



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of RON WITTMAN

Born May 20, 1939 Started modeling in 1942
AMA #6152



Written and Submitted by RW (01/2006); Also written by AMA staff; Transcribed and Edited by JS (05/2006, 01/2012), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

Ron Wittman submitted the following autobiography in January of 2006.

Modeling History of Ron Wittman

The first model I received was a small rubber band ready-to-fly all-balsa model. I was three years old. My dad wound it up and it flew from the living room into the dining room; I was forever hooked on model airplanes. After that, I loved anything with wings and built many ten-cent models.

We lived near a school where, every weekend, the playgrounds filled with U-Control models. At the age of ten, the first model I built was a *'Lil Mustang*, [an] all-balsa model with a Baby Spitfire engine on it (which I still have). I could not get it to fly, so I designed a built-up model. [That model flew] and many more models followed.

We moved to South Chicago a few years later, near the Free Flight field on Pulaski Avenue. This was a different world! I was befriended by a fellow who was flying a model called a *Cumulus*. Sometimes he gave me a dime to chase it. His name was Carl Goldberg.

After many models, I built a Jasco *Streak* with an OK Cub diesel on it (I still have it). [I] can remember Carl cranking on that engine for 10 to 15 minutes, and when he finally got it running, released the model, which immediately re-kitted itself. There were a lot of great fliers at that field every weekend: Carl Goldberg, Pete and Charlie Sotich, Ken Merker, Coleman, and many others. I learned a lot! I entered my first contest paired with Ken Merker and we won a case of fuel and box of props. I was hooked.

In 1954, we moved to Southern California and I started to fly more U-Control and lots of Free Flight models. In 1955, I flew an indoor microfilm stick model at the Santa Ana blimp hanger, helped by Bill Atwood and Warren Williams. [I] loved indoor models ever since.

The 1950s was a great time for model airplanes and flying fields, of which many were nearby, such as Sepulveda Basin and Rosecrans and Crenshaw. I built many Free Flight models and bought supplies from Modelcraft Hobby Shop (owned by Barney Snyder), which also kitted the *Zero*. I met and started flying *Zeros* with Toshi Matsuda. I also flew payload, rocket, and hand launch gliders. About this time, I started winning some contests in outdoor events, mostly in Gas.

Around 1959, I went to the Wilmington indoor site to fly some microfilm models and saw Lee Hines flying a hand launch glider...amazing! I was fascinated and had to try this event. Lee was

a major contributor to my learning how to design and fly hand launch gliders, which led to a Category I Indoor Hand Launch Glider (IHLG) record.

During this same period, I started flying with Jim Scarborough, Ken Happersett and Ron Young. We were intense competitors and went to many contests. In 1960, I went to the National Aeromodeling Championships (Nats) with Jim Scarborough and won IHLG with my *Texette*, Outdoor Hand Launch Glider (OHLG) with my *Thermalette* and the Tulsa Glue Dobbers trophy. I think this was the first time this was done at the Nats.

In 1961, I went to the Nats with Chuck Diller and Al Vela, and again won the Indoor Glider event, [as well as] Rocket Payload (the last time held at the Nats). At this time, I served as an AMA leader member and contest director.

In late 1961, I went into the Air Force, eventually stationed at Hill Air Force Base (AFB) in Utah as a computer programmer. I flew in many contests in Utah with some very nice folks. In 1965, I returned to California and resumed competitive flying, setting a new IHLG record for Category I. In 1967, flying at the California Western Regional Championships, I set a new OHLG record flying my *Tara 18*.

In 1972, I started flying at the U.S. Free Flight Championships, which continued for 27 years. My sons also competed and still hold AMA records. Also in 1972, I began flying IHLG in the Santa Ana blimp hangars. After a few sessions, I felt that I could design a new glider, get into shape, and try for a new high ceiling record. After conversing with fellow modeler Dick Peterson, [we determined] a higher aspect ratio glider was the way to go.

This began the *Supersweep* design series of gliders [with] 19", 20", 22" and 24" versions. It took approximately a year of flying at the record trials every month (working out every day) but ultimately, with the help of Larry Calliau, I ... set a new Category IV IHLG record of 2:58.6 with the *Supersweep 22*, which included a 1:30 flight. The next month I recorded a time of 2:59.8, but because of a paperwork problem, the AMA did not approve the new record.

The record of 2:58.6 still stands today as the AMA national record and recognized world record. This record was set on February 18, 1973, and at the time of this writing, is the oldest AMA indoor record. [I donated this model] to the AMA's National Model Aviation Museum ... along with published articles (including one I wrote with Bob Meuser, published by *American Modeler* in 1974) and additional information. The *Supersweep 22* was voted the 1976 Hand Launch Glider 'Model of the Year' by the National Free Flight Society (NFFS), and the plans and article were published in the 1976 *NFFS Symposium*.

In 1973, I designed the *Easy Riser* Radio Control (RC) glider and convinced Sal Taibi ("Competition Models") to kit the model, which was very successful. I still compete occasionally in RC glider with my *Shaker* design. Most recently, while flying RC gliders, I observed [electric model airplanes] flown by fellow modeler Steve Stever and decided to start designing and flying some of these models. They are also very challenging and a lot of fun, especially 3-D and Scale.

I still compete in Free Flight, and probably because of my childhood experiences, currently enjoy flying mostly in Old Time and Nostalgia events.

Ron Wittman
12-29-2005

The following was printed in the January 2012 issue of Model Aviation by AMA staff. Ron was inducted into the AMA Hall of Fame in 2011.

Ron Wittman

As a competitor for 57 years, Ron Wittman has participated in more than 300 contests and his wins are too numerous to list. He has earned several firsts in national competitions including Indoor Hand-Launched Glider (1960), rocket-powered PAA-Load (1961), and gas-powered PAA Load (1997).

Ron attributes his modeling skills to his early teachers: Carl Goldberg in the Chicago area and Bill Atwood in the Los Angeles area. Ron passed on the helpful ways he learned from his old heroes and has helped many young men learn modeling and set their own AMA records.

Ron founded his own company, called the J.L. Wittman Co. He manufactures kits of his own design and offers a service refurbishing model airplane engines. He supplies the FF community with hard-to-find specialty items.

All of Ron's national winning airplanes have been his designs. Ron developed his own launch techniques that were used until the time that wingtip launch was developed. Some of his designs include the *Tara 18*, *Supersweet 22*, and *Jet Star*.

Ron's contribution to model aviation is enormous. His most famous two-part article that told the secrets of his design ideas, building techniques, flying methods, and trimming were outlined in *American Modeler* magazine in September and October of 1974. This article was dubbed "the Bible" by all of Ron's fans. His plans and articles have appeared in many US magazines and several foreign magazines.

As a member of the Lost Angeles Thunderbirds, Ron held position of secretary. He was secretary and CD for the Thunderbugs Model Airplane club and a CD for the Pacific Soaring Association, an RC glider club.

Ron is an AMA Leader Member. He also served as a presidential advisor to Howard Johnson when he was AMA president.

In 1973, Ron set an AMA world record that would stand for 36 years in Indoor Hand-Launch Glider with his *Tara 18*. The January 2011 issue of *Model Aviation* tells of Ron's 36-year record in the article "Wittman's Pursuit."

Ron has been helping youngsters learn about model aviation for more than 50 years. He designed a model airplane called *Easy I* for children to learn how to build and fly models. Ron has received many letters from people whom he helped when they were young. He not only helped them, but they became famous in their own right, setting AMA records and writing magazine articles. Ron's two sons have both set AMA Indoor records.

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AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

