



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of RICHARD (DICK) KORDA

February 15, 1915 – October 12, 2001 Started modeling in 1928
AMA #534711



Written & Submitted by GR (09/1999); Transcribed by NR (09/1999); Edited & Formatted by SS (12/2002), Updated by JS (10/2008, 11/2017),
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Video link: One of the National Model Aviation Museum's special Fly By report, Korda's Wakefield, is on YouTube [here](#).



Career:

- 1935: Set a new world record in Mulvihill Trophy outdoor stick model event at the Nationals with a time of 24 minutes and 40 seconds
- 1937: Set a new world record in fuselage class D at 54 minutes and 13 seconds at the Nationals
- 1939: Won the Wakefield Cup with a record-breaking 43 minutes and 39 seconds flight
- 1946: Placed first in towline glider and Class A Control Line at the Nationals
- 1946: Member of the Cleveland Balsa Butchers when they received the Fred W. Megow Club Trophy at the Nationals
- 1994: Honored nationally at the SAM Championships
- Honored at an event hosted by the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) Chapter 39

Honors:

- 1970: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
 - 1978: National Free Flight Society (NFFS) Hall of Fame
 - 1989: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
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His friend, fellow Wakefield flyer, and brother-in-law George Reich submitted the following information about Dick Korda.

The name Dick Korda is one of the most recognized and respected names in model aviation throughout the U.S. and abroad. A modest and very courteous competitor, Dick was always willing to help others with their modeling problems. His interest in aviation was nurtured at an early age while living next to a small airport. He was soon reading all the air war stories in the popular pulp magazines of the time, especially about his idol, the Red Baron – Manfred Von

Richthofen. When he was 13, his father bought him a small 12-inch rubber-powered model airplane. It was made in Japan and silk-covered on a wire frame with a metal prop. After flying the model he was soon building his own Rise-off-Ground (ROG) stick models and on his way to an illustrious career in model aviation.

Intensely fascinated with airplanes, Dick always found a way to attend the Cleveland Air Races every day of the event beginning in 1929 when he was only 14. He loved the racing planes and even managed to meet some of the pilots.

Dick's aeromodeling interest ranged from indoor microfilm and all phases of Free Flight models and Radio Control (RC). His most notable success was in 1939 when he won the coveted Wakefield Trophy at the International Wakefield Contest held in Bendix, New Jersey. His remarkable flight of 43 minutes and 15 seconds was the best of the day and set a new international record.

The Korda Wakefield has been built and flown more than any other design of Wakefield model and 60 years later is still a favorite model for Old-Timer events. The Wakefield Cup is considered model aviation's most prestigious trophy. The Wakefield Cup was donated by Lord Wakefield of Hythe to promote interest in model aeronautics. The first Wakefield Cup competition was held near London, England in 1928.

After winning the Wakefield Cup, a Cleveland aviation firm hired Dick as a machinist, recognizing his resourcefulness and ingenuity. This experience led to a career as a very respected and skilled toolmaker in the Cleveland area.

Dick Korda flew models competitively through 1953. His main interest then turned to real flying. His first airplane was a Piper Cub in 1950 and later an Aeronca Chief. Dick took glider lessons in 1951 and a year later was part owner of a Schweitzer 126. In the mid 1950s, he became a tow pilot for the Cleveland Soaring Society. In 1973 he flew a Schweitzer 126 over Colorado's Pikes Peak in hopes of earning a diamond pin given by the Soaring Society of America for attitude soaring. He was within 200 feet of the required 16,000 feet height gain (after release) when the extreme cold forced him to retreat to a lower altitude. Sadly, in 1989 Dick's flying days drew to a close after he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

Even with the onset of Parkinson's, Dick's enthusiasm for airplanes never dimmed. At age 79, he built and flew his 1939 Wakefield model at the 1994 Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) Championships, which was a commemorative event in his honor. He placed 10th out of 76 entries.

A list of Dick Korda's most noteworthy accomplishments in model aeronautics follows:

1935: National Model Airplane Championships, Saint Louis, Missouri. Set a new world record in Mulvihill Trophy outdoor stick model event with the time of 24 minutes, 40 seconds. His plans were published in *Model Airplane News* magazine's November 1935 issue. They were also published in Frank Zaic's 1937 Yearbook.

1936: Thompson Junior Trophy Race in Akron, Ohio. Rubber-powered speed model record of 75 mph. Cleveland Speedster plans in published Frank Zaic's 1938 Yearbook.

1937: Junior National Air Races, Akron, Ohio. Acclaimed Junior Aviator national champion, winning the Major Al William's Trophy. First place in rubber-powered speed event.

1937: National Model Airplane Championships, Detroit, Michigan. New world record of 54 minutes, 13 seconds in fuselage class D. Plans published in *Air Trails* magazine, February 1938. Model was kitted by Burd Model Airplane Co.

1937: Class C Outdoor Tractor (rubber-powered stick) published in 1937 Frank Zaic's Yearbook.

1938: Article in February 1938 *Air Trails* magazine called "54 Minutes – World Record Cabin Fuselage Model" by Richard Korda and Gordon S. Light.

1938: Korda's Wakefield design published in Frank Zaic's Yearbook.

1939: International Wakefield Cup Contest, Bendix, New Jersey. First place with record-breaking flight of 43 minutes, 39 seconds (three-flight average over 15 minutes) to win the most prestigious award in aeromodeling – the Wakefield Cup. Plans were published in *Air Trails* magazine in November 1939. Megow Models sold Korda's Wakefield Winner in kits.

1939: National Model Airplane Championships, Detroit, Michigan. First place in Free Flight class B gas with Champion model, which was later kitted by Cleveland Models.

1940: Wrote article "Hints on Design" for *Air Trails* magazine in June 1940.

1941: Plans for Sticker (200-square-inch stick model) in *Air Trails* magazine in September 1941.

1943: Wrote article "Stretch that Rubber" for *Air Trails* Model Annual.

1946: National Model Airplane Championships, Wichita, Kansas. First in towline glider and first in class A Control Line. Also a member of the Cleveland Balsa Butchers who received the perpetual Fred W. Megow Club Trophy. Plans for the towline glider were published in Bill Winter's Plan Book.

1948: International Wakefield Event, Akron, Ohio. Competed as a member of the U.S. team, finishing in 13th place.

- Powerhouse class B world record of 35-feet and 44-inches established at Michigan State Meet. Model kitted by Berkeley Models. Class A version plans published in Model Craftsman.

Accolades for Dick Korda

Hall of Fame member of the following:

- 1970 - Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1978 - National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1989 - Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame

In 1993, chapter 39 of the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) hosted a local commemorative event in Dick Korda's honor in Shelby, Ohio.

The 1994 SAM Championships in Muncie, Indiana, was a national commemorative event to honor Dick Korda.

Jim Bennett of Saint Louis, Missouri provided the following information on Dick Korda.

Richard Korda is a native of Cleveland, Ohio, and resides there today. He was born February 14, 1915. He began building and flying model airplanes after attending the 1934 National Meet in Akron, Ohio. He was one of the first members of the Cleveland Balsa Butchers.

He won the Mulvihill Trophy on his first try. Flying a 100-square-inch rubber stick model, he made a 24-minute flight at the Saint Louis National meet. The flight set a National class C rubber outdoor stick record. It was his first and last contest in the Senior Division. Korda's next stick design was a 150-square-inch three-panel dihedral wing featured in the 1937 Frank Zaic *Model Aeronautic Yearbook*. In 1936, Korda placed second to Chester Lanzo in outdoor cabin at the 1936 Detroit Nationals. Lanzo set a 48-minute record and Korda's flight was 12 minutes.

His fame reached telescopic highs after his 54-minute flight at the 1937 Detroit Nationals. His outdoor cabin set a national record and made the longest flight at the meet. The plane was found undamaged five miles from the Wayne County airport flying site. The model was featured in an article, "The 54 Minute Record Breaker," in the February 1938 issue of *Air Trails* magazine. Burd Models purchased the rights to the design and produced the kit. Initially offered at a dollar with high production the price in 1940 dropped to 29-cents. Kids by the thousands in the United States and around the world built the plane.

Korda's most famous achievement was the Wakefield win in 1939. His flight was the first of the meet that Sunday morning, August 6. The flying site was the golf course at Bendix, New Jersey, adjoining a small airport. Those watching attributed Korda's sensational flight to his ability to grasp the opportunity in the quiet and hot morning air with currents rising. Cirrus clouds indicated winds were coming and the situation would not last. The steep climb got the red and blue trimmed model into a strong thermal. The motor run was about a minute. He used 18 strands of 3/16-inch U.S. rubber "brown," four-feet long with one thousand turns. The propeller was a single blade folder of 18-inch diameter. Within minutes, Korda's plane was 1,000 feet

high.

Fred Bowers of the Canadian team got his ship into the air shortly after. Korda's plane was soaring almost over the takeoff board. Bower's got into a thermal but off in another direction. He made a flight of over 12 minutes. Meanwhile Korda was breaking British team member Bob Copland's 33-minute world record set the year before in Yugoslavia at the King Peter Cup. Korda's model landed about a half-mile from the take off spot with a 43-minute, 29-second flight.

Dick won the 30-inch sterling silver Lord Wakefield cup. Fred Bowers placed second. Giovanni of France was third with proxy flyer Maurice Schoenbrun of New York City. Bob Copland and Norm Lees of England were fourth and fifth. Teams from Britain, Canada, France, South Africa, and the United States competed. U.S. proxies flew for the French and South Africans.

The Wakefield winning design and the contest article were featured in the November 1939 *Air Trails* magazine articles "America Keeps the Wakefield Cup" and "The 1939 Wakefield Winner." Megow Models and later Burd produced kits of the model. I mentioned to *Air Trails* editor, Bill Winter, a timer of the 43-minute flight along with Al Casano, that the November 1939 issue was my favorite model airplane publication. Bill said, "Mine too."

Korda won firsts in rubber speed at the 1936 and 1937 Scripps-Howard Junior Aviator Nationals in Cleveland and Akron. Korda won the 1937 event in Akron with a flight of 70.83 miles per hour over an electrically timed 88-foot course. The speed models were included in Frank Zaic's "Model Aeronautic Yearbook." He won flying scale at a regional meet in Akron setting a scale record. In 1939, he won a series of gas events in class C and class B and set a NAA record. Later he took a third in class B gas at the 1939 Detroit Nationals. The four-foot span design was produced as a kit by Cleveland Models and was called Korda's Powerhouse.

Korda wrote a series of design articles for rubber models in *Air Trails* in 1940. In the January issue he wrote, "How to Break Records," he co-authored an article with 1938 Wakefield winner, Jim Cahill in February, "To Streamline or not to Streamline," in May he wrote "Props and Fittings" and in the June issue, "Hints On Design."

Dick's next big win was the 1941 outdoor cabin event at the Chicago Nationals. He called the 300-square-inch ship the Dethermalizer. Using one of the first dethermalizers, an "Austin" air timer actuated rudder tab, the design was featured in the February 1942 *Air Trails*. It is a favorite of SAM flyers in the large rubber cabin event. His Stickler class D stick, September 1941 *Air Trails*, is another favorite SAM large rubber design.

Control Line speed became a contest category and Korda was a competitor. He won class A speed at the 1946 Wichita Nationals. He won towline glider that year too. The glider design was featured in Bill Winter's Plan Book. Towline was also a first time event at a national meet. Korda placed high in the CO2 event that year too, another first time event at the national meet. His club, the Cleveland Balsa Butchers won the 1946 National Club Championship helped by Dick's winning places along with his brother-in-law George Reich's win in outdoor cabin.

He won outdoor rubber cabin in the Plymouth International Model Airplane Contest in Detroit in 1947. His place on the first post-war Wakefield team in 1948 could have been ceded by virtue of the 1939 win. He chose to fly in the elimination at the 1948 Nationals in Olathe and won a place on the team. The Wakefield was in the U.S. that year because of his winning the previous meet in 1939. The 1948 Championship was held at Akron. Roy Chesterton of Britain won the Wakefield Cup.

Korda continued in Wakefield competition two more years and retired from competition in 1950. He flew full-scale light planes and sailplanes until his 70s.

He's a natural talent, skilled craftsmen and an astute designer with an excellent contest flying sense. In his 80s, he flew and won a 1939 Korda Wakefield reunion meet in which all participants, including the finest fliers, flew the 1939 Korda Wakefield design.

Dick Korda was a star in an exciting time when model airplanes became a vast hobby in the United States and around the world. He was a colossal contributor to teenage builders and flyers throughout the world.

Korda was one of the first five named to the [Model Aviation] Hall of Fame. He was then named to the National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame and the Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame. Over 60 years after his top achievement in model flying – winning the Wakefield Trophy and setting an international record – Korda is legendary in a century of great designers and flyers.

The following obituary was published in the February 2002 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

Dick Korda, a native of Cleveland, Ohio, died on October 12, 2001. Born in 1915, Dick became one of the most recognized and respected names in model aviation.

Dick was one of the first members of the Cleveland Balsa Butchers and was chosen as a member of [the] Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 1970.

He was elected to the National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame in 1978 and the Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame in 1989.

In 1993, Chapter 39 of the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) hosted a local event in Dick's honor in Shelby, Ohio, and the 1994 Society of Antique Modelers Championships, held in Muncie, Indiana, was a national commemorative event to honor him.

Dick's interest in aviation was nurtured at an early age while living next to a small airport. He was soon reading air war stories in the popular pulp magazines of the time, especially about his idol, the Red Baron, Manfred [Albrecht Freiherr] von Richthofen.

When he was 13, his father bought him a small rubber-powered model airplane. After flying the

model, he was soon building his own rise-off-ground (ROG) stick models and was on his way to an illustrious career in model aviation.

Dick's aeromodeling interest ranged from Indoor microfilm and all phases of Free Flight models to Radio Control. His most notable success was in 1939 when he won the coveted Wakefield Trophy, considered one of model aviation's most prestigious trophies, at the International Wakefield Contest held in Bendix, New Jersey. His remarkable flight of 43 minutes and 15 seconds was the best of the day and set a new international record.

Dick's Korda Wakefield design has been built and flown more than any other design of Wakefield model, and 60 years later is still a favorite model for Old-Timer events.

Dick wrote a series of design articles for Rubber models in *Air Trails* in 1940. His plans for the Sticker were published in 1941, and plans for his National Aeromodeling Championships-winning Towline Glider were published in Bill Winter's Plan Book in 1946.

Dick retired from aeromodeling competition in 1950 and began flying full-scale light planes and sailplanes until he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in his seventies. He returned to aeromodeling, and at age 79, he built and flew his 1939 Wakefield model at the 1994 Society of Antique Modelers Championships. He placed 10th out of 76 entries!

Dick Korda was a star in an exciting time when model airplanes were a vast hobby in the United States and around the world.

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