



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JOHN A. MISKE Jr.

October 19, 1932 - November 6, 2014

Started modeling in the 1940s



Written by DH (06/2009); Transcribed and Edited by JS (06-07/2009); Update by JS (10/2015)

Awards

- 1983: Received the first John Miske Memorial Award, a perpetual award presented annually at the AMA's National Aeromodeling Championships for the best Old Time Stunt airplane. The Award was designed and built by Windy Urtnowski and Dick Maddox.
 - 1993: At the fifth annual Vintage Stunt Championships, he received the Father of Old Time Stunt plaque with a Rocket .46 ignition engine donated by George Aldrich.
 - 2008: Inducted into Precision Aerobatics Model Pilot's Association Hall of Fame
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The following biography was submitted by De Hill in June of 2008.

The Beginning

John Miske was born at Saint Mary's Hospital in Passaic, New Jersey, at 6:30 am on October 19, 1932. Model airplanes always fascinated him, and by the time he was eight or nine, he was finally able to complete an occasional Comet or Guillow's kit. In 1945 Santa brought John an Ignition Rocket .46 engine for Christmas. The next day, he headed down to the small hobby shop where the Rocket had come from and purchased a kit for the Stanzel *Tiger Shark*. He didn't start building it until the following spring, since his workbench was the picnic table located outside of the house. By fall, his first gas model was ready to fly. A few laps of hedgehopping and a pancake landing broke the prop and bent the gear; there was no other damage. John went back to running the Rocket on the bench and driving the neighbors nuts. His next engine was an Arden .09. Shortly afterward, Berkeley Models, Inc. came out with the *PeeWee Zilch* stunter expressly designed for the Arden .099. John bought one, had it all put together by early 1948, and took it out to the local overgrown schoolyard. His helper launched it, and after a couple of hedgehopping laps, John's new ship flattened out in the weeds with no damage. On the next flight, John took off, locked his wrist and arm in neutral at about 8 feet up, and flew out the full tank. Hot dog, he could finally fly! Learning to stunt took a little more time, but John was on his way!

Competition

By the time 1951 came along, Guillow's kitted Lew Andrew's Nats-winning *Barnstormer*, and John got one from Al Casano's Hobby Headquarters. He built the wing on a 48" x 24" piece of Homosote ceiling insulation, which he placed on the kitchen floor after dinner and the dishes were done. The floor was the only place John had to build a 47" wing. A new era had begun; John could even do maneuvers from the Mirror Meet Pattern such as the Double Vertical Eight, the Three Leaf Clover, and the Bolo Wingover! The first major contest he entered was a Plymouth Meet elimination, which was held in the summer of 1952 at Warinanco Park in

Elizabeth, New Jersey. John flew well that day and won first place, defeating Leon Schulman, Larry Scarinzi, and Red Reinhardt. John was told that if he had been from Union County, he would have won a free trip to fly in the Plymouth Internationals Meet in Detroit.

The 1954 British Nationals at Royal Air Force (RAF) Waterbeach Airfield

John was drafted into the U.S. Army in February of 1953. This caused him to miss the 1953 Mirror Meet. He had already signed up, entered, and was ready to go, but went into the service instead. After basic training, John shipped out to Germany in July, and ended up in Karlsruhe as a combat engineer. At the base's craft shop, he asked the guy behind the counter if there was any model airplane activity on the post. The guy said, "Have you met Lieutenant Burns?" A short time later, John heard an airplane flying over by the motor pool. It was Lieutenant Ed Burns flying a large original stunt ship powered by a glow Atwood Triumph .51 in the truck parking lot.

Ed Burns and John decided to attend the 1954 British Nationals and John built a new Guillow's Barnstormer and ordered a new Fox .35 for it. He had decided that Stunt was to be the only event that he would enter. John ordered some Cox fuel from his old hobby shop in Clifton, New Jersey and it arrived in Karlsruhe with no problems. (Try that today!) They left Karlsruhe on the bus, arrived at Rhein-Main Air Force Base, and tried to catch a military hop to London. No military hops were available for the next several days, so they bought tickets on British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) Airlines and left the next day for London. John flew with his *Barnstormer* sitting in the seat next to him! (The BOAC airliner had lots of empty seats.)

They landed in London and took a train to the Nats site, RAF Waterbeach, then took a taxi out to the flying site and looked the place over. The taxi driver owned a bed and breakfast and they spent the night with him. He was all booked up the next day, so they went to Waterbeach (without a hotel room) and watched the first day of competition. They did manage to get three test flights on the new *Barnstormer*. The engine ran well, and the airplane had no bad habits. The next item was to find a place to stay. Luck was with them, and they met an RAF airplane mechanic named Brian Groom who was stationed at RAF Waterbeach and was working at the Nats that week. He invited them to stay with him and his family. Brian had an extra bedroom, and John and Ed gratefully accepted his kind offer. They spent the next four days with him. Brian was a modeler also, and admired John's *Barnstormer* and Fox .35. When John and Ed got back to Karlsruhe, they sent him a new Fox .35 and a new *Barnstormer* kit for his kindness.

Wind blew and rain fell for quite a bit of the time they spent at RAF Waterbeach. The Gold Cup (Stunt) was flown on the next to last day of the Nats. When John flew, it was windy and rain was falling. It was not a good day to fly stunt! He only got one flight and did not find out until later that he had placed second. On the last day of the Nats, they saw a British modeler flying an Amco 3.5 cc (.21) ball bearing diesel in a stunt ship. The engine was running really well, and when it landed, Ed Burns walked over and asked the guy if he would sell his engine. The modeler looked a little surprised and said "sure." A price was agreed upon and Ed now had a good diesel engine. They saw another British modeler flying a stunt ship powered with a Frog .500 glow engine that wasn't running well at all. They gave him a tank of Cox fuel, and the Frog .500 flew and ran really well. About halfway through the flight, the engine mount bolts loosened, and the engine came out of the airplane and tumbled to the ground! It was like something out of

a 1950s Cox fuel advertisement. After the Nats ended, they said goodbye to Brian and took a taxi to London.

John and Ed spent the night in London. The next day they took a train from London to Dover to get on the ferry. It was very crowded at the train station, and the *Barnstormer* was almost crushed during the entraining process. John and Ed got to Dover and got on the ferry that evening with no problems. The ferry took them to Amsterdam, and from there a morning train took them back to Karlsruhe.

Leadership

- President of the Clifton Model Airplane Club for a few months in 1956. He resigned to marry Elaine.
- Joined Garden State Circle Burners (GSCB) in 1963, and served as president for 11 years total.

John was chairman of the GSCB's largest fundraiser, the Annual Dinner Dance, for seven years. He helped out with the Dinner Dance in 1964, and took over in 1965. In 1972, John went back to helping out by keeping the contact list of individuals and clubs. The Circle Burners first sold plastic roses during the dinner dance that had raffle tickets attached to them. Later they went to Hawaiian leis, which were cheaper, and offered more plays on words for the sales pitch! The raffle prizes were baskets of cheer. Some years they had 310 people attending the Dinner Dance. Out of town clubs would have their own tables. The Circle Burners always had a live band who would usually work past midnight (for a big tip) to keep the festivities going on. Larry Scarinzi helped out during these years, even though he was busy running his bicycle shop.

- John was awarded a Life Membership in the GSCB, and is now designated President Emeritus.
- John wrote an Old Time Stunt column for the GSCB Newsletter "Prop Wash" for 8 years.

Contest Leadership

- John became a Contest Director in November of 1966. He was the C.D. for around 40 contests. He had to stop in 1992, as he had opened a hobby shop, and had no free time.
- GSCB Stunt Event Director for 10 years
- John was the event director for Old Time Stunt at the 1983 and 1985 AMA Nationals at Chicopee, Massachusetts.

The Origin of Old Time Stunt (Garden State Circle Burners' Rules)

John was at the GSCB fall meet in 1969, and questioned why they had an empty circle. He was told that the young men who had been running the 1/2A Speed event were at college and there was no other event to put in its place. An open circle meant lost entry fees, lost food sales, lost raffle sales, etc. The GSCB needed the dollars to run the club, because the expenses were (and are) very high. They have field rent, grass cutting charges, meeting hall rent, and insurance costs. The Circle Burners' fall meets were always run on two consecutive weekends in October. Having a vacant circle at one of them was not a good option. After some discussion among the

club members on how to fill the empty circle, someone wondered if they could use some of their older models in an event. Bingo, Old Time Stunt!

A lot of folks refer to Old Time Stunt (OTS) as being invented. In fact, it was resurrected from the 1951- 1952 AMA Rulebook and was to be flown using designs no newer than December 31, 1952. To be qualified, the models had to be listed in magazine advertisements (kitted) or published as a construction article prior to 1953. It helped that John had a complete collection of model magazines (*Air Trails*, *Model Airplane News*, and *Flying Models*) from 1945 to 1952, plus a few other books. John listed all the Stunt kits and another GSCB member listed all the construction articles that would qualify for the OTS event. As long as it was kitted or published in a magazine or book prior to 1953, it could easily be confirmed as eligible.

The first OTS Contest was held on October 4, 1970 at the GSCB club field in New Jersey. Elliot Dixon was the contest director, and John Miske was the event director. There were 17 entries. Bob Hunt won Open with a Veco *Mustang*, and John D'attavio placed second with his deBolt *All American Senior*. Tom Niebuhr came up from St. Louis to fly his *Barnstormer* and Jimmy Damarell flew a duplicate of the Sterling *Ringmaster* factory demonstrator. Wayne Colgan won Jr/Sr combined. After the first contest, word spread around the U.S. and to other countries. This was a fun event with a slightly different pattern. John supplied copies of the OTS Rules, the list of approved airplanes, and copies of plans for the old designs to all who wrote or called. The rafters of his basement were full of plans for the stunt ships. This was necessary because there were and are some very inaccurate OTS plans being sold. The money earned from the sale of the plans went into the GSCB treasury. OTS was first flown at the Riverside AMA Nats in 1979. It grew in popularity through the 1970s and 1980s, and is still being flown at most Control Line contests.

Publishing Experience

- *Model Airplane News*, July 1974, *Building a Concrete Take-Off Deck*.
- *Model Airplane News*, July 1979, Old Time Stunt article (received over 100 responses asking for more information; answered them all)
- *Model Airplane News*, June 1981, guest columnist for Harry Higley.

Hobby Industry Involvement

- John operated John's Clifton Hobbies (an old-fashioned hobby shop) from August 1992 thru Sept. 2001.

Education Involvement

John built a Guillow's *Trainer 3* for the Circle Burners and installed a McCoy Redhead .19 in it. They used it for many years to teach interested spectators who thought that they might want to learn how to fly. The engine was great until they installed a muffler on it. The McCoy must have had a little sub piston induction, because it overheated and lost all compression. They replaced it with an O.S. 19 and continued on.

In January of 1974, The Garden State Circle Burners and the Rockland County Radio Control

Club of New York teamed up to put on a midwinter model airplane air expo show. The theme was "the Spirit of Cooperation." The Show was held at the Marriot Motor Hotel, and was a major effort to prove that Control Line and Radio Control could work side by side for the common good of our modeling sport. The idea was to provide the general public with an opportunity to see a large variety of different types of model aircraft. A total of 134 models were entered in the competition, with three trophies in each of the following categories: Pattern (Control Line and Radio Control), Racing (Control Line and Radio Control), Old Timers, Helicopters, Gliders, Scale, Sport, Boats, Cars, and Rockets. In addition, the Marriot Motor Hotel presented the "Best in Show" and the "Best Junior" awards.

In addition to the main display area at the Marriot, three smaller conference rooms were set up in which AMA films were presented and model building techniques were demonstrated by various members of the Garden State Circle Burners and the Rockland County Radio Control Club. In addition, Bob Hunt, of Control Line Specialties Company, showed how to "hot wire" cut and assemble foam core wings. While all of this was going on in the nice warm confines of the Marriot, several other modelers were out in a large parking lot that had just been freshly plowed clear of snow. They were braving 20-degree temperatures to put on demonstrations of Radio Control and Control Line flying, as well as Radio Control cars and model rocketry. 1300 spectators filed through four rooms in the Marriot during the two-day event. The Expo was very successful, with the GSCB club and the Rockland County RC Club splitting the \$1000.00 profit. The attendance was pretty amazing, especially since the Expo had mistakenly been scheduled on the weekend of Super Bowl VIII! Show Chairman John Miske Jr. worked with Co-Chairman Josh Titus (Rockland County RC Club member and District 11 Vice President) in a spirit of cooperation that brought about the successful conclusion of a great modelers show.



1952, Warinaco Park: John with his Fox-powered Barnstormer and 1st place trophy.



1954, Karlsruhe, Germany: John Miske starts his Barnstormer while Butch (the colonel's son) holds it.



1954, Stuttgart, Germany: John Miske at a flying contest. There was lots of interest!



1976: John Miske with a Curtiss Swift



1990, GSCB Field: John with other contestants at the 20th anniversary of Old Time Stunt. [John Miske photo]



October 4, 1970, GSCB Field: John Miske and Beth England (Miss Old Time Stunt) at the First Old Time Stunt event.



1990: 20th Anniversary of Old Time Stunt - GSCB Members with a double-sized Ringmaster. [John Miske photo]



John (left, holding with Father of OTS Award) with De Hill and Betty Fox



John Miske [Tom Niebuhr photo]



1993, Tuscan, AZ: John Miske with Larry Scarinzi's El Diablo at VSC 5

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