. Glancing at each other, we realized that this was going to be a very l-o-n-g chase. Worse, if we failed to keep up with the model, it could easily die beneath the wheels of some unknowing motorist's car. Adrenalin mixed with hormones to give wings to the flying pedals of our one-speeders as we raced east towards town.

Then the model struck a second thermal and went back up, although not so high as the first time. Past Knapp Street, past Ohio Street, lungs heaving, sweat dripping, on we flew. The thought occurred to us that it might end up in the lake! We both wondered how far we would be willing to swim to retrieve it. Seeing us trying to watch for traffic while keeping the model in sight would surely have added to my parents' grey hairs – had they known. Mein Gott!

Well, we did recover Walt's model, undamaged, as it landed in the yard of the second house east of the corner of 13th and Oregon! Pedaling home at a rational pace, we reflected on the wisdom of flying with a pair of wires to restrain the model and prevent such episodes as we had just experienced.

Model Cars – In a Model Airplane Club?

Well, yes. It was more common than you might think. With winter weather restricting flying activity, small propeller-driven air cars were often run in someone's garage after the club meeting. These small air cars had the economic advantage of merely needing to be removed from your airplane, mounted on a block of wood with either three or four wheels, depending on a whim, and a sufficient length restraining wire attached to a center pole to allow a circular track of 12 to 18 feet around the outer edge. They were then timed for Speed. Being warm in the garage, our motors started easily. The smallest cars could reach speeds of 40 mph or so on a 16-foot diameter track. You haven't lived until you've seen 40 mph inside your garage! It's quite a sight.

Bob Sonnleitner displays two unfinished examples of nearly five-foot wingspan aerobatic models, prior to covering and painting. It was quite a journey from the earlier 9-inch span paper-and-pine gliders to these ½ - horsepower balsa beauties. [Sonnleitner Photo]

Like all other engines, model engines come in various sizes, some larger and some smaller. To go faster meant a larger motor. One long accepted method of going faster was to install a larger motor in a smaller car. In our case, it would have been a good idea to install a heavier, stronger retaining wire with this larger motor. This one fellow doubled his engine size but kept the same size restraining wire. This idea fared poorly.

During a run at an estimated 70 mph in the garage, the restraining wire broke. The car slid sideways, flipped, and then punched out one of the plywood panels in his overhead door. Although the car's owner readily paid for the door repairs, Huey was not mollified. Somehow, the sparkle had gone from his eye.

Clearly disgruntled, he gamely allowed the racing to continue with the new thicker restraining wire.

The next "issue" was the attempt to run a ½ horsepower motor car with no body (to lighten the weight.) The problem here was that the thrust of the propeller/motor exceeded the weight of the car and it simply took off – UP! It narrowly missed several delicate models hanging in the garage rafters before crashing harshly to the floor. Unsurprisingly, thereafter, only the smallest, slowest cars were allowed to run in his garage.

Time Passed…

Soon after the War, club ranks nearly reached pre-war levels. Those who stuck with the hobby learned the ins and outs of building and flying. Eventually, the U.S. Navy supported modelers officially. The paper gliders had become intricate, five-foot wingspan models shown here. Life was good.

Epilogue

As one might expect, some modelers were in the hobby for but a short time, while others followed it for the rest of their lives. Two of the Aeronuts members owned hobby shops. Several competed in regional contests with varying degrees of success. One sold some original designs to national magazines, is an antique engine collector, and writes columns for two national model magazines. One obtained a Ph.D. in Ecology. The old Oshkosh Aeronuts were eventually replaced by the Winnebagoland R/C Flyers. As of this writing, the Experimental Aviation Association supports the aeronautical education of youth with, among other things, their yearly convention of Kidventure, where as many as 2500 kids have learned to fly in seven days. So things are still very active.

Period Oshkosh Hobby Shops

Between 1946 and 1954, when I left Oshkosh, there were three local stores offering hobby supplies:

1. **The Hobby House**. First located at 168 Main Street and then later moving to 51 Main Street. The largest, oldest, and premiere shop, it carried the largest inventory, plus the owner, Ed Libowski, built and flew models. He offered engines, kits, fuel and all the bits and pieces needed to build and fly models. His wife sold dollhouses, an embarrassment to guys building airplane items.

2. **Don's Camera and Hobbies**. First located at 11 Otter Street in 1951, he later moved to 8th and Oregon, where he specialized in stamps. Don Thurwatcher was the owner.

3. **Otto's News and Stationary**. 918 Oregon Street, Harry Otto, owner. He sold only the lower-end products such as balsa display models, glue, and small gliders in one area of his store as the name indicates.

Let's Meet Some of the Builders of the Oshkosh Aeronuts

Please bear in mind that this listing is not complete for the following reasons: 1. There were three different model airplane clubs and I only had access to one club's roster. 2. This roster only covered 1947 to 1955, although the club lasted until the mid-to-late 1960s. 3. Obviously, not everyone who built model airplanes joined a club.

Club Members/Builders
("C" is a charter member)

Butch Abraham – North side
Norbert Bednarck – North side
Lavern Bender – South side
Duwayne Besaw – North side
Donald Blink – South side
Gayle Bodoh – South side
Gene Bodoh – South side
Tom Bork – North side
Melvin Brechlin – North side
Brian Bueler (Buhler?) – North side
Richard Cubby – North side
Doug Dahlke – South side
Roger Dawson - ?
David Dolly - North/South side
Glen Burben - ?
Ted Engelke – South side
Bill Fisher – South side
John Flaherty - ?
Lynn Galow – South side
Dick Gams - South side - C
Fred Guenther – South side
Frank Haire – North side
Bob Hawkins – North side
Anton Holzbauer – South side
Gary Horton – South side
Jerry Ihrig – North side
Dave Jameson – North side
Walter Johnson – North side
Bill Judkins – North side
Joe Kempinger – South side
Roy Krueger – South side
Ed Libowski – South side - C
Orville Luebke – South side - C
Walter Lynn – South side
Jerry Martin – South side
Frank Mathe – South side
James Meli – North side
Eddie Morgan – East side

The original charter members of the Oshkosh Aeronuts, the city's third model airplane club, Summer 1947. (L-R) Roger Schmidt, Herb Nolte, Larry Galow, Edmund Putzer, Ed Labowski, Bob Triose, Hugh Ziebell, Bryce Robertson, Dick Schmidt, Roy Mostellar, Bernie Zaehlke, Dave Timm; (Front) Al Putzer

Roy Mosstellar – North side
Herb Nolte – North side
August Pitz – North side
Al Pulzer – South side - C
Edmund Putzer – East side
Leonard Rechter - ?
Joe Reichenberger – South side
Gary Rewalt – North side
Dick Rieter – ?
Bruce Robertson – North side
George Rotter – West side
William Sanvidge -?
John Schmiedling – Appleton (N.G.)
Richard Schmidt – South side - C
Roger Schmidt – South side - C
Robert Schneider – North side
Earl Sherburn – South side
Ken Simposon – South side
Robert Sonnleiner – South side
Lyle Staehle – South side
Gareth Sternitske – East side
Earl Strade - North side

Virgil Thornton – South side
Don Thurwatcher – North & South side
Danlee Timm – North side
David Timm – North side - C
Jack Tinsman – North side
Robert Treise – North side - C
Jerry Weber – South side
Herb Webster – North side
Peter Wonsor – East side
Charles Ziebell – South side
Daniel Ziebell – South side
Hugh Ziebell – South side – C
Robert Ziebell – South side
Bernie Zuehlke – East side - C

Model Builders Who Were Not Club Members

Roger Becker – South side
Jimmie Brown – South side
Bob Gear – North side
Tommy Killilea – South side
Bobby Lewellyn – South side
Gale Oehler - South side

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