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# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of ROBERT (BOB) N. OSLAN



Born August 18, 1929 Started modeling in 1936  
AMA #56691

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Written and Submitted by RO (07/1996); Transcribed and Edited by SS (06/2002), Reformatted by JS (11/2009, 07/2014)

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## Career:

- Early 1970s: Served as vice president then president of the Southern California Antique Model Plane Society
- 1971-1978: Manufactured Free Flight and Radio Controlled kits
- A member of the Society of Antique Modelers
- Had articles published in American Modeler, Junior American Modeler, Model Aviation and Model Builder magazines

## Honors:

- 2002: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
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My name is Bob Oslan and I've lived in Huntington Beach, California for the past 29 years. I'm 67-years-old and got hooked on model airplanes 60 years ago when my mother took me to a school supply store that also sold model kits. Displayed on a shelf were rubber-powered models of a Gee Bee R-1 and a Nieuport 17. Their images are as vivid in my mind now as they were 60 years ago in Chicago. Not having anyone to teach me, my early attempts to build stick models were fruitless. Solid models, however, were somewhere within the limits of my skills and, of course, there were those Strombecker kits of the China Clipper and I think the early model of the Flying Fortress.

One day a neighbor friend of mine asked me to show him how to build a 10-cent Comet kit of a Curtiss Cabin, a low wing airplane with landing gear fairings. At this stage, I still didn't know how to build stick models but was too embarrassed to confess. So, I went to his house and saw that Comet plans had simple instructions on how to build unlike any plans I'd seen before. I then told my friend "how it was done," went out, and bought one of those Curtiss Cabins for myself – I was off to the races.

My first really good flying model was Ed Lidgard's Sparky produced by Comet, which, incidentally, is still being produced today. That was about 1940 or 1941. The Sparky was followed by a Korda Victory and about that time I began designing my own models. In addition to building for my own pleasure, I began building display and prototype models for Joe Ott. We were involved in World War II and these models were made of basswood and cardboard and were all models of military aircraft. They were too heavy to fly, but they looked neat. They probably would have flown reasonably well had balsa been available during the war years. In addition to the stick models, which were called Otto Former models, Joe also produced solid models of laminated basswood and profile identification models called Identoplanes. I made display models of these also. Joe's factory produced thousands of kits daily all throughout World War II.

Our family moved from Chicago to Valparaiso, Indiana, in 1944. Werner Henneberg, a tool and die make at McGill Manufacturing Co. operated a modest model shop in the basement of his home. It was through Werner that I got my first engine – an Ohlsson 60 Custom. It was used but

in excellent condition. I scaled up Henry Struck's New Ruler from Air Trails magazine and built my first gas model. It was, in fact, the first gas model I had ever seen. Seems strange but all my flying experience up to that time had been rubber-powered.

It was 1945 and getting gas and oil for the Ohlsson was a problem unless you had gas ration stamps, which I didn't. I remember pleading at the Skelly gas station for a quart of three parts white gas and one part 70 wgt. oil. They finally relented and I was set. To make a long story short, after two serious crashes I got the New Ruler trimmed to fly safely which it did for several years.

The next 10 years or so were spent in U-Control for the most part. This period also saw four years in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War, college (Purdue University) for a BSME. For one of the Purdue years I belonged to the Purdue Aeromodelers and shared that experience with Dick Swenson, Les Gerhardt, Frank Heeb, Neil Armstrong, Frank Claire, and many other fine modelers.

My wife, three children, and I pulled up stakes and moved from Illinois to California in 1967. I soon became acquainted with Old-Timer Free Flight and have been an avid participant ever since. I joined the SCAMPS (Southern California Antique Model Plane Society) and served as vice president and president in the early 1970s. Joined the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) and have written articles for American Modeler, Junior American Modeler, Model Aviation, and Model Builder. I was an active contest director and manufactured Free Flight kits and Radio Control kits from 1971 to 1978. I still compete in three or four contests a year.

### **Articles**

- "So Long," .020 Free Flight in American Model magazine; 1970; construction article
- "The Antiquers" in Junior American Modeler magazine; April 1973
- "Ryan Mechanics Long Eagle," rubber scale Free Flight in Model Builder; September 1974; construction article
- "Old Timer," columnist in the National Free Flight Society publication; 1974 to 1977
- "Commodore," Old-Timer Radio Control in Model Aviation; February 1981; construction article
- "Cloud Cruiser," Old-Timer Radio Control in Model Aviation; November 1983; construction article

### **Kits**

- Founded Cal Aero Model in 1971; open through 1978
- Produced four .020 Free Flight kits:
  - So Long
  - Brooklyn Dodger
  - Playboy Senior
  - Strato Streak
- Produced two Sport Radio Control kits:
  - Taibi Powerhouse
  - Air Trails Sportster
- The .020 kits are still being produced by R.N. Models

*(signed) Robert N. Olsan*

July 1, 1996



*Bob with his prototype .020 So Long*



*1991: Bob at the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) Champs in Jean, Nevada.*



*Bob with his original design, the Swift, designed to 1941 AMA rules.*

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