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# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of HAROLD (HAL) DEBOLT

**Modeler, Designer, Manufacturer, Author,  
Competitor, Contest Director**



December 22, 1918 - February 10, 2005      Started modeling in 1927  
AMA #1520

Written & Submitted by MMK (1976); Transcribed by NR (02/1997); Edited by SS (2002); Updated by JS (12/2008, 11/2015)

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## Career:

- Competitor in Rubber (indoor & outdoor); Free Flight; Control Line Speed; Stunt; Radio Control Pattern; Pylon Racing; 1960-1973 FAI Radio Control Team
- Writer; articles on modeling since 1944 to present in model magazines such as Craftsman, Air Trails, American Modeler, Radio Control Modeler and Model Airplane News
- Manufacturer of Control Line kits, Radio Control kits, Fuel Tanks (Clunk), Dural Landing Gears and Multi-Servo
- Designer/ Experimenter:
  - Free Flight “Spoilers”
  - Developed, Retractable landing gear for Control Line
  - Developed, Pressure fuel systems for Control Line Speed
  - Developed, Speed Pan for Control Line speed
  - Developed, The Dural landing gear for Radio Control and Control Line
  - Developed, Inverted flying fuel tanks(Clunk)
  - Developed, First electric power servo for Radio Control
  - Developed, Strip Ailerons for Radio Control
  - Developed, First retractable landing gear for Radio Control
- Club Organizer of Geneva Aeronuts, Buffalo Aeronuts, Pawtuxet Navy Base (1st Navy Model Club) and United Pylon Racing Circuit (8 club organization)

## Honors:

- 1954: AMA Eight Ball Member
- 1959: AMA Fellows (25 years of Service)
- 1961: Japanese Government Award
- 1970: National Miniature Pylon Racing Association Award
- 1974: United Pylon Racing Association Award
- 1975: Radio Amateurs of America Award
- 1976: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1980: Vintage Radio Control Society Hall of Fame
- 1980: Howard McEntee Award
- 1997: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
- 2000: Precision Aerobatics Model Pilot Association Hall of Fame

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*The biography that follows was taken from the Hall of Fame application submitted by Marvin M. Kowalewski, Ph.D. It is a complete and detailed history of Hal (Pappy) de Bolt up to 1976 when it was written.*

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## **Preface**

This work represents a brief portion of Harold deBolt's many accomplishments in over 40 years of modeling. His career in this field is interrelated with his psychological and sociological interpretations of life and one finds numerous extensions and almost "religious" beliefs heavily intertwined and obscuring the reality of a tremendous amount of accomplishments.

This researcher humbly begs the Academy Hall of Fame Committee and Harold deBolt for the simplistic and cursory review of a man's life and hopes that the magnitude and presence of the man overshadows the script.

Sincere thanks for help in preparation of this work is extended to Arlene deBolt, Bob Brown, John Grigg, and John Williams. A special thanks is extended to Vice President John Byrne' for encouragement and help in "spreading the message to interested modelers on behalf of Hal deBolt."

*-Respectfully submitted,  
Marvin M. Kowalewski, Ph.D.*

## **Competitor**

Harold deBolt has competed in hundreds of contests. Beginning in 1930, as a young boy, Harold successfully organized the sponsorship of model contests in Geneva, N.Y. in conjunction with local civic groups. He worked with the American Legion program in this town and developed a system to enable sharing of model supplies and later engines which not only enabled Harold to compete, but many other youngsters in that area were able to compete as well.

(It is not difficult to determine if Hal's early psychological bent was to compete to win or to compete to enable better and more modeling. A clue to his unselfish approach lies in the number of personally organized contests, clubs, events, and circuits throughout the years.)

## **Entered Contests**

Harold has entered virtually hundreds of contests to date. Pictures of contest winnings are enclosed and if it were not for the fire in Harold's plant in Williamsville, N.Y., where many other important and valuable trophies were lost, there could be a more complete accounting.

1930-1933: Inter club contests; rubber power models

1932: Rochester Wing Regional Jr. Birdman meets; indoor and outdoor rubber glider

1933: All New York State championships - Free Flight; rubber, power and glider; First and Second place winnings  
 1933: Rochester Wing Jr. Birdman Sikorsky Exhibition Scale Regional Meet; placed fifth  
 1934: National Sikorsky Competition; fifth place  
 1935: Entered First Gas Model Meet held at Lakehurst, N.J.  
 1936: Attended Jr.-Birdman Nationals as one of 17 Contestants in San Antonio, Texas  
 1936: Rochester Wing Jr. Birdman Indoor Regional Championships  
 1938: Won first gas model Free Flight meet held at Rome, N.Y.  
 1938-1945: Entered and placed in all gas model Free Flight meets throughout Western New York  
 1945: Won Philadelphia Record Control Line Flying Circus at Philadelphia while in the Navy  
 1946: Entered and won all Philadelphia Flying Circus Control Line Meets  
 1947: Won all Philadelphia Flying Circus Control Line meets  
 1946, 1947, 1948: Entered and won New York Mirror Meets  
 1947-1950: Won and placed in all Canadian Nationals Control Line Events  
 1952: Won first in Tangerine International/Radio Control events  
 1952-1958: Entered and placed in all Northeast and Midwest Area Contests in Radio Control, Pattern and Racing  
 1958-1970: Entered, competed and developed pylon racing, events in Northeast and Midwest Regional Areas  
 1970: Las Vegas International Pylon Races; Ninth place  
 1947-1973: Entered all consecutive nationals in Control Line speed, Control Line stunt, Radio Control Pattern and Radio Control Racing

### **United States (FAI) Team**

1960: World Radio Control Championship Zurich, Switzerland; Seventh place  
 1973: Air Olympics FAI Pylon Races for Sopwith Trophy Long Island, N.Y.; Fifth place

### **Nationals Event Winner**

1940-50: Won or placed in all Control Line Speed and Stunt events  
 1944: First National Control Line Speed Record  
 1949: National Record Holder All Classes of Control Line Speed  
 1957: National Radio Control Pattern; Second place  
 1959: National Radio Control Pattern; fourth place  
 1964: National Radio Control Pattern; fourth place  
 1967: National Radio Control Pattern; Second place  
 1969: National Formula I and Formula II Racing Championship; Formula I, Third place; Formula II, First place  
 1969: National Formula II Racing Championship NMPRA  
 1970: National Formula II Racing Championship NMPRA  
 1971: National Formula II Racing Championship NMPRA  
 1972: National Formula II Racing Championship NMPRA

1973: National Formula II Racing Championship NMPRA

### **World Records**

1952: deBolt, Wilson Team Control Line Speed Records - (Hydro)

1952: deBolt, Wilson Team Control Line Speed Records - (Hydro)

1952: deBolt, Wilson Team Control Line Speed Records - (Hydro)

1952: deBolt, Wilson Team Control Line Speed Records

1960: FAI Closed Course Radio Control Distance Record

### **National Promotion of Modeling**

1967: ABC Wide World of Sports Pattern Feature.

1968: ABC Wide World of Sports Formula 1 Racing Feature

### **Designer/Experimenter**

Harold deBolt is an outstanding designer of planes. His research and careful analysis along with scores of pages of records and experiments with different designs have enabled many modelers to become instantly successful with the famous deBolt designs.

Harold deBolt has never “designed for a market” even though he is an outstanding manufacturer. His basic intention when producing a design is to first successfully accomplish a modeling task, i.e., set a record or build a better, simple design to enable a certain personal performance in modeling. Evidence of this philosophy is seen in the many championship planes which ultimately are kitted, notwithstanding the many designs which could have been kitted but never quite measured up to the deBolt standard.

### **Published Designs**

Harold has readily shared his modeling designs as found in the many publications. Brief reviews of his published designs are as follows:

1944: Model Craftsman, Speed-Wagon, Control Line Speed

1945: Model Craftsman, “Butch,” Control Line Speed

1945: Model Craftsman, Thunderbolt, Free Flight

1946: Model Craftsman, Air Foiler, Free Flight

1955: Air Trails Magazine, Equalizer Design, Radio Control Model Design

1959: American Modeler, Crusader, Radio Control Model Design

1964: Interceptor, Radio Control Model Design

1964: Model Airplane News, Twin Viscount Model Airplane Design

1966: American Modeler Magazine, Interceptor V, Radio Control Model Design

1967: Model Airplane News, Chief, Radio Control Model Design

1967: RC Modeler, Encore Model Design

1973: American Modeler, Donight Special, Radio Control Racer Design

### Designs Kitted

Below is a list of models that have been kitted by deBolt Model Engineering. Many of these designs would still be available; however, a tragic fire wiped out all drawings, records, and machinery along with inflicting critical injuries to deBolt Senior. Despite the tragic setback and loss of his dad, Harold rebuilt and then moved to the present location. It should be noted that many deBolt's friends and modelers helped in the reconstruction and moving process – a credit to Harold.

The following is a list of kits produced, the date, and the amount distributed.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Kits</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>1946</b>	<i>Bipe</i>	20,000
	<i>Air Foiler</i>	2,000
	<i>DMECO Special</i>	2,500
<b>1947</b>	<i>DMECO Special, Jr.</i>	2,000
	<i>Wildcat</i>	1,500
	<i>Speed Wagon</i>	1,000
<b>1948</b>	<i>Super Bipe</i>	5,000
	<i>Speed Wagon 20</i>	5,000
	<i>Speed Wagon 30</i>	7,000
	<i>Stunt Wagon</i>	8,000
<b>1949</b>	<i>Stunt Wagon 30</i>	6,000
	<i>Infant Wagon</i>	20,000
	<i>Sport Wing</i>	6,000
<b>1950</b>	<i>Speedster</i>	3,000
	<i>Speed Wagon 50</i>	5,000
	<i>All American Trainer</i>	8,000
<b>1951</b>	<i>All American Junior</i>	8,000
	<i>All American Stunt</i>	8,000
	<i>All American Senior</i>	91,000
	<i>A/2 Twin</i>	3,000
<b>1952</b>	<i>Live Wire Trainer</i>	15,000
	<i>Live Wire Senior</i>	1,500
	<i>Live Wire Kitten</i>	5,000
<b>1953</b>	<i>Live Wire Clipper</i>	3,000
<b>1954</b>	<i>Live Wire Cruiser</i>	5,000
	<i>Continental</i>	5,000
<b>1955</b>	<i>Live Wire Champion</i>	25,000

<b>1958</b>	<i>Live Wire Super Club</i>	8,000
	<i>Live Wire Custom</i>	5,000
	<i>Live Wire Rebel</i>	8,000
<b>1959</b>	<i>Live Wire Cosmic Wind</i>	5,000
	<i>All American Combateer</i>	5,000
<b>1960</b>	<i>Live Wire Pursuit</i>	3,000
<b>1961**</b>	<i>Live Wire Encoupe</i>	3,000
	<i>Live Wire Sonic Cruiser</i>	3,000
	<i>Live Wire Yonkers</i>	5,000
	<i>Live Wire Viscount</i>	5,000
<b>1962</b>	<i>Brett Perigee</i>	5000
<b>1963</b>	<i>Live Wire Jerry</i>	15,000
	<i>Live Wire P-Shooter</i>	10,000
<b>1966</b>	<i>Live Wire Acrobat</i>	2,500
<b>1968</b>	<i>Live Wire Cobra</i>	5,000
<b>1971</b>	<i>Live Wire P-51</i>	2,000
<b>1974</b>	<i>Live Wire Junior Champs</i>	3,000
<b>1976</b>	<i>Live Wire Coudron</i>	

[\*\*Editor's note: The *Live Wire Yankee* was also produced in 1961; the amount distributed is unknown.]

#### **Accessories produced are as follows:**

1947: Positive flow tanks  
1948: Dural landing gears  
1952: Clanktanks clunk tanks  
1953: Multi-Servo for RC; 30,000 produced  
1960: Polypropylene Hinges (use of medical material to repair hearts)

#### **Designs used by others to win contests:**

DeBolt designs used in contest wins are so numerous that a list would be difficult to acquire. Of special merit are the designs used by Dick Wilson in 1952 to set four World Speed Records and Harrison Morgan to win many National Radio Control places (deBolt Champ) and countless numbers of Control Line and Radio Control pilots who found the winner's circle.

#### **Experimenter in Aerodynamics, Radio Control and Related**

As an engineer and experimenter, Harold has explored unknown areas and often resulted in contributing many firsts to the modeling public. The following represents a brief review of experiments shared through publication in the national press:

1938-39: Developed first use, of dethermalizer in Free Flight using wing spoiler system  
 1943: Developed retractable landing gear for Control Line speed models  
 1945: Developed and experimented with spring steel hinge to neutralize Control Line surfaces  
 1947: Developed pressure fuel system for Control Line speed models  
 1947: Developed speed pan through use in the speed wagon Control Line speed model  
 1948: Developed circle flight and weather vane stability for Control Line speed models  
 1948: Developed asymmetrical stability for Control Line stunt models  
 1948: Developed dural landing gears for Control Line and Radio Control models  
 1951: Designed first model aircraft especially for Radio Control use in, i.e., all sheet balsa model aircraft  
 1952: Developed clunk type Radio Control fuel tanks  
 1953: Developed use of symmetrical air foils for RC  
 1953: Developed first electro power motor driven servos for Radio Control use  
 1954: Developed commercial two-channel Radio Control system, transmitter, receiver, and servos marketed through Citizenship Radio Corporation  
 1955: Experimented with electric power Control Line models  
 1960: Developed and originated strip ailerons for RC models  
 1960: Developed and originated plastic strip hinges for Radio Control models  
 1964: Developed and perfected first retractable landing gear for Radio Control models

### **Leader**

Harold deBolt's leadership in modeling and in the promotion of the hobby can be described as tireless. He has been described as “visionary” and his modeling career, which spans several decades, enables him to continue to view the future. Many of the present organizations, clubs, and committees he once helped organize still exist today.

The following is just a brief list of leadership activities that have benefited thousands of modelers – past, present and future.

### **Organized Clubs**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Club Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
1936	Geneva Aeronuts	Geneva, New York
1939	Buffalo Aeronuts	Buffalo, New York
1943	Pawtuxet Naval Base (First Navy Model Club)	Pawtuxet, Maryland
1946	Flying Bisons	Buffalo, New York
1969	United Pylon-Racing Circuit (Eight Club Organization to promote racing events)	Western, New York

## **Club Offices**

Harold deBolt served as club president and organizer of the above organizations for many years. In addition, he promoted and organized club programs such as the famous Flying Bison indoor Control Line flying meets at the Buffalo Armory.

## **Officer of the Academy of Model Aeronautics**

Harold deBolt is well recognized for his efforts on behalf of the Academy. His initiation of rules, commentaries, and leadership spans more than 25 years of AMA Service. In 1959 Dr. Walt Good successfully nominated Harold deBolt as an AMA Fellow and lifetime member.

DeBolt's formal service to the AMA includes Control Line Contest Board (1949, 1950); Radio Control Contest Board (1952, 1953, 1954) and AMA Vice President (1956, 1957, 1958 and 1959).

Harold deBolt was instrumental in writing Control Line rules, Radio Control Pattern rules for Class I, II and III and Pylon Racing Rules.

## **International Rules**

Harold deBolt and Ed Shipe set down the original and still utilized FAI Radio Control Pylon Racing Event and Rules.

## **Contest Director**

(“Every contest should have a junior division,” says deBolt.)

Since 1933 Harold deBolt has been involved in organizing local meets and contests. His formal AMA efforts include serving as a contest director for at least three major contests per year in western New York State from 1950 to 1975 – a total of 75 contests in addition to directing the 1953 National Radio Control Event.

DeBolt organized and directed the first Radio Control Conferences ever held, that is the “Buffalo Mid-Winter Radio Control Conference,” which was very successfully held for over 14 years.

Harold organized the Plymouth Aero League Contests and many of these contests were of giant proportion and were held in a Buffalo Stadium.

On the international level, Harold deBolt and John Brodbeck, Sr. organized the Air Force Nationals in Japan in 1971 and put on a giant show for over 15,000 Japanese people.



## **Writer and Contributor**

Recognizing that writing involves hours of time-consuming effort, Harold always seemed to enjoy sharing these extra hours with the modeling public. The following is a list of some of deBolt's published articles and contributions to advancement of every modeler's knowledge.

1948: *Air Trails* - Experiments in Speed Design  
1950: *Air Trails* - 150 Miles per Hour Plus, Control Line Speed  
1951: *Model Airplane News* - Speed Can Be Fun  
1953: *Model Airplane News* - Some Radio Control Experiments  
1954: *Air Trails* - Over and Under Radio Control Modeler  
1955: *Air Trails* - Equalizer - Radio Control Model  
1956: *Air Trails* - Automatic Multi-Control Radio Control Flying  
1961: *Model Airplane News* - Radio Control Design in Ed Lorenz's Column  
1961: *Model Airplane News* - Radio Control Design in Ed Lorenz's Column  
1974: *Model Airplane News* - Forum on United Pylon Racing Circuit

In addition, Harold deBolt was invited to publish in the *Zaic Model Aviation Year Book* in 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960 and 1961. His articles included Radio Control Notes and Radio Control for the periods of 1959 through 1960.

## **Club Newsletters**

Harold wrote several newsletters for the clubs he organized.

The most remembered are the Flying Bison “Beep Box” and the United Pylon Racing Circuit “Pylon Cuttings.”

## **Industry**

### **Manufacturer**

DeBolt Model Engineering Company and Orbit Northwest  
3833 Harlem Road  
Buffalo, New York  
1945 to present (*This was written in 1975*)

## **Supporting Remarks**

DeBolt promotes hobby throughout the world.  
1968: Canadian Demonstrations throughout Canada  
1969: Canadian Demonstration at Nationals  
1971: Tokyo, Japan - flew demonstrations before 20,000 Japanese

1972: Mexico City, Mexico flew demonstrations before 5,000

### **National Promotion of Modeling**

1967: ABC Wide World of Sports Pattern Feature

1968: ABC Wide World of Sports Formula I Racing Feature

### **Regional and Local Promotion of Modeling**

Harold deBolt has rendered valuable service to the development and cause of modeling through public appearances. Beginning in 1930's, Harold's promotional efforts with the American Legion, Kiwanis Club, Optimist Club, New York Schools and various societies has been endless.

It is not unusual for Harold to spend winter weekends away from home lecturing to Amateur Radio Clubs and Modeling groups of all categories. Often these travels are gratis and done with a smile. A brief story is told of Harold and a group of young boys putting on a Control Line flying demonstration in a church! Of course, the little K+B .020 was used on 20-foot lines but the boys enjoyed it and so did the audience. For Harold's sake, I hope the "Big Modeler" Himself was watching too!

**Footnote:** *It should be noted that as extensive as this biography is, it was written at a time when "Pappy" was living in Williamsville, New York and still producing kits back in 1975.*

*When this biography was uncovered from the old AMA records in 1997 (22 years later) "Hal" deBolt was living in Florida and writing a monthly column in Model Airplane News called, "The Golden Age of Radio Control." He has been writing this column now since 1985 (12 years in 1997).*

*He is still active in modeling and writing and is now flying electric powered models. He has from time to time published these designs.*

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*The following biography was published in the January 1977 issue of Model Aviation magazine.*

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Harold deBolt, owner of the former deBolt Model Engineering Company (recently changed to deBolt Radio Control) in Buffalo, New York, is known as "Hal" or, more affectionately, as "Pappy" by his numerous aeromodeling friends throughout the U.S. and Canada. His career spans almost 50 years since he began organizing inter-club contests in Geneva, New York during the twenties. He competed with rubber power until 1938 when he won in Free Flight Gas at a Rome, New York contest. He flew Free Flight until the end of WWII and then began an impressive string of victories in Control Line Speed and Stunt. During his career, he has held four World and all National Control Line Speed records.

Hal's aeromodeling endeavors include Radio Control; he pioneered early Radio Control model aircraft kits. His Trainer and Rebel designs have taught thousands to fly Radio Control and his interest in Radio Control Pattern carried him to many top places in National Competition and earned him a spot on the U.S. team to the World Championships in 1960 where he placed seventh.

Turning to Pylon Racing, Pappy deBolt won many local, regional and national honors in this category. He also held the FAI Closed Course Radio Control Distance Record.

From 1944 to the present, deBolt has published over 13 designs and kitted more than 45 models. He has also produced more than six different accessories for models including the first dural landing gears and electric power-driven Radio Control servos.

Hal organized five model airplane clubs, including the first Navy model club at Pawtuxet Naval Air Base in Maryland. He has directed numerous contests and served on both the AMA Control Line and Radio Control Contest Boards as well as an AMA Vice President. In 1958, he became an AMA Fellow and Life Member. Hal continues today as an active competitor in Radio Control Pylon Racing and as an industry leader.

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