



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of ROBERT (BOB) CLAUSS



Written & Submitted by RC (02/2022); Reformatted & Edited by JS (02/2022)

Robert (Bob) Clauss wrote the following autobiography with his experiences at Sterling Models, and submitted it to the AMA History Project in February 2022.

Robert Clauss Model Builder to Designer at Sterling Models

I was introduced to model building at the age of 8 years by an uncle who was sort of interested in model building. I say sort of because he built only as time permitted due to a heavy work schedule. Even so, he took the time to help me learn to build the stick and tissue models that I cut my teeth on. I moved on through the natural progression of Free Flight, Control Line and eventually Radio Control.

I was working as a draftsman at an electronics company and really didn't like what I was doing. I had taken aeronautics classes as an elective in high school, drafting and design technology at Penn State, and model building 101 with my uncle. So why not contact the model companies about a job designing their kits? I had drawn up and built many of my own designs and felt I could handle the job.

I received an invitation to visit Sterling Models by one of the partners, Edward Manulkin. Sterling was in Philadelphia, and I lived in Allentown, about 50 miles to the north, so off I went. Sterling's current designer had just left for another job, so the timing was quite fortunate. I got the job in 1962 and had my abilities tested by starting a new series of scale stick-and-tissue models, the "A" series. In the smaller, less-expensive kits, Sterling rarely kitted just one model, but a series. This was true with the A series, as they did six models to be manufactured and advertised at the same time.

As I mentioned, Sterling was owned and operated by a partnership of two men, Edward Manulkin and Pete Timchal. Ed was the business end and Pete was the production side.

I soon realized that there was quite a rivalry between existing companies of the time: Top Flite, Carl Goldberg, Midwest, Comet, etc. Even with this rivalry there was also a bond between the owners, with a gentlemen's agreement between them; if one was working on a Corsair none of the others would do so at the same time. Trade shows really showed the friendship and competitiveness of the companies. Any company that needed help at a show got it from the other companies. When the show ended for the day and it was dinner time, the friendship and rivalry continued by many of the attending companies sitting together at one large table, discussing business and picking on each other.

This brotherhood was dramatically displayed at a show in Georgia. A forklift operator unloading shipping crates had accidentally put the forks through one of Sterling's crates. The crate of

course contained display models that were severely damaged, with the show opening in the morning. I received a panic call in Philadelphia to gather all the materials I would need and get to Georgia to repair the models. I worked through the night with the help of members from the other companies and had the display models ready in the morning. There were many more trade shows, and many more models to be designed, built, test flown, and kitted.

Eventually the partnership was dissolved, and Ed bought out Pete's share. The company continued to flourish, and moved from its location at Wister & Belfield Street to the new location at 'G' and Alleghany. This was the company's location when Sterling was a sponsor for the racing airplane #68, "Real Sporty". Sterling did a Radio Control model of the plane as well as a rubber power version. In order to be able to get scale measurements of the plane, the owner, Paul Musso, and his crew partially disassembled the plane and brought it from New Jersey to our display area in Philadelphia. I got the scale measurements, and we produced the two versions. Then we contacted the Toledo Show staff and presented our idea of bringing the real "Real Sporty" to their show. They were agreeable and we had quite a display at that show!

To say I had many memorable experiences at Sterling would be a real understatement, and it was a sad day to hear of Ed's illness and eventual passing. The company continued for a few more years and was then sold by the family. It was sold to a local fellow, who then sold it to Estes, who then sold it to Great Planes, and the company no longer continued.

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