



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of BOB PECK



Written by AMA Staff (01/1991); reformatted by JS (04/2014)

The following was written by AMA staff and published in the National Model Aviation Museum's Cloud 9 newsletter, in the January 1991 issue.

Bob Peck – A Study in Courage

On Monday, January 7, 1991, at approximately 11:30am, Bob Peck passed away after a short illness. He would have celebrated his 57th birthday soon. He was a highly respected and admired modeler and manufacturer. Bob was best known for his innovative firm, Peck-Polymers, of Santee, California, which he and his wife, Sandy, established nearly 20 years ago.

Bob suffered for many years from arthritis and had been confined to a wheelchair for longer than I care to remember. Undeterred and helped by his most supportive wife and family, he let no handicap prevent him from pursuing his hobby of aeromodeling and managing his highly specialized and successful business. We understand that Sandy intends to carry on, as Bob would have wished.

We extend our heartfelt sympathy to Sandy, and to Jill and Vera, for their great loss of husband and father.

The following was written by Bill Warner staff and published in the April 1991 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

Bob Peck Eulogy

Bob Peck is gone. He was the engineering genius behind Peck-Polymers. A heart attack at Christmastime '90 and breathing problems shortly afterward took him from us.

By Bill Warner

Born in Salt Lake City, Utah, near the beginning of the Great Depression, Bob had the misfortune to be stricken with rheumatoid arthritis during his early days in high school. When a new drug came along to aid sufferers of this crippling and painful malady, its use made it possible for Bob to function at a level of activity nearer to normal, but the disease continued and worsened throughout his life. It slowed him down, but he was never one to let it get in the way of his interests in things mechanical (cars, bikes and airplanes), fishing, animals, and nature.

In 1958, Bob and Sandy were married, forming an unsinkable team that gave each other a love and devotion backed by inner strength that enabled them to meet and conquer disasters which would have crushed lesser beings.

Founded in 1971, Peck-Polymers was not successful as a fishing lure maker despite the fact that it had a good product. When they switched to model planes, they not only made a go of it, but

also gained a reputation which has circled the globe.

Bob's contributions to modeling were greater than to just design a number of excellent beginners models. He made it possible for a large number of cottage-industry types to sell their planes, kits and products through the Peck-Polymers catalog. They were outstanding kits with good wood and the Peck nylon nose button, and outflow anything else on the market.

In recent years, Bob expanded into designing electric RC blimps, many of which were quite clever, such as a Space Shuttle or a huge floating pig that could drop and catch an oversized basketball. His blimps have been seen by millions of people ranging from fans of the "Hollywood Squares" TV show to the daily shows put on at the Lotte World Hotel in Seoul, Korea, by four of his fantasy-theme light-studded airships "manned" by comical dolls.

Bob broke his leg in 1973, the aftermath of this incident resulting in his being confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. As the arthritis progressed, Bob finally had to curtail his drafting as the pain was too great. He could no longer turn his head, and any movement at all was difficult and painful.

With Sandy's love and help, he went on, never uttering a word of complaint or self-pity. Quite the contrary. He refused to be curtailed by his disability, redesigning his home, workshop and darkroom to fit his life on wheels.

His wheelchair became an extension of himself. He hopped up his 300-pound vehicle to be able to avoid... "being caught in the middle of the street when the traffic light changed." He added film-making capability to it by equipping it with a TV camera and monitor. Adding a model plane control stick improved its handling.

He took on challenges with good cheer and conquered hardship exuberantly. Spending a day with Bob and Sandy gave one some small appreciation of what overcoming handicaps is about, whether it be finding a place to park where one can get the chair elevator out from the side of the special van, or experiencing the jostling, heat, and noise Bob underwent during their travels. He loved traveling, despite hardships like getting stranded in the middle of the Nevada desert with a blown engine or trying to visit friends in Europe whose only access was a forbidding staircase.

If Bob was admired for his ability as an electromechanical engineer and modeler by all who knew him, he was held in awe for his courage in the face of adversity. He was more than a survivor. With Sandy's strength, love, help, and devotion, he accomplished minor miracles. When the building housing his business burned a few years ago, he rebuilt it and made it even better. When he could no longer hold a drafting pen, he didn't stop designing. He might not have been able to do as much as he wanted to, but he was never satisfied with mediocrity. He excelled through ingenuity and persistence.

Bob's enthusiasm for life was catching, and you never ceased to appreciate his warmth and spirit. A mutual friend once said that Bob had accomplished more from a wheelchair than any three of us. No one who knew him would dispute that, except to say that "three" seemed a bit on the low side.

Sandy intends to keep Peck-Polymers going, which should please the many friends here and abroad that she and Bob made over the years. The familiar orange-boxed kits which introduced

so many modeling and gave them success will continue to be a fitting memorial to him.

Each time a beginning modeler of any age makes a Peck R.O.G., Prairie Bird, One-Night 28 or any of the other tried and true models designed by Bob (or other master modelers whose planes Bob kitted), the result will be a tribute to his vision. He never lost the excitement of youth, and he never lowered his eyes from the skies. We are grateful for his many contributions to modeling and are truly inspired by his example as a model human being.

Postscript: A plaque is being set into the wall of the AMA Museum in Bob's memory. [*History Project editorial note: Reston, Virginia building, not Muncie, Indiana building.*] A Peck Prairie Bird contest with classes for all ages is being sponsored by the Blacksheep Squadron at the 1991 U.S. Free Flight Champs in California, to be held over the Memorial Day weekend.

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