



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of LEE R. HINES

June 5, 1938 – May 2, 2022 Started modeling in 1950
AMA #7334



Written by LRH (09/2005); Edited & Formatted by JS (09/2005), Reformatted by JS (09/2009); Updated by JS (07/2022)

The following is an autobiography, amended by Lee R. Hines in September of 2005.

The Free Flight Biography of Lee R. Hines

As one born in 1938, growing up as WWII and the Korean Conflict raged, an abiding aircraft interest was naturally instilled in me. My first recollection of model aircraft is hard to pinpoint, but somehow I started. The year would be about 1950.

The place was Omaha, Nebraska, which is about 40 miles west of the Iowa farm town of my birth. *Model Airplane News*, *Air Trails*, *Flying Models*, etc, were read until dog-eared as I began rudimentary attempts to learn how to build the kits and designs of that era. The Jasco line of gliders was within the reach of my limited funds, and seemed of good design, so I began. Later I bought Zaic YBs, which still give good historical references and enjoyment when I leaf through them.

In 1953, my family moved to Torrance, California. This was a great boon to my Free Flight future, as the California scene was where the best FF action and fliers seemed to be located! I had religiously read Dick Everett's Western Round Up column in *Air Trails*, where he talked about Taibi, Mahieu, Gilliam, Hal Cover, Stan Hill, and the rest. Now I was able to see them and fly in the same contests! Almost too cool for words, it was. FYI: I have kept a small loose-leaf notebook with a log of all sanctioned contests I have flown it since my first one in 1952. The current count is 477 comps as of 21 September 2005, by the way.

I began with 1/2A-power jobs, then got bigger motors and built kits of Zeeks, Kiwis, Fubars, Cumulus, and Spacers. Then I saw St. Jean and his Ramrod in 1954 and built a fleet of them through 1957 and the Rules Change. I was the first to build one after Ron himself. [Ref: NFFS Digest, Jan 2004 issue]. I had many successes with them, including several placings at Nationals from 1955 through 1957. I set a record or two with them as well.

I had already taken a liking to glider events, especially Hand Launch Glider, and was trying to learn how to do better, both indoor and outdoor. After much enjoyable effort, I finally broke the magic minute barrier, thanks in great part to some tips from Joe Foster.

The transformation was so sudden that my first time over 60 seconds was 68! I knew I finally had a good bird, so I took some official flights. The second throw transitioned clean and did 71.6 seconds, beating the Senior record! I was so psyched up, with adrenalin coming out of every pore, that the next throw tore the fin off (lousy glue!) and it went into the girders, never to be found! [Ref: Tustin Blimp Hanger on Mar 24, 1957]

My first 15 minutes of fame came a short time later at the 1957 Nats [Willow Grove, Pennsylvania].

The indoor events were held at famous/infamous Lakehurst in New Jersey. A magic day for me, and Larry Conover wrote that “this skinny 19 year old from California” proceeded to set the all-time IHLG World Record with a flight of 77.2 seconds. It was an unreal event for me, for I was in the zone that day performing well, with many greats of our sport looking on.

Shortly thereafter the *Sweepette* glider design began to emerge, which I suppose is my crowning achievement in aeromodeling. From its beginnings as a 6-inch indoor glider, it saw many versions and sizes, and was used both indoors and outdoors. I still build them today, with plan forms virtually unchanged since the 1970s. I was happily surprised when the *Sweepette* received the first Model of the Year Award in 1970. Of course, the fact that the design has been so successful in the hands of so many glider fliers is the primary source of that happiness.

My interest in the FAI events began with the USA juggernaut victories of 1953 at Cranfield, England. My heroes became Wakefield winner Joe Foster and Dave Kneeland, who won FAI Power. Our teams also were winners. For a while, I thought that field of endeavor was above my learnings and earnings, but I built some FAI Power jobs (Cumulus, Zeek, and Ramrod) and an A2.

I left the Power arena in the 60s while I pursued other interests, like earning a living, ladies, auto racing, travel, etc. I flew many hand-launched gliders, with the *Sweepette* design development coming rapidly due to good competition and collaborations with many good glider fliers, especially Ron Wittman.

I built many sizes, for various sites, setting many records and having great fun doing so. In fact, I won Indoor Hand Launch Glider at the 1963 and 1967 Los Alamitos Nats, plus had the first-known flight over 80 seconds, doing 82.5 at Edward Air Force Base on April 19, 1964. It rode some sunlight lift for about 10 seconds of helpful air. *Sweepette* 18s of various weights were used for those victories.

Then the rules changed January of 1965. We had record trials at the Tustin Hanger (a.k.a. “Santa Ana”) on January 10, 1965, where I scored another World Record with a highest flight of 1:25.4 (plus a 1:22, for record total of 2:47.4) using the *Sweepette 18*, Mk 13. I did an article and plans of it for *Model Airplane News*, which they published July of 1965. When I went to England and Europe in 1965 mainly to see F1 and sports car racing, *Aeromodeler's* Ron Moulton corralled me to design and build a GB version of *Sweepette 20*, a fun project I was glad to do.

In 1970, I became interested in FAI more seriously because Dennis Bronco used my *Sharkie A2* design to win a team spot for the 1971 Swedish World Champs. I then designed, built and published several A2s in the *NFFS Digest*. The *Ultimax*, *Mean Machine*, *Sweet Bird*, and *HRH* can be found in back issues by the diligent ones out there. Those were circle tow zoom-style gliders, which served me well in many contests. *Ultimax II* was the first plane to max all fourteen rounds of the tough Maxmen FAI in February of 1976. At the 1979 Taft World Champs, *Mean Machine* was used exclusively, taking third place. *Sweet Bird* followed and I used it to win a spot on the 1985 team. I was not fortunate in Livno 1985, though.

Then I took off a couple of years for R&R. In 1989 & 1990 I saw the sea change in F1A coming. Bunters! Composite construction! Soon I bought one and started getting used to a new style of launching, which was very demanding of the airframe. In addition, more precise trim adjustments were necessary, as much higher speeds occurred than before. I began to design some bunters, notably the AL Series, developed from the great 1989 World Champion Andres Lepp's AL-33 design, built approximately in 1979! A timeless bird, I must say. Flying towline is still a lot of fun, notwithstanding the fact that I can't do it like younger bods do. Still, I have had my share of successes, including a spot on the 2001 USA Team and World Cup victories in Germany [97] and New Zealand [04].

I have enjoyed flying the relatively new Catapult Glider class since 1999. I won Catapult Launch Glider at that year's Nats, as well as in 2000, 2003 and 2004. Stan Buddenbohm got me started with some good Copper Cat kits before I started the Swee'Cat design I use currently. And I surprise myself by still being able to get enough altitude to snag some thermals flying OHLG at the age of 67!

Lee R. Hines
21 Sept 2005

Addendum...September 2005

I have been *NFFS Digest Glider* contributing editor since...I don't remember when. I have tried to beat the bushes off my fellow glider fliers for designs and general info which might be of interest and helpful to readers. As mentioned above, my *Sweepette 18* #13 was in MAN, while several/most of my F1As and HLGs and CLGs have been NFFS fodder over the years. I have been a Contest Director since the 80s, running the Maxmen FAI International along with Bob White. In 1987 that contest had the distinction of being the first sanctioned event of the newly created FAI World Cup Free Flight series. By the way, I will be Contest Director of the first ever F1E World Cup event in February of 2006.

-LRH

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