



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of MAXWELL B. BASSETT

July 7, 1914 – April 4, 2005  
AMA #176460 (Life member)



Written by DR (11/1983); Transcribed by NR (11/1999); Edited by SS (2002), updated by JS (10/2007, 03/2012), Reformatted by JS (06/2009)

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## Career:

- September 10, 1932: First to make an official flight with gas power at a U.S. Nationals in Atlantic City, N.J.
- June 27, 1933: First to win a Nationals event with gas power – Roosevelt Field, Long Island, N.Y.
- First to exceed a national record in Other-than-Rubber-Power
- First to win a contest with a gasoline powered model
- Responsible for the separation between rubber models and gas models

## Honors:

- 1981: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1983: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1989: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame

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*This biography was taken from an article written and published in AMA's Model Aviation magazine in the September, October, and November 1983 issues, authored by a Mr. Dave Ritchie.*

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## Part 1

Prior to the early 1930s, gasoline-powered models were practically unknown. Then two young men from Philadelphia changed everything. Bill Brown designed the first practical model airplane engine; Max Bassett showed everyone how to fly with this kind of power. The rest is history.

The opening years of this decade mark a significant, yet almost unnoticed, milestone in the history of model aviation – the Golden Anniversary of “gas power.” That is not to say that no gas models existed before 50 years ago. Indeed, one of the first gasoline-powered models on record – built by a 16-year-old named Ray Arden who much later invented the glow plug – is said to have flown as early as 1907. However, this and the handful of other attempts at gas power by various individuals over the next 25 years somehow failed to spark the imagination of the large majority of model airplane builders. The result was that our hobby grew up virtually tied to rubber power until the early 1930s.

All good things must have a beginning, though. If the vast amount of activity involving today's highly developed, wondrously powerful model airplane engines can be traced back to a single event, that would have to be a gas model contest held some 51 years ago (1983 at time of writing) on May 10, 1932 near what is now the Philadelphia International Airport.

Four hopeful entrants lined up at that windy Saturday afternoon contest with their model planes, powered not by the usual twisted rubber bands, but by real internal combustion engines running

on a mixture of gasoline and oil. One by one, they started their engines and released their models for takeoff. One by one the snarling miniature planes rose from the ground, nosed into the air . . . and crashed. When the dust settled and everyone had picked up all the pieces, the winner was announced. Maxwell B. Bassett, a lanky, tousle-headed youth of 16, had achieved the best flight of the day – lasting, all of nine seconds. Close behind, with an eight second flight was a 20-year-old named William L. Brown, whom the local newspapers credited with having designed those remarkable little gas engines.

From that humble beginning, virtually unnoticed outside of Philadelphia, sprang a worldwide revolution in aircraft modeling. In little more than a year the names of Bill Brown and (especially) Max Bassett would become synonymous with the incredibly popular new phenomenon of gas models.

What follows is the story of how these two young Philadelphians sparked one of the most sweeping changes ever in model aviation history . . . and how one of them – Max Bassett – went on to become the most successful modeler of his time and perhaps of all time.

### **Two boys with a dream**

It was no accident that Max Bassett and Bill Brown placed first and second in model aviation's first true gas power contest. A considerable amount of development, to say nothing of friendship, preceded their efforts that day. Quite probably, neither would have achieved alone what the two of them did together.

Since grade school days, Bill Brown and “Buddy” Bassett (as he was known to close friends) had been neighborhood chums in Philadelphia's Oak Lane section. As Bassett recalls, one of their earliest encounters involved a gasoline engine.

When he was about 10 or 11 years old, Bassett tried to build a sort-of go-kart or wagon powered by a two-cycle gasoline engine salvaged from a Maytag washing machine. He connected the motor directly to the wagon's drive wheels by it V-belt and since there was no proper clutch, he had quite a bit of trouble getting the cart to operate as intended.

Brown, who enjoyed tinkering with mechanical things, saw the problem and offered to help. Together, the boys devised a sprocket drive that allowed the engine to be disconnected from the rear wheels for starting and stopping.

It was right about this time that Charles Lindbergh made his historic transatlantic flight from New York to Paris. In its wake, the whole country went “aviation crazy.” Model airplane clubs sprang up in cities all over the country, and the youth of America joined them in droves. By 1929, a group of small clubs in the Philadelphia area had consolidated under the banner of the Philadelphia Model Aeroplane Association (PMAA). The PMAA was sponsored jointly by the city's Playgrounds Association, the Pennsylvania Aero Club, and the Philadelphia Bulletin, which covered news of the club's events in its Saturday edition.

Both Brown and Bassett were among the many Philadelphia youngsters then building and flying rubber powered models. By the time the two joined the PMAA Bassett was already displaying a

flair for competition having recorded a number of wins in citywide meets – both indoor and outdoor.

Bassett was dissatisfied with the short flights afforded by rubber power. At first, he tried to remedy this by building a piggyback model – a single pusher canard type model superimposed on a twin pusher motor frame. As long as the twin-pusher motors were tightly wound, their tension held the whole assembly together. But when the twin props unwound and their rubber motor tension relaxed, the lower framework would drop away allowing the single prop to take over and extend the model's flight.

Bassett says the idea was a success that won several contests until the officials altered the rules to bar anything dropping off the models in flight. That was the first time that, but by no means the last, Bassett models would bring about a change in contest rules. The inevitable result of Bassett's quest for longer flights and Brown's love of mechanical experimentation was that the two Oak Lane boys soon began to discuss the possibilities of a model plane powered by a gasoline engine.

Says Bassett: "Since there was no such engine available, we decided we'd have to build one ourselves."

### **Bill Brown's First Engine**

In September of 1930, they began work on the idea. Dividing their efforts, Brown concentrated on producing the engine in his father's home workshop, which was equipped with a small lathe and a few other machine tools while Bassett began to design and build the airframe.

Numerous obstacles stood in the way of achieving an engine that would simply run – let alone be light and powerful enough to fly a model. Brown made a dozen piston/cylinder assemblies before coming up with one that would produce decent compression. The spark plug and ignition coil were particularly difficult problems, recalls Bassett: "Bill's first operable spark plug was made out of a nail, a nut and a stack of mica washers for the insulator. After a few runs it would become soaked with oil, and he'd have to make another."

The boys needed a lightweight induction type coil to cause the spark to jump across the points of those crude early plugs. They made more than 20 coils by hand before getting one that worked. Each coil required thousands of turns of fine enameled wire interleaved with wax paper over an iron core.

After months of experimentation, the little engine was ready at last for mounting and test running in Bassett's plane. With an 11/16-in. bore and 1/4in. stroke, it displaced only .278 cubic inches but weighed a hefty 14 ounces complete with coil, condenser, fuel tank, batteries and a 9 1/2-in. prop that Bassett had carved.

The engine was balky and hard to start. Though getting such a tiny engine to run at all seemed a miraculous achievement, its performance was not exactly spectacular. With a flywheel, it would turn up about 6.500 rpm – less than half that was possible with a prop.

The boys had an interesting method of measuring rpm. “We'd start the engine,” said Bassett, “and take it into the house – right into the living room next to the piano. Then we would start hitting piano keys until we found one that matched the pitch of the engine. From there it was a simple calculation to convert the frequency of the piano note to engine rpm.”

In the spring of 1931, Victor R. Fritz, an industrial arts teacher at Olney High School, who was also field director of the PMAA, heard of the boys' experiments, and asked to see their model. Fritz wrote most of the newspaper articles on PMAA activities. On Memorial Day of 1931, the article he wrote appeared in the Philadelphia Bulletin, complete with a photo of Brown with Bassett's airplane and construction plans for the Midget engine.

According to Bassett, Fritz's article was perhaps a bit “premature.” Indeed, while it stated that the little engine “amazed” spectators at its first public demonstration, it contains no actual reference to the model's flight. Compared to the way later articles described Brown and Bassett's activities, it is probably fair to conclude that this was only a running demonstration of the engine.

The newspaper mentioned, however, that Brown would attempt to fly an “improved” version of the engine a week later. Among those who read the story was a middle-aged man named Walter Hurleman who ran a machine shop not far from the boys' neighborhood. Hurleman had always been interested in small engines. As a younger man, he had gained some experiences in “hopping up” outboard motors for racing. Curious to see so tiny an engine as Brown's in operation, he drove out to the PMAA's flying field the next Saturday with his son, Walter, Jr.

According to Walter Hurleman, Jr., the demonstration he and his father witnessed consisted of “a handful of people who stood around while Brown and Bassett tried to start their engine.”

As Hurleman remembers, the engine looked like “an attempt to miniaturize a washing machine motor.”

“They worked on it for quite a while,” he said, “but never got it running long enough to fly the plane. It would only pop and pop.” (The only Brown engine that looks anything like a washing machine motor was the first Midget engine. Both it and the Maytag engine Brown and Bassett tinkered with several years earlier had under-slung gas tanks with the carburetor drawing right through the tank. Brown said that other engines also influenced the design of his Midget, including an outboard his father had bought for summer use at the Jersey shore and a type of bicycle motor both he and Bassett used as youngsters.)

### **The Brown Junior Engine**

Meanwhile, Bill Brown continued to work on his engine idea from the time Victor Fritz's first article appeared in the spring of 1931. The Midget motor's reliability improved greatly when he replaced the original mica insulators in his spark plugs with real ceramic insulators obtained from the Isolantite Company, a manufacturer of full-size spark plug insulators and other ceramic products in northern New Jersey. Even then, the motor's output was not strong enough to lift Bassett's first gas model more than a few feet off the ground.

A second engine design of slightly larger displacement was attempted – this time with the help of

Brown's father, William L., Sr., who was an engineer by profession and an accomplished craftsman in his own right. Unfortunately, none of several prototypes resulting from this father/son collaboration were successful and, by late summer of 1931, Bill Brown (still a high school senior) had roughed-out on paper the configuration of yet a third engine.

This new design did away with the performance-limiting crankcase poppet valve induction of the original Midget engine. Instead, it employed the lighter, simpler, more efficient “four-port” system in which admission of fresh gas/air mixture was controlled by the passage of the piston skirt over intake ports drilled in the rear of the cylinder. With a 7/8-in bore and 1-in. stroke, it displaced .60 cubic in., establishing a standard that survives to this day. With a good ignition hookup, fresh batteries, and properly mixed fuel, it started and ran with much greater reliability and power than the original Midget ever displayed – turning a 14-in. prop at 4,000-5,000 rpm while generating up to three pounds of thrust.

Brown laboriously hand built about eight or 10 of these engines, four of which appeared at the first PMAA gas model contest on May 10, 1932.

At about this time, Walter Hurleman contacted the Browns with an offer. Hurleman wanted young Bill Brown, who had graduated from Frankford High School in February of 1932, to work in his machine shop during the coming summer. Instead of pay (which he could ill afford in those dark days of the Great Depression), Hurleman offered Brown the facilities of his shop in which to continue developing his engine idea.

Brown must have jumped at the chance. He said, “Walter Hurleman was a highly skilled machinist and tool and die maker. His was the first commercial shop I ever worked in and I was eager to learn anything I could from the old master. In Hurleman's shop, there were available machines and processes far beyond the scope of my father's home workshop. They were put to good use in refining the design of the engine and putting it into a higher level of production.”

Evidently production was precisely what Hurleman had in mind because almost immediately he began to develop sophisticated tooling of his own to mass-produce the engine. Along the way, he added some refinements to the basic design.

All of Bill Brown's hand-built engines had employed pistons with heavy rings that leaked compression to some degree and exacted a friction penalty as they worked up and down in the cylinder. These engines also used a 1/16-in.-dia. “shear pin” to secure the propeller drive washer to the crankshaft. According to Brown, it was Walter Hurleman who originated the ring-less hard steel “lapped” piston, which produced superior compression and ran so much better than earlier engines that it became standard practice for model engine construction for a long time afterwards. This refinement and a more positive propeller hub hex drive were incorporated into the new Brown Jr. engines which the Hurleman shop began turning out as early as midsummer of 1932. The workmanship on these Hurleman-built engines was “excellent,” according to Brown, who adds that their running “pleased us all very much at the time.” They were rated, conservatively at 1/5 hp – a five-fold increase over Brown's original Midget.

By this time, development of the Brown Jr. engine was essentially complete. Further changes, though there were many over the years, were all aimed at easing production, not at increasing

power or performance. Development of the gas-powered model, which had been left to Maxwell Bassett, was just beginning.

### **Bassett's First Gassies**

Fortunately, for history Bassett numbered his gas models in a way that aids their identification. His first, built for Brown's .278 cu. in. Midget and pictured in Victor Fritz's May 1931 newspaper article, was number B-100. This was followed by four others numbered B-101 through B-104, which served as test beds for the engine improvements Brown was making during the summer of 1931. No photos of them have survived, but they were undoubtedly all of "stick" design for ease of repair and modification-and with wingspans of around four feet.

"What we were really trying to do," explained Bassett, "was to develop and test a gas model in secret so that when we were ready we could go to the meets and 'clean up' against the competition, which was all rubber-powered at that time."

Once they had the Midget engine running more or less reliably in the plane, they began to test-fly the craft right in front of Bassett's house.

"The very first takeoffs were ROGs [Rise-off-Ground models] right off of 11th Street," said Bassett. "The plane would keep turning left and would end up in the bushes."

After a few such attempts, they moved their testing to a nearby vacant lot.

"Because of the tall weeds," said Bassett, "I had to hand-launch the models. This gave us more time to figure out what was going wrong. The main problem with the first flights was that they always ended up in a left-hand spiral dive. In an attempt to correct this instability, I kept enlarging the tail surfaces and increasing the wing dihedral, but we still had the spiral dive to the left."

By the time Bassett built his first contest-winning gas job, B-105, the tail had become truly outsized, as can be seen in one of the pictures. But the stability problem persisted. Accounts of its May 10, 1932 flight describe a large loop 50 feet into the air, ending in a crash that might have been avoided had the plane gained only a few feet more altitude.

Undaunted, Bassett fielded another model, B-106, in competition a month later. On June 11, at the second meet of the PMAA's 1932 Outdoor season, this ship took off from Model Farms, the club's South Philadelphia flying field. For two minutes and 42 1/5 seconds, it gyrated wildly through the air toward the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Its looping, swooping flight was the first by a gas model to exceed the then current record of a minute and a half other than rubber power, set a year earlier by a Louisville, Ken. Boy's compressed-air-powered model. Bassett retrieved the plane nearly a half-mile from its launch point. Afterward the Bulletin quoted Bill Brown exclaiming, "That flight certainly was worth the two years' work put into that motor."

Not one to rest on his laurels, Bassett immediately set to work on two more models. Number B-107 was another stick job, but B-108, his ninth gas model, was something new – a cabin design. Bassett gave this airplane a name as well as a number. He called it the Fleetwing.

## On to Atlantic City

The 1932 Nationals (Nats) Contest was set for Atlantic City, New Jersey in September. Doubtless, the two boys had their sights on a major win. In testing the new airplanes, Bassett found the cabin job powered with a Hurleman-built engine a better flier than the stick model. He said, "I thought I was making the Fleetwing more stable by giving it a low CG. Actually I learned much later that I was really giving the plane more side area, which countered the effect of what had become a pretty oversize tail."

Competition for the International Wakefield Cup was to be the highlight of the Atlantic City meet. The Wakefield rules stated that models had to be of fuselage (as opposed to stick) design, but they were not specific as to the type of power. Therefore, Bassett entered his gas-powered cabin job in the Wakefield event.

As it turned out, the competition was tougher than expected. According to running accounts of the two-day meet, Gordon Light of Lebanon, Pennsylvania put in a truly phenomenal rubber-powered flight of 25 minutes and 53 seconds on the first day. His flight covered a distance of eight miles from the meet site at Atlantic City's Bader Airport. This must have been disallowed for some reason, though because the final published results credited him with only 7 minutes and 57 <sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> seconds – good enough, nonetheless, to win the Wakefield trophy. (Later, even this win was declared invalid because of a involving the fact that the contest had been postponed from an earlier date.)

Bassett's best official flight lasted only 2 minutes and 55 seconds, netting him fourth place in the competition. But the buzz of the Brown gas engine understandably created quite a stir. Charles Hampson Grant, editor of the Universal Model Airplane News magazine, was especially impressed and he gave Bassett and his gas model exceptional coverage in his October 1932 Nats write-up. Apparently, what impressed Grant was not so much the model's official time, but what it might have been had the contest lasted only a few minutes longer.

Dissatisfied with his ship's performance in earlier rounds, Bassett decided to give it one last try on the second day of the meet. Alas, it was just minutes after the Wakefield competition officially closed! This time the Fleetwing climbed skyward, almost disappearing from view. Bassett gave chase, riding in an Atlantic City motorcycle policeman's sidecar along with a PMAA adult sponsor, Jesse Bieberinan who held the stopwatch. After 13 minutes and 5 seconds in the air, the model landed in a marshy meadow some four miles from the airport.

Bassett and Bieberinan were not the only ones in hot pursuit of the model. Kern Dodge, Philadelphia's director of public safety and a prominent member of the Pennsylvania Aero Club, took off after the Fleetwing in his Challenger biplane. Later, Dodge personally congratulated Bassett on the model's performance estimating that it had reached an altitude of nearly 3,000 feet.

Even after such a spectacular flight, most of Bassett's fellow contestants regarded the gas model as little more than a curiosity. Bassett knew better, and he confidently predicted that gas models would soon eclipse rubber power.

The resulting Nats publicity brought Bill Brown numerous requests for copies of his engine. The Hurleman shop, which was producing them in limited quantity, sold about 40 or 50 Brown Jr. engines over the next year.

Meanwhile, requests for plans of the Fleetwing came from as far away as Germany. Bassett's friend and fellow PMAA member Paul Karnow drew up an accurate set of plans for the ship which were published by the Philadelphia Bulletin in April of 1933, along with a construction article authored by Bassett, himself.

### ***Miss Philadelphia at the World's Fair***

For Max Bassett those early days of gas power must have been filled with almost constant model building. The stability problems he sought to correct were still not wholly solved by the Fleetwing design. Because his models were relatively small, they were quite fast under power and not exactly “floaters” in the glide. Nearly every flight ended in a crack-up.

Even as he was preparing for the Atlantic City Nats, Bassett had two more models in some stage of completion. Of model B-109, which he named Sky Devil, only one photo exists; it shows the same general layout as his earlier stick models with their large tail feathers and short fuselages. Its one major difference was an extra-high parasol wing mount, evidently an attempt at a “pendulum” stabilizing effect. No flight history exists, but undoubtedly, Bassett gained some additional experience with this ship.

B-110, the next model off Bassett's workbench, was another cabin job. Essentially, it was similar to his successful Fleetwing design, embodying a longer fuselage of somewhat different profile aft of the wing. At 6-ft. span, the evenly tapered wing was larger than that of any of his previous planes, and it had a pronounced dihedral like that of model B-107.

Bassett gained considerable notoriety from his Atlantic City flights, as other newspapers picked up the Bulletin's stories about the Philadelphia boy who flew gasoline-powered model airplanes. Just as he was finishing his latest cabin model, he received in the mail a totally unanticipated invitation. Some officials from the upcoming 1933 Chicago World's Fair wanted to display one of his remarkable gas models at one of the fair's exhibits.

Since B-110 was the most realistic looking plane he had yet produced, it was a natural for such a display. Bassett took extra care finishing it, giving it a fancy paint job and a more scale-like landing gear than his usual wooden-strut type, which was better suited for actual flying.

Bassett says it was publicity-minded Victor Fritz who suggested naming the craft *Miss Philadelphia*. Evidently, he hoped the name would bring attention not only to the city which AMA founder H.W. (John) Alden would later call “the world's most active in model airplane matters,” but to the PMAA as well.

Bassett flew the new model only a time or two before shipping it off to Chicago. He would not fly it in competition until the following year. But *Miss Philadelphia* had already set two precedents that would become routine with Bassett. It was the first of several of his models to go



on public display. It was also the first of a whole succession of tremendously successful designs to bear his hometown's name.

### **The Last “Stick” Model**

With *Miss Philadelphia* temporarily out of action, Bassett needed another ship to try to better his earlier flight times. He decided to give the stick model concept another try. As it turned out, number B-111, or *Miss Philadelphia II* as he named it, was his last stick job. Generally proportioned about the same as *Miss Philly I*, it performed markedly better than the earlier stick models. By now, Bassett had found the secret to success with gas power. By building his models larger than before, he was able to slow them down and add to their gliding capability. He also found that longer fuselages contributed much to flight stability.

By late fall of 1932, Bassett estimated he had made as many as 300 gas-powered flights. Most of his test flying was now conducted at Wings Field, an airport north of the city. Though his best official record was the 2 minutes and 55 seconds scored at Atlantic City, he was achieving flights as long as 15 minutes at Wings under favorable conditions.

At this time, Max Bassett was not the only gas modeler in Philadelphia – just the most successful. His closest competitor at the PMAA's, first gas model contest had been Bill Brown. But Brown was nearing the age of 21, after which he would be barred from PMAA competition (no open class existed in those days) for this reason, and also because he was entering the College of Engineering at Penn State, Brown never again entered a gas model contest. Brown said, “I had more than enough work just taking care of the engines.”

PMAA members Edward Henne and Franklin Reed were Bassett's other gas power rivals in 1932, but in competition his models always managed to stay aloft just a few seconds longer than theirs and they soon dropped out of the picture.

Pushing the season a bit, Victor Fritz scheduled the first PMAA gas contest of 1933 for Saturday, March 11, to give Bassett and other modelers an early chance at raising his 2 minutes and 42.6 seconds PMAA record set at a previous June. The weather turned out to be sub-freezing and blustery. Nevertheless, Max Bassett and his father drove out to the meet site at Casper and Cottman Avenues with *Miss Philly II* in the back seat of their car.

Other Brown Jr.-powered entries in the meet were those of Frank Reed and Walter Hurleman, Jr., who showed up with a rather complicated pendulum-controlled model he and his father built.

After four attempts, Bassett managed to get his ship trimmed for sustained flight. On its fifth launch, *Miss Philly II* sailed away to the cheers of spectators circling to an estimated altitude of 700 feet. The model blew east about three-quarters of a mile crossing Roosevelt Boulevard a hundred feet over the traffic below. From a vantage point atop a hill west of the boulevard, Bassett and Fritz clocked its new record time at 4 minutes and 37  $\frac{3}{5}$  seconds as it landed in a driveway on the other side. Returning to the contest with the model tucked under his arm, Bassett was applauded by the onlookers including Hurleman and Reed, neither of whom obtained successful flights that day.

## Total triumph at last

During the winter, Bassett had completed yet another new cabin model. This one he designated B-113. Continuing the tradition begun by Victor Fritz, he called it *Miss Philadelphia III*. The new plane was a further evolution of the original cabin design (which resembled the Curtiss Robin). It had an even longer fuselage, double-tapered aft of the wing and fully enclosed engine with a more streamlined hood or cowl (not even the spark plug protruded as it had on *Miss Philly I*)

The six-foot wing of *Miss Philly III* was a new departure for Bassett, being his first with polyhedral or double dihedral, as he called it. The rudder had a straight leading edge and trailing edges tapered to a rounded tip.

Bassett left an apparent gap in his numbering system between *Miss Philly II* (B-111) and *Miss Philly III* (B-113). As flown on March 11, 1933, *Miss Philly II* had a single dihedral tapered wing and a rather rounded rudder, as shown in one of the pictures. Later pictures of this model show a rudder more like *Miss Philly* and some show a polyhedral wing as well. No evidence exists that Bassett ever built a separate model bearing number B-112. Evidently he considered the polyhedral version of *Miss Philly II* enough of a change to warrant reserving that number from any other design.

At any rate, by the time of the 1933 Nats, Bassett was prepared with two well-tested and trimmed gas models. Like the previous year's Nats, the competition was a two-day affair. All outdoor events were scheduled to take place at Roosevelt Field, Long Island on Tuesday June 27, with indoor events to follow the next day at the 258th Field Artillery Armory in the Bronx.

Fog and drizzle greeted the bulk of the 165 registered contestants as they arrived at the airport made famous only six years before by Charles Lindbergh. By 11 a.m., the sky cleared and the meet got underway.

In contrast to the multifaceted weeklong competitions of our day, the 1933 Nats presented contestants with only three outdoor events. The Mulvihill Trophy was for Hand-Launched Stick models. The William B. Stout Trophy, named for the designer of the Ford Trimotor transport, was for R.O.G. Cabin (or "fuselage" models, as they were called then). In addition, a third trophy was being offered for the first time in honor of the Bureau of Aeronautics chief, Rear Admiral William A. Moffett, who had perished in the crash of the dirigible Akron, Ohio only months earlier.

So as not to interfere with the flurry of rubber-powered stick-and-tissue twin pushers and light fuselage "tractor" models circling silently above the main competition area, Bassett and Bill Brown (present in his usual "mechanic" capacity) took the gas powered *Miss Phillys* some distance down the main runway to prepare them for flight.

Three times that afternoon Bassett poured a measured ounce of fuel into his models' gas tanks. Three times he set his ignition and flipped the prop. Three times the buzzing *Miss Phillys* took off into the light southeast breeze climbing in steady spirals to play hide-and-seek among the clouds. The display was spellbinding to all except Bassett who immediately began his now-

familiar race to keep his craft in sight.

By the close of the afternoon, the two Philadelphia youths knew they had finally accomplished their goal of three years before; *Miss Philadelphia II* had won the Mulvihill event with a time of 14 minutes and 55 seconds. Her sister ship, *Miss Philly III* took both the Stout and Moffett Trophies with times of 22 minutes and 22-1/2 second and 28 minutes and 18 seconds respectively – a clean sweep!!

The Mulvihill and Moffett flights scored new world records. In addition, Bassett was presented with a new perpetual trophy offered by Texaco for the longest gasoline-engine powered flight of the National Meet.

Bassett's models weren't the only gas jobs entered in the 1933 Nats. Only the day before the contest, Brooklyn's Joe Kovel was putting the last touches on his entry, the *KG-1* designed by Charlie Grant because of inspiration provided by Bassett's gas powered exploits at the previous year's Nats. John Romanowsky of Jersey City, N.J. is also reported to have entered a gas model in the meet. Both, however, failed to make official flights and, aside from Bassett's marks, the rest of the outdoor times recorded were by "elastically-driven" models, as one reporter termed them.

Bassett's remarkable wins brought him considerable fame. After the meet, his *Miss Philly III* was put on display in a downtown Philadelphia store window along with his Nats trophies. Stories of his modeling achievements appeared not only in *Model Airplane News*, but also in *American Boy* and *Youth World Magazine* as well as the *New York Times* and all Philadelphia papers.

It also caused considerable commotion at the National Aeronautic Association (NAA), which was then the sanctioning, body for model competitions well as full-scale events. In its coverage of the event, the NAA's *National Aeronautic Magazine* editorialized: "Because it was gasoline powered, Bassett's ship was far and away ahead of its competitors . . . It was evident from the results that gasoline powered models must be placed in a separate category from rubber-powered models. The latter do not have a fair chance when entered against gasoline-powered planes."

Shortly thereafter, the NAA Contest Committee made sure that rubber and gas power would never again compete in the same events.

Philadelphia's 18-year-old model airplane champion seemed not to notice. Absorbed in exploring the limits of gas model endurance, Bassett began construction of yet another *Miss Philadelphia*.

## **Part 2**

### **Maxwell Bassett -- First Modeling Champion**

In late summer of 1933, Maxwell Bassett could have quit building model airplanes entirely and still been assured of a prominent place in model aviation history. Using gasoline engines designed by his friend, Bill Brown, he was the first to set an official record with a gas-powered model in the NAA's "other than rubber power" class (2:42.6-June 11, 1932). He was also the first to record an official gas-powered flight at a U.S. Nationals (2:55-September 1932, at Atlantic

City, New Jersey). Less than a year later, he astonished the whole modeling world by winning all the outdoor events at the 1933 New York Nationals and setting two records in the process. As a direct result of his 1933 Nats performance, the NAA established new rules to separate gas-powered models into their own competition category.

Quitting was the farthest thing from Bassett's mind. Fresh from his 1933 Nationals sweep, he began to draw plans for still another new gas model (altogether, he had built 13 gas jobs up to this time). Ship number B-114 (*Miss Philadelphia IV*) resembled his Nats-winning *Miss Philly III* quite closely in most respects. Though its rudder was more rounded, its fuselage was nearly identical to the Moffett Trophy winner's. Unlike its predecessor, however, it originally mounted a V-dihedral wing of 7-ft. span, and it had a neat pair of detachable wheel pants that were intended for display only. The biggest difference was inside the cabin where Bassett installed a 15-oz. auxiliary gas tank to augment the 21/2-oz. tank that came as standard with the Brown Jr engine.

Bassett at first envisioned flying the model from some flatland area – the prairie country of the Midwest, perhaps – where it could be conveniently tracked cross-country by automobile. But Victor Fritz, fearful that the endurance record for gas models might leave the Philadelphia area if an attempt were not made soon, thought it would be better to launch the model from a local airport and follow it wherever it might go in a full-size airplane.

Fritz made arrangements with the operator of the Camden (New Jersey) Central Airport. It was hoped that a record trial could be made before Christmas of 1933. Harsh winter weather forced at least a half-dozen postponements, though, and it was late in the following spring before an attempt at all-out endurance could be made.

Meanwhile on May 19, 1934, the PMAA sent a large contingent of modelers to the Eastern States Outdoor Championships at Newark, New Jersey. Bassett, of course, was among them. His entry in the new NAA gas model category was the original *Miss Philadelphia*, recently returned from the World's Fair altogether untried in competition.

The model sported a new polyhedral wing and a prop-saving wooden-strut landing gear. A new Model B Brown Jr. engine provided the power. Unlike the earlier A-model engines Bassett had used, this one was manufactured by Junior Motors Corporation which Bill Brown, his father and a financial backer named Edward Roberts had formed after a parting of ways late with Walter Hurleman in 1933. In contrast to the low volume capability of the Hurleman shop, Junior Motors would mass-produce more than 50,000 engines before World War II. Roberts would also become the third president of the not-yet-formed Academy of Model Aeronautics, but all that lay ahead.

The Newark meet was still predominantly a rubber-power contest, but the gas bug was catching on. Bassett encountered serious competition from a number of other gas modelers, including his 1933 Nats rival Joe Kovel, plus Alfred Huber, Martin Faynor and others from the Newark area.

Early on in the meet, Kovel got his KG- I off to a stalling 4-minute and 35 second flight (which might have lasted longer had the model been properly trimmed). The more experienced Bassett easily bettered this mark by launching his *Miss Philly* into a thermal, which carried it out-of-sight in 6 minutes and 7-1/5 seconds, winning the event despite the new NAA gas rules, which limited

*Miss Philly's* fuel supply to 2 oz. Searching the neighborhood over which it was last seen, Bassett and his father found the slightly damaged model in the possession of a youngster whom they paid the princely reward of two dollars for its return.

On May 28, nine days after his Newark win, Bassett readied the new *Miss Philadelphia IV* for its oft-postponed endurance attempt from Camden Airport. Among the small group of onlookers was pioneer air transport operator C. Townsend Ludington (founder of what is now Eastern Airlines) as well as Bassett's parents, a handful of friends from the PMAA and, of course, Bill Brown. Nearby, Victor Fritz and charter pilot Jack Byrne prepared to follow the model in Byrne's open cockpit Fairchild Parasol.

Two attempts had been made the previous day, the first ending in the dreaded spiral dive because of a trim error; the second curtailed after a minute or so by engine failure. This time, however, everything clicked. Bassett, with Bill Brown holding, started his engine and adjusted the spark and mixture until he was satisfied with its exhaust note. Then, hefting the plane to shoulder height, he sprinted a few steps and heaved it into the wind. Climbing in slow, steady circles, *Miss Philly IV* was off in the blue with 17 oz. of gas aboard.

Byrne and Fritz took off after the miniature plane, keeping their Fairchild above it as it circled away in a southwesterly direction. With Fritz filming its progress with a 16mm movie camera, they tracked the steadily climbing model from Camden to Gloucester, New Jersey, across the Delaware River to South Philadelphia and beyond. Over Chester, Pennsylvania, a wind change blew the ship eastward back across the river to Gibbstown, New Jersey, where it changed direction again, driving the constantly circling *Miss Philly IV* south over Salem, New Jersey, then westward once more across Delaware Bay.

The model's engine ran out of gas at 8,000 feet altitude shortly after reaching the Delaware (state) side. "All we had to do now," said Byrne later, "was watching the ship glide lazily in circle after circle. I would never have believed it if I hadn't seen it myself. That little plane glided 10 miles!"

Two hours, 35 minutes and  $39\frac{1}{5}$  seconds after its launch, Victor Fritz punched his stopwatch as *Miss Philadelphia IV* nosed over in a cow pasture near Armstrong's Corner in Delaware, just south of Middletown and four miles from the Maryland state line. Byrne landed in an adjoining field and both he and Fritz clambered out of the Fairchild to retrieve the model. *Miss Philly IV* had traversed a straight-line distance of 54 miles from its launch point, but Fritz estimated (optimistically, as usual) that it had actually covered 180 miles due to its circling flight path.

After refueling at a nearby airport, Byrne and Fritz headed back to Camden where they touched down just before dark with the model poking out of the Fairchild's front cockpit. Bassett, who had waited patiently with a group of friends in front of Byrne's hangar, recalled, "That was the longest four hours I'd ever spent in my life."

The Philadelphia Bulletin hailed the unprecedented feat as a new endurance record. The PMAA lauded both Bassett and Brown with specially created Achievement Awards "in recognition of their advancement of miniature aircraft science." Sounding a note that reverberates to this day, PMAA director Charles H. English declared: "These boys . . . have shown that model planes

cannot be classed as mere playthings.”

Praise came from prestigious sources outside Philadelphia, too. Reginald Cleveland, the New York Time's aviation editor, noted the accomplishment in his by-lined column. Popular Science and Reader's Digest brought the story to barbershop readers all over the U.S. In its write-up, Time Magazine compared 19-year-old Max Bassett to then-current aviation heroes, Frank Hawks and Roscoe Turner.

Ironically, though, the NAA refused to recognize the flight. According to its new 1934 rules (which Bassett had precipitated by his 1933 Nats sweep and under which he had flown at Newark), gas models were allotted 1/4 oz. of fuel per pound of airplane weight, up to a maximum of 13/s oz. liquid. *Miss Philly IV's* 17 oz. fuel load far exceeded that and so the 2-1/2 hour flight never officially made the record books.

Not getting the record really didn't matter. By then Maxwell Bassett was indisputably the nation's foremost gas model builder. Youngsters (and not-so-youngsters) all over the country hungered to emulate him. Junior Motors Corp., deluged with orders, would produce about 1,000 Brown Jr. engines in its first year or so of operation. The gas model boom was on.

### **The Akron Nats**

As mentioned earlier, *Miss Philly IV* was originally designed with a 7-ft. V-dihedral wing. For the actual 2-1/2-hour flight, however, Bassett substituted a polyhedral wing of 6-feet, 1-in. span, similar to that of *Miss Philly III*. Sometime before the flight, Paul Kamow had made an accurate plan of the ship in this configuration that was published in the Bulletin and also in the 1934 and later editions of the PMAA handbook by Victor Fritz entitled “How to Build Model Airplanes.”

During the return trip from Delaware, the model's wing and tail assembly were damaged by the Fairchild's slipstream. To replace the broken parts, Bassett built another polyhedral wing – this time with an 8-ft. span as well as a larger elevator and slightly different rudder. With the new wing and tail, the model went on 10 days of temporary display at Philadelphia's famed Franklin Institute museum before being whisked off to Akron, OH for the 1934 Nationals.

Exactly one month after the 2-1/2 hour flight, Max Bassett once again prepared *Miss Philly IV* for action, this time from the weedy terrain of the Akron Municipal Airport. Nearby in the shadow of the giant Goodyear Air Dock – a mountain of a building designed to house the largest of zeppelin lighter-than-air ships – a crowd of over 2,000 spectators gathered for the seventh running of the National Model Airplane Championships.

Bassett faced more competition at this meet than at any he had ever before entered. Modelers from as far as Los Angeles, Boston, and Chicago had come with their gas-powered entries to join the fray.

Already Emmanuel Radoff of Newark, New Jersey and Robert Long of Reading, Pennsylvania had sent their Brown-powered ships aloft for flights of nearly 2 minutes and over 3-1/2 minutes, respectively. Though not in direct competition with Bassett because of his age, 21-year-old Carl V. Carlson of Chicago bettered Bassett's Newark record with a 6 minute, 48-1/2 second flight in

the new open class.

A bit of excitement was provided by Joe Braun, a fellow-Philadelphian, whose model took a sudden crash-dive into the turf. After repairs, Braun sent his plane up again for 8 minutes and 26-1/2 seconds.

Meanwhile, the California contingent of Bill Atwood and Irwin Ohlsson, who together had driven all the way to Akron from Los Angeles, were having problems with their gas models. Thirty-six seconds gas the best Ohlsson could coax out of his beautifully built and finished eight-foot ship, which was known to be capable of much better performance when things were going right. The only official flight shorter than Ohlsson's was one made by Harold Mitchell of Everett, Mass., who posted a time of 33 seconds. Atwood, having no luck at all with his gas job, gave up and went back to his rubber-powered ships, of which he had several entered in the contest.

As the day wore on, it became clear that Brooklyn's Joe Kovel would be the one to beat. His KG-2 (mounting a wing of 10-foot span) had crashed into a car, but he simply got out his earlier 8-foot KG-1 and clocked a flight of more than 14 minutes.

For a while, it appeared that Max Bassett might not make an official flight at all. After two tries, his blue-and-yellow craft had yet to get off the ground. On the third launch, he released his plane only to see it falter, rise uncertainly, and begin to circle the field at a precariously low altitude. In his haste, he had apparently set his needle valve a hair too rich. Then suddenly the faithful Brown's chugging pace quickened and the plane zoomed off towards the crowd of spectators. Gaining altitude, it flew over the Goodyear hangar, barely missing a mast on top of the huge structure. For a moment, it seemed to hover over the air dock, but then it drifted off to the northeast with Bassett and two contest officials following by car.

Its 1-1/2-oz. fuel allotment long gone, *Miss Philly IV* landed, after 21 minutes and 57 seconds aloft, in a briar patch off Akron-Canton Road some four miles from the airport. It was retrieved by its builder and the two timers who had kept it in sight all the while.

Returning to the field, Bassett logged his flight time and was immediately congratulated by meet officials and fellow contestants. Once again, he had come out on top. The Texaco Trophy, now the major prize for gas modelers under 21 years of age, was his to keep for the second year running. Officially, his flight set a new record, more than tripling his earlier mark at Newark, New Jersey, flown under the NAA's new gas model fuel-allotment rules. Wiley Post, who was on hand to give the keynote address at the Nats banquet, examined the championship model, and praised its design and workmanship.

In Philadelphia, the next day's newspapers ran a familiar story: Bassett wins again. The Bulletin noted that all of the first five placers in the Texaco event flew models powered by engines designed by William L. Brown.

On the night of the Nats banquet in Akron's Mayflower Hotel, a young Indiana hobby shop owner named Bert Pond persuaded Bassett to let him make measurements of the Texaco trophy-winning plane. From these, Pond produced an extremely detailed plan of *Miss Philly IV*, which, though mislabeled as the 2-1/2 hour version of the craft, was referenced in one of Frank Zaic's

earliest “Year Books” and sold through Pond's hobby shop. (Copies of this plan are still available. ~~Write to Bert Pond, 128 Warren Terrace, Longmeadow, MA 01106.~~) [Editor’s note: The Pond plans were purchased by the AMA in the mid-2000s and are now available through the AMA Plans Service, 5151 E. Memorial Drive, Muncie, IN 47302] Oddly, magazine plans of the ship didn't appear until 1937, and some of them were woefully inaccurate.

On his return to Philadelphia, Bassett retired *Miss Philly IV* to the Franklin Institute where it went on permanent display in the museum's Hall of Aviation, hanging in an honored position from the landing gear of Amelia Earhart's Lockheed Vega. (Neither the Vega nor Bassett’s model can be seen at the Franklin Institute today. The Vega was moved to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. in about 1965. Unfortunately, *Miss Philadelphia IV* has been lost.) For the balance of the summer, he apparently took a well-deserved rest from modeling activities. Having graduated in June on a music scholarship from Philadelphia's exclusive Pennsylvania Charter High School, where he was an accomplished violinist as well as a member of the varsity tennis team, he now prepared to enter the University of Pennsylvania as an engineering student.

### **The Last *Miss Philly***

With academic and other interests growing more important in Bassett's life, he began to have less and less time for model building and flying. He did, however, manage to compete in three meets in 1935. The first of these was a relatively minor competition that was featured as an added attraction to a full-size glider meet in Paoli, Pennsylvania. Having nothing else to fly, he pulled the two-year-old *Miss Philadelphia II* stick model out of mothballs to score a narrow win over fellow PMAA members Tanley Corrsin and Matt Kania in an event where the Contest Director (CD) limited the fuel supply to a total of 114 oz. to prevent the models from flying out of sight.

The Nats in St. Louis, Mo. demanded something more competitive than *Miss Philly II* and Bassett hurriedly designed and built an entirely new ship (B-116) named, predictably, *Miss Philadelphia V*. (Again, an apparent gap in B-numbers between *Miss Philadelphia IV* (B-114) and *Miss Philadelphia V* (B- 116) is accounted for by the fact that Bassett considered the two versions of *Miss Philadelphia IV* (the 6-foot-span 2-1/2hour endurance version and the 8-foot-span Texaco Trophy winner) as separate designs, therefore reserving number B-115 for the latter, even though it never actually appeared on the plane.)

In this model he combined elements of both the stick and cabin designs that had previously been so successful for him. Like *Miss Philly I, III, and IV*, the fuselage was a built-up box section with considerable flat side area. It had no cabin, however. Instead, the wing was mounted on a wire parasol framework, a la *Miss Philly II*. The wing itself was something new. Eight feet in span and of constant chord throughout, it had a flat center section approximately half as long as the total span, with the outer quarter panels turned up in what might be called trihedral. In flight, the wing tended to flex slightly, giving the center section one or two degrees of effective dihedral. The tail surfaces were pretty much as before, i.e., roughly oval and outlined in bamboo. For the landing gear, Bassett stuck with his tried and proven wooden struts but substituted a fat pair of M&M air wheels for the skinny wooden ones he had used on all previous ships. The power plant was one of his original A-model Brown Juniors.



Rather than go to St. Louis with just one airplane, Bassett built two models to this same design. He called the second one *Miss Philadelphia V* also, but gave it a slightly different paint job and number B-117. Otherwise, the two were identical.

The June 1935 Nats turned out to be a huge disappointment for Bassett. Plagued by engine trouble he missed his chance to win the Texaco Trophy for a third and last time. (If he had won it, he would have been allowed to keep it permanently.) Next season he would be 21 – too old to qualify for Texaco competition.

Leo Weiss won the event with a unique all-balsa twin-tailed model that was highly streamlined. It was small in comparison with most other entries. Weiss ran his engine at part-throttle to conserve gas; he scored a new record of 64 minutes and 12 seconds. Second place went to Bruno Marchi of Boston for his 41 minutes and 55 seconds effort. The best Bassett could manage was a third place flight of 36 minutes and 49 seconds – quite respectable, nonetheless, considering his engine ran for only about 1- 2 minutes

Perhaps Bassett's engine – among the very first Brown Juniors built and a veteran of hundreds of flights – was finally showing its age. Or maybe he was just having a bad day. Whatever the reason, this setback must have been a hard pill to swallow for a modeler as keenly competitive as he was. Not since the 1932 Nationals had he failed to place at the top of any model airplane competition he entered. And he had never been beaten at his own game – gas model flying. So discouraged was he, apparently, that before leaving St. Louis he announced that this was his last contest.

It is not clear whether Bassett really intended to quit modeling or not. It so happened that later in the summer a \$100 top prize was offered by the Junior Birdmen of America in a contest to be held at the Lakehurst (New Jersey) Naval Air Station. The prospect of winning that much money (equivalent to maybe \$700 to \$1,000 today) was hard to ignore. Bassett says he was “easily persuaded out of retirement” by it.

On August 28, 1935 he entered his twin ships (by this time he was calling them *Miss Philly V* and VI) in the Junior Birdmen Gas Model Classic, one of the few gas meets (if not the only one) ever sponsored by that organization, which later brought on its own downfall by turning against gas power. A crowd of about 1,000 watched both models fly O.O.S. at that meet, but not before the ground observers credited *Miss Philly VI* with the contest-winning time of 17 minutes and 48 seconds.

Two weeks later Bassett received a \$100 check in the mail from Lawrence Shaw, national director of the Junior Birdmen. Second place had been worth \$50 to Leo Vartanian of Brooklyn, New York and the \$25 third prize went to Henry Stadelmier of New York City.

The contest might have been a net loss for Bassett, who valued his models at around \$75 apiece. Fortunately, a few days after the meet, they were spotted in the scrub pine underbrush several miles from the air station by cruising Navy blimp crews, and he eventually recovered them undamaged.

### Part 3

The latter years of Max Bassett's modeling career brought diminished activity, but not diminished competitiveness. This last chapter of the Bassett story also reveals what became of him after his retirement from the hobby/sport and it includes some interesting information about Bill Brown's early engines.

The years 1934 and 1935 had been mostly successful for Maxwell Bassett as far as model flying, was concerned. Having started the gas model revolution with Bill Brown in 1932 and 1933, he went on to win the first NAA-sanctioned gas model competition at Newark, New Jersey in the spring of 1934 and the Texaco Trophy – gas modeling's ultimate prize – for a second year running at the 1934 Akron Nationals. He had launched his *Miss Philadelphia IV* on an amazing 54-mile cross-country duration flight of more than 2-1/2 hours; a feat which, though not recognized by the NAA as an official record, nevertheless brought him national prominence in newsreels and publications like *Time*, *Reader's Digest*, *Popular Science*, and the *New York Times*.

If he looked with disappointment at his failure to win the Texaco Trophy a third time at the 1935 St. Louis Nationals, he at least redeemed his reputation as being unbeatable by taking first place and a \$100 cash prize at the Junior Birdmen Gas Model Classic at Lakehurst, New Jersey later in the year. However, there's no getting around the fact that Max Bassett's modeling activity began to diminish ever so slightly in 1935, a trend which continued into the next year. No new planes had emerged from his workshop over the winter. In 1936, he did not even go to the Nats in Detroit, due to a last-minute accident.

On Saturday, February 22, 1936, he joined with Bill Brown and Victor Fritz in a local Philadelphia radio talk show, recapping their pioneering efforts in the gas model movement. During the broadcast, which originated from the Franklin Institute's lecture hall, Brown quoted the number of engines manufactured up to that time at 1,300.

Bassett made his first contest appearance of the 1936 season on May 9 at Hadley Field, New Brunswick, New Jersey, where Charlie Grant's International Gas Model Airplane Association was sponsoring its first all-gas meet. Proof of the booming popularity of this still-new form of modeling was the fact that he now faced 115 other competitors at this, a mere eastern states regional meet.

Contest rules specified 1/16 oz. of fuel per pound of airplane weight, which was one-fourth the usual allotment under NAA rules. *Miss Philly VI* carried only 5/16 oz., enough for a 3-minute engine run. As if to show that the master had not lost his magic touch, the model caught a thermal and soared away from the timers who kept it in sight for 24 minutes and 18 seconds. The flight, which Contest Director Nathan Polk termed "remarkable," was a decisive winner, more than 2-1/2 times as long as the next best mark that was posted by Walter Dickenson of Newark.

Bassett followed his ship for 10 miles by car, only to reach its landing place minutes after someone in an automobile with Pennsylvania license plates was seen carrying it off. He reported the theft to the state police and they succeeded in getting the model returned. Back at the meet he received for his efforts the gold-bronze IGMAA Trophy and a Forster .99 engine, presented

personally by George Forster.

Bassett flew in two more contests in 1936, both of which were held at Hadley Field. At a meet sponsored by Ben Shereshaw's Kresge Aero Club on October 3, he had to settle for third place behind Ray Heit and Thracey Petrides in the weight-lifting event, where all models were required to carry a payload of 25% of their net weight.

The IGMAA fall contest on October 31 proved more rewarding. Once again, he carried off all the marbles with a first overall time of 16 minutes and 46.4 seconds in the duration event and a first in the consistency event with a three-flight total of 23 minutes and 45.8 seconds. Incidentally, second place in consistency was won by another Philadelphian, Ed Manulkin, now deceased, who later founded Sterling Models.

The next year (1937) saw the kitting of two Bassett designs by the Scientific Model Airplane Company of Newark, New Jersey. Scientific's kit of *Miss Philadelphia V* (or was it VI) sold for \$9.95 without the engine, but complete with virtually everything else needed to build and finish the model. The goodies included a pair of air wheels, prop, bamboo paper covering (a Bassett trademark), cement, yellow and blue dope and all necessary hardware – even battery hookup wire. Deluxe versions of the kit could be had with a Brown B engine for \$29, with an Ohlsson Miniature engine for \$27 or with a Baby Cyclone for \$26. And each of these combination packages included a specially designed prop, supposedly worth \$1.95 extra (whoopee!).

Another Bassett design, apparently created especially for Scientific, was called the Streamliner. This 6-foot-span ship resembled the *Miss Philly III and IV* cabin models to some degree; the kit sold for \$4.95, without engine and wheels. Bassett also wrote construction articles for several versions of *Miss Philly IV* that were published that year in both *Air Trails* and magazines with plans that, in some instances, were none too accurate. How he got away with selling similar articles to two competing magazines is anybody's guess. Perhaps it was an indication of the level of his popularity.

During 1937 Bassett spent less time in competition than ever before. In fact, the National Meet, held again in Detroit on July 10, was his only contest entry. It turned out to be his last.

He made no special preparations for the contest, aside from mounting a new engine in the nose of his now two-year-old *Miss Philly V*. Abandoning the Brown Jr. that had served him so well up to now, he installed in its place a Baby Cyclone which he had won as a prize at the previous year's IGMAA fall contest. This, in itself, may have had some bearing on the 1937 National results. At only .36 cubic inch displacement, the Baby Cyke produced less power than the Brown but was considerably more fuel-efficient, a quality the fuel-allotment rules favored.

This time Bassett was up against a list of entries that included Carl Goldberg, famed as the most successful indoor modeler of his time. Goldberg surprised everyone at the 1937 Nats by showing up with a gas job. What a gas job! His huge, beautifully streamlined Valkyrie mounted a 10-foot elliptical wing that was said to contain over 1,100 individual parts in its complicated, but very light, trussed-rib structure. Many who saw it considered it the finest gas model on the field. By comparison, *Miss Philly V* looked like an outdated old crate.

Looks alone do not a contest winner make, as Bassett once again proved by sending his ship aloft for an astounding 70 minutes and 2 seconds flight in the open class that ended O.O.S. over the neighboring city of Windsor, Canada. It was a time that even Goldberg could not beat, though he tried valiantly, losing, the beautiful Valkyrie forever on second-place flight that was 17 minutes and as many seconds short of Bassett's. Incidentally, Bassett's system (or luck) for finding lost planes was as good as it was for winning. Unlike Goldberg, he again recovered his lost model after the contest.

Bassett's performance left everyone shaking their heads in amazement. Not only was it the best time in the open-class competition, but it was the best of the entire contest – almost doubling the existing open record of 36:52 set at the previous Nats by Mike Roll! “Everybody wonders how he does it,” wrote Charlie Grant in his September 1937 Nats coverage in *Model Airplane News*.

If there were any secrets to his success, Max Bassett was not telling. At the Nats, he modestly commented that he really had not expected to do very well at all. In fact, though, this one flight won him more prizes than any single event he had ever entered. The list included the Gar Wood Trophy, presented by none other than Jimmy Doolittle; the Baby Cyclone prize of \$150 cash; Scientific's prize of \$50 for winning with a model in their kit line (never mind if it was *the* prototype); and \$12.72 for the 67 points the flight earned in the Du Pont Company's gas model competition.

### **From Model Planes to the Real Thing**

Some say it is a wise champion who retires at the peak of his form. Perhaps Maxwell Bassett shared that view. However, there is probably another reason why he made the 1937 Nationals his “last fling” at active competition. Viewed from an overall perspective, modeling seems to have been simply a stage (though a very important one) in his development as a young man – a preparation, as it were, for things to come. By this time, his interest in modeling was giving way to his pursuit of a career in full-size aviation.

Bassett did not actually cease model building and flying altogether with his last Nats win. During this period, he designed and built an entirely new model of only 48-in. wingspan as a test-bed for a minuscule new engine Bill Brown was developing. (This engine was the .12 cubic inch Lykens Brown. Lykens was Brown's middle name. Ahead of its time design-wise, it was the first model engine to incorporate a form of Schnuerle porting. Unfortunately, lack of sophistication in marketing resulted in only about 100 examples being sold mostly through Fred Megow's organization.)

Patterned after the Rearwin Speedster, a popular modeling subject of the day, this plane was much prettier than any of the rather boxy ships he had designed before. In 1938, it was kitted by Megow as the Cardinal. It is the only one of Bassett's models that has survived to today.

Bassett also says that before giving up the hobby for good, he built and flew successfully a Radio Controlled (RC) model, which he never entered in competition (there really was not much RC competition outside of the Nats in the late 1930s anyway). “It had rudder-only control,” he said, “and the receiver had two tubes.”

In 1939, he graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a mechanical engineering degree. After doing graduate work in aeronautical engineering, he joined Martin Aircraft Co. in Baltimore, MD as an aircraft designer. His early projects at Martin included extensive design work on the B-26, the Mars flying boat and other military aircraft during World War II.

One day in 1944 when it looked like the war's end was nearing, he found a note on his desk summoning him to the boss' (Glen L. Martin's) office. "Martin made me the head of an advanced design department," said Bassett, "of which I was the sole member for about a year. My task was to come up with the design for a projected postwar airline transport."

The result of that assignment was the twin-engine Martin 202 which was introduced in 1946. Quite likely, it was the last major aircraft ever designed by one person. Bassett says that after that first year of solitary work, his department grew to more than 100 people, but the basic 202 transport design was his alone.

Bassett continued at Martin through the 1950s. In the early part of the decade, one of his more memorable projects involved his heading a design team that evolved the B-57D, a high-altitude reconnaissance version of the Canberra bomber that served as a precursor to the U-2 spy plane.

Bassett said, "We were given the task of taking an existing aircraft and modifying it for a very special purpose using any available technology we could find. It was a rush job, and the whole project was to take only about five to seven months from start to finish. We lengthened the plane's wingspan considerably, installed different engines, and, in general, transformed the entire airplane with off-the-shelf parts into something quite different from what it was originally. In the end about all we had left from the original aircraft was the cockpit section."

During the mid to late 1950s, Bassett became involved with the Titan missile project. After that, he gravitated more toward electronics and management than aeronautical design. Around 1961 he joined General Precision Equipment Corp., an avionics concern where he held various management positions until leaving the company in 1970.

Since then he has specialized in management consulting in the development of high technology projects (involving lasers and similar equipment) and in reviving companies that are ailing financially.

### **Bassett Today (in 1983)**

For recreation, he enjoys a hobby that goes back to his early days at Martin when he began spending a fair amount of his spare time sailing on the broad waters of the Chesapeake Bay. Of course, he has come up a bit from the small sailboats he piloted back then. On entering the foyer of his beautiful home in the Connecticut hills, one is confronted by a glass-encased model of his all-aluminum Sparkman & Stevens-designed, ocean-going sailing yacht ("built like an aircraft," he says), which he campaigns in many of the major Atlantic Ocean races. Obviously, he is still very much the competitor.

Though Bassett's retirement from the modeling scene was one of the most complete ever (almost no one in the hobby has known of his doings or whereabouts since 1937), he still keeps in

occasional touch with old friends like Bill Brown, Charlie Grant, Nat Polk and others. Besides a thick scrapbook full of newspaper and magazine clippings (from which a good deal of this article was researched), his collection of modeling memorabilia includes most of his trophies, the prototype of the Megow Cardinal, one of his original Brown Jr. engines (serial number A17) and the 16mm black-and-white film that Victor Fritz shot of the 2-1/2 hour flight of *Miss Philadelphia IV* from Camden, New Jersey to Middletown, DE.

Bassett still enjoys a good gabfest about airplanes even though he is not much involved with them anymore. "No question about it," he says, "I do miss the aviation business."

But gas modeling's foremost pioneer, who tends to categorize people as either "dreamers" or "doers," definitely does not dwell on the past. He is much too busy with whatever task happens to be at hand, be that turning a client company's finances around, overseeing the development of a new laser or competing in a yacht race in the Caribbean.

Would he ever get back into modeling?

"It would be fun," he admits, "but I just don't see how I'd find the time to build one again."

That is probably good for the rest of us. In a contest, who would stand a chance against a competitor like Maxwell Bassett?

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*The following is an excerpt from the Model Aviation Hall of Fame application that Mr. Ritchie submitted.*

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### **(As an) Experimenter**

From May 10, 1932 onwards, Maxwell Bassett's contest record shown that he was the foremost experimenter in gas powered modeling our hobby has ever seen, (see first four items page 1 of this supporting data). Using gasoline engines designed by his friend and fellow PMA member, Bill Brown, he single-handedly launched the gas model boon of the early 1930s with his clean-sweep of all outdoor events at the 1933 New York City Nationals. In one of his most spectacular achievements, he launched his *Miss Philadelphia IV* from an airport in Camden, New Jersey in an attempt at all-out Free Flight endurance, May 28, 1934. The model was especially designed for this attempt and carried a total of 17 ounces of fuel. Its flight, tracked, filmed and timed by Victor R. Fritz, field director of the PMAA, who followed it in a chartered airplane, lasted two hours, 35 minutes and 39-1/5 seconds, reaching an altitude of 8,000 feet and covering a distance of 54 miles, ended in a cow pasture near Armstrong's Corner, Del. (near Middletown, 4 miles from the Maryland state line). Unfortunately, it was never listed as an official record because its fuel load far exceeded the 1-3/4 oz. maximum allowed by the then-new gas model rules Bassett's Nationals win of the previous year had precipitated.

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*Listed below are a number of letters written by Mr. Dave Ritchie to the AMA. The letters were included with the Model Aviation Hall of Fame application. The content and intent of these letters was to convince the AMA of Mr. Bassett's overwhelming qualifications as a candidate.*

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May 13, 1983

Mr. Dave Ritchie  
2908 Truman Drive  
Hatfield, PA 19440

Dear Dave:

*The [Model Aviation] Hall of Fame Committee is balloting by mail for the '83 selections, with a deadline of May 31 for voting. So we will know the results very soon. I think, however, that Bassett's induction is almost automatic.*

*With or without the Hall of Fame we will try to have Max at the Nats. We agree that the Nats would be a great setting for the presentation.*

*By copy of this letter to the AMA PR Department, I am asking them to proceed with an invitation and the arrangements for a visit by Bassett.*

*Thanks very much for your interest.*

*Best regards,  
John Worth  
Executive Director*

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May 10, 1983

Mr. Carl R. Wheeley  
Editor and Publisher  
Model Aviation Magazine  
1810 Samuel Morse Drive  
Reston, VA 22090

Dear Carl:

*Thanks for your May 2 note acknowledging receipt of the Brown Engine sidebar to the Max Bassett article. Hope you can fit it in somewhere.*

*Carl, what I'm really writing for this time is to ask if you've heard anything pro or con about whether Max Bassett is being considered for induction into the [Model Aviation] Hall of Fame this year. I'm asking you because I really don't know anyone else at AMA Headquarters or on the Hall of Fame Committee.*

*As you know, I've submitted a form to the committee nominating Bassett for the award this year. If I may be allowed to "lobby" a bit in his behalf, I feel there can be no more appropriate choice for the award in this particular year.*

*It's been just 50 years since Bassett's "clean sweep" of the '33 Nats launched the gas model hobby in earnest. And this year's Nats – the first on the East Coast, and the first within driving distance of Bassett's home in many a year – offers a perfect (shall I say "golden?")*

*opportunity to present him the award. In my opinion, it would be a shame for the AMA to pass up the opportunity to honor this man whose achievements – both in modeling and in life – represent so well the best we have to offer society.*

*If the Hall of Fame Committee should agree with the above, then I have just one other piece of advice: Now is the time to get moving on arrangements to have Bassett present at the Nats to accept the award. From what I know of him, he is a very active and busy man who may be just as likely to be on his yacht in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean as at home in New Canaan, Connecticut during the last week in July ... unless a solid commitment can be wrung from him. (Note: I've attended two modeling-related functions in the past two years where Bassett was billed as a guest of honor – neither of which he was able to make because of last-minute foul-ups or poor organization in the first place.)*

*Carl, I'm sure that at this time of year you and the rest of the AMA HQ staff are besieged with requests from hundreds of individuals pushing their pet projects for the Nats. All I can say is that I'd work the whole Nats week through just to see Bassett get this award!*

*Sincerely,  
Dave Ritchie  
2908 Truman Drive  
Hatfield, PA 19440*

***cc: John Grigg  
John Worth***

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*May 10, 1983*

*Mr. John Worth  
Executive Director  
Academy of Model Aeronautics  
1810 Samuel Morse Drive  
Reston, VA 22090*

*Dear John:*

*Enclosed is a copy of a letter I wrote to Carl Wheeley "lobbying" for the induction of Maxwell Bassett into the [Model Aviation] Hall of Fame and suggesting that this year's Nats would make a perfect setting for the presentation of such an award.*

*Max Bassett was our first gas model champion and his modeling achievements are detailed in the Hall of Fame nomination submitted earlier this year (copy also enclosed). In my opinion, we could have no more distinguished a guest at our "East Coast Nationals" than him. I hope you agree.*

*Sincerely,  
Dave Ritchie  
2908 Truman Drive*



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*Below is a listing of Maxwell Bassett's competition record taken from his Model Aviation Hall of Fame application.*

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## **Maxwell Bassett's Competition Record**

As a competitor, he entered contests as follows (all events Free Flight):

- First to win a contest with a gasoline-powered model at the Philadelphia Model Aeroplane Association's first gas model meet on May 10, 1932. Winning time: 9 seconds; Model: Bassett design #B-105
- First to exceed national record in "other-than-rubber-power" class with gasoline power at the
- PMAA sponsored record trial in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on June 11, 1932. Time: 2 minutes and 42 3/5 seconds. Model: Bassett design #B-106 (Existing NAA other-than-rubber-power record at that time was 1-1/2 minutes, set by compressed-air power.)
- First to win an official flight with gas power at a U.S. Nationals on Sept 10, 1932 in Atlantic City, N.J. Time: 2 minutes and 55 seconds. Model: Fleetwing (Bassett design # B-108). Flight gained 4th place in Wakefield event.
- First to win a Nationals event with gas power at Roosevelt Field, Long Island (N.Y. City Nationals) on June 27, 1933. Times:
  - Mulvihill Trophy event, 14 minutes and 55 seconds (world record)
  - Moffett Trophy event, 28 minutes and 18 seconds (world record)
  - Stout Trophy event, 22 minutes 22-1/2 seconds (Bassett won all three events plus the Texaco trophy, thus precipitating the separation of gas power into its own competition class—separate from rubber power). Models: *Miss Philadelphia II* (B-111) and *Miss Philadelphia 132* (B-113)
- First, to win a contest under new NAA gas model rules at the Eastern States Outdoor Championships, Newark, N.J. on May 19, 1934. Winning time: 6 minutes and 7-1/2 seconds. Model: *Miss Philadelphia I* (B-120)
- 1934 Nationals in Akron, Ohio on June 28, 1934. Winner of Texaco trophy. National record. Time: 21 minutes and 57 seconds. Model: *Miss Philadelphia IV* (B-114). Only modeler ever to win Texaco trophy two years running.
- 1935 Nationals in St. Louis, Missouri. Third place in Texaco event. Time: 36 minute and 49 seconds. Model: *Miss Philadelphia V* (B-216)
- Junior Birdmen Gas Model Classic, Aug. 28, 1935 in Lakehurst, N.J.- First place (\$100 cash prize.) Time: 17 minutes and 48 seconds. Model: *Miss Philadelphia VI* (B-117)

- First International Gas Model Airplane Association's all-gas-power contest on May 9, 1936 at Hadley Field, New Brunswick, N.J. First place overall. Time: 24 minutes and 18 seconds. Model: *Miss Philadelphia V*
- Kresge Aero Club gas contest on Oct. 3, 1936 at Hadley Field, N.J. Third place in weight lifting event. Model: *Miss Philadelphia V*.
- Second IGMAA gas power contest on Oct. 31, 1936 at Hadley Field, N.J. First place overall time: 16 minutes and 40.4 seconds. First place in consistency event. Time (3-flight total): 23 minutes and 45.8 seconds. Model: *Miss Philadelphia V*.
- 1937 Nationals in Detroit, Mich. on July 10, 1937. One flight of 70 minutes and 2 seconds. Won the following: First place in open class; First overall (longest flight of the contest); new world's record; Gar Wood trophy; Baby Cyclone prize (\$150); Scientific Model Airplane Co., prize (\$50). Model: *Miss Philadelphia V*.

### **As a Designer/Experimenter, Published the following designs:**

Plans published (all Free Flight):

- Fleetwing gas model flown at 1932 Atlantic City Nats. Plan and construction article published by *Philadelphia Bulletin*, April 8, 1933.
- *Miss Philadelphia IV* (2-1/2 hour endurance version). Plan and construction article published by *Philadelphia Bulletin*, June 1934 and in PMAA Handbook *How to Build Model Airplanes* by Victor Fritz (1934 & later editions)
- *Miss Philadelphia IV* (134 Nationals Texaco trophy version) - small plan published in the *1935-1936 Model Aeronautics Year Book* by Frank Zaic. This plan was made from full-size plan drawn by Bert Pond (and sold thru his Peru, Indiana, hobby shop in the mid 1930s – ~~this plan still available by writing Bert Pond, 128 Warren Terrace, Longmeadow, Massachusetts, 01106~~). [Editor's note: The Pond plans were purchased by the AMA in the mid-2000s and are now available through the AMA Plans Service, 5151 E. Memorial Drive, Muncie, IN 47302]
- *Miss Philadelphia IV* plan and construction article published by *Air Trails* magazine, August 1937.
- *Miss Philadelphia IV* plan and construction article published by *Flying Aces* magazine, September 1937 (plan not too accurate).
- *Miss Philadelphia VI* plan and construction article published by *Air Trails*, March of 1938. Photo B in article showed *Miss Philadelphia V*. Both airplanes were identical except for paint job; both built at same time early in 1935 and for a time Bassett called them both *Miss Philadelphia VI*).

## Designs kitted

- *Miss Philadelphia V (VI)* - Scientific Model Airplane Company, Newark, New Jersey, 1937
- *Streamliner* - Scientific Model Airplane Company, Newark, New Jersey, 1937
- *Cardinal* - Megow Model Company, Philadelphia, 1938

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*The following is an article on Maxwell Bassett published in Model Airplane News in August of 1937.*

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### **Model Builders Hall of Fame: Maxwell Bassett**

By Philip Zecchitella

It was the day before the gas event at the Detroit National meet when the word was passed. Through the corridors of the luxurious Book-Cadillac Hotel, up to the workroom, and down to the registration desk, sped the message.

“Bassett is coming.”

And that was all. Although, we should say, that was enough. The next morning, the gas models were being transported to the field, but still the queries persisted.

“Is he coming?”

“Yeah, he’ll be here, don’t worry!”

At two in the afternoon, at spacious Wayne County Airport, the grapevine communication tersely passed the message:

“Bassett isn’t coming!”

A crisis seemed to have passed. Anew life leaped into the tiny engines. Gas model novices hurried repairs for their models. Old timers spoke:

“Stick your motor in with tooth-picks, pin your wing on, put the rudder on with a thumb-tack, but *fly* it!”

It is not a secret that Bassett is considered a triple threat at a gas model contest or at least they don’t keep it a secret very well. His record certainly speaks for itself. The only gas model meet in which he did not win first prize was the St. Louis Texaco event, but for good reasons. And, yet, how can we explain this phenomenon? Originally, it was credited to Maxwell’s superior knowledge of the tiny engine that carries his models aloft. At that time this assumption might have been entirely correct for the big problem was how to start the engine and to keep it going after it had started. Maxwell’s consistent knack of getting his engine to start put him in a class by himself, but it was not for long until the boys became familiar with their tiny power plants, when little or no trouble was experienced in starting the engines. However, Bassett continued to walk

away with top honors at the gas model meets. Then it became evident that his skill was more than, shall we say, engine deep.

If one were to line up the contestants at a meet, and try to speculate who would win by noting their outward personality, Bassett would certainly be eliminated first off. His appearance is not heralded by the usual “blowing” and other talk invariably resorted to by other enthusiasts when referring to the relative merits of their models. He has an air of shyness and conveys the impression that this is his first contest. (A little careful observation when Bassett is adjusting his model would soon remedy that impression, however.) To look at the line-up and judge Bassett one would say, “Mmm. He won’t win.”

Now let us suppose all the models were put on the line, and they will range from every description; streamlined, monocoque, parasol, and cantilever. A beautifully constructed model would be seriously considered. Others, with much care devoted to their finish, glisten in the sun. Bassett’s model, however, is distinctly a gawky looking craft with its nose pertinently perched skyward and with its wing jauntily riding almost a foot above the fuselage. An aerodynamic analysis of the model would show its superiority immediately, but to judge by appearance one would again say, “That model? Mmm. *That* model won’t win!”

And, yet, Bassett flies his model and “Mmm. They *do* win!”

Explanation? Well, let us ask Bassett himself.

“I test a new model for stability first by gliding it. Later, I fly it with gradually increased amounts of power. It requires an average of six months to build a model, and it takes me about a month to prepare for a contest properly. That consists of test-hopping my planes many time and repairing of improving the construction.”

This makes his prowess practically no secret at all.

Bassett is twenty-two years old and was born in Philadelphia. At present, he is a junior at the University of Pennsylvania where he is studying mechanical engineering. His model-building career started in 1927 when his interest was aroused, or stimulated, at any rate, by the model airplane feature articles in boys’ magazines. His supplies were obtained through the Airplane Model League of America. Spruce and balsa were mostly used. His first model was a tractor with a twenty-inch wingspan covered with Japanese tissue.

“The most difficult part,” he says, “was to make the propeller which I succeeded in carving only after hacking all my fingers and losing my temper a number of times.”

The model, when completed, flew thirty feet and landed in a clump of bushes. There were numerous holes in the wing of the model, but Bassett forgot to tell us what happened to the bushes! His greatest disappointment came when a new rule was adopted which specified that no parts of a model could be dropped off while in flight. Up to that period, he had been working on a ship, which had two distinct sets of motors. After a steep climb, the model would level off and drop its heavy motor, then continue under power of a very light rubber motor, with just enough thrust to keep the model in level flight. He had hoped to take this to the National Meet in 1930

but was very much discouraged when the new rule was issued.

Just how many models has he built is a figure that has never been accurately established but a conservative estimate places the amount at about one thousand models, twenty of which have been gas models. We should say that in addition to being a sport, this last revelation makes it practically a career. His workshop, which is about twelve by twenty feet, is piled at least two feet deep (except around the workbench) and models decorate all available wall space. Most of his work is done while on vacation or whenever he feels that his models need him more than his teachers.

His first gas model did not fly. In fact, it was not until his sixth model that he obtained what could really be called a good flight. His first plane had a four-foot wingspan and weighed about two pounds. It was only a stick model and was built of approximately the same materials as those of today. The worst problems he encountered on his early gas jobs were that of stability. Next to this was the problem of correct size, weight, and construction. As there was no available information on the subject at the time, it amounted to quite a predicament. On the subject of safety, he feels there is no existing danger in gas model flying. If proper rules are made and precautions are taken, there will be no reason for considering the sport a hazard. He has been very fortunate in getting back all of his models which at one time or another have flown out of sight, although some of them have been lost for as long as three months.

His continued interest in models, he believes, is largely due to competition. His first contest was in 1929 at a Philadelphia airport. His entry was a twin pusher (“and those propellers had a lot to push!”). Since then, he has entered between 60 and 70 contests, including the 1932, '33, '34 and '35 Nationals, and has placed in approximately 90% of them. The first prize he ever won was a second place ribbon in a Baby R.O.G. event. His prizes have now reached about fifty-five, with ribbons being conspicuously absent.

His early ambition was to some day attend, and maybe win, a national contest. To say that this goal has been achieved is to put it mildly. Perhaps “quadrupled” would be more in the way of keeping with the adjectives that are designed to explain his career. In 1933, he entered the New York City National Meet. The outdoor events at that time specified their respective rules but no provision was set down for the motive power. In other words, as long as the propellers turned around, the officials weren't particularly interested in the little matter of what made them turn. Aside from one or two more violent (than rubber) forms of propulsion, no attention was paid to this aspect. Since gas engines were not considered, shall we say, violent, Bassett was allowed to enter his gas models in competition with rubber models. This was not considered a threat by the other contestants, however. With a shrug of the shoulders, it was dismissed as merely a novelty gesture. So Bassett *merely* won the Texaco, Mulvihill, Stout and Moffett trophies because of the “mere” novelty!

And then the fun began. Gas models were immediately put into a separate class. The town and country suddenly awakened to this new sport, which has long since grown to large proportions, but a little common deduction will place the scene of the original inspiration at the outdoor flying events of the 1932 National meet – and that's where Bassett came in.

His most unfortunate incident occurred at the St. Louis National Meet. He was quite rushed in

the preparation for this meet, as is usually the case in all meets. In his haste, he purchased three dozen batteries for use at the contest. On the morning of the event, he followed the usual routine of checking the gas model but did not check the engine, since everything appeared to be all right. About two o'clock he decided to take an official flight and started to warm up the engine. He ran it for a minute, the usual procedure, and it seemed to turn over smoothly. He launched the ship, but after running for a minute and one half in the air, the engine suddenly "conked." The plane glided, and as luck would have it, landed in the Mississippi river. With the aid of a boat (if Joe Kovel prefers to swim out to his model, that's all right with Bassett, but he prefers a boat!) and the model was retrieved and brought back to the field for another official flight. The engine, however, continued to cut after one and one half minutes, and try as he would, it refused to run any longer. The remainder of the afternoon was devoted to this little matter of trying to keep the engine awake, but to no avail. As a result, he placed third in the contest. It was the only motor trouble Bassett had ever experienced and he was quite puzzled about it – until he remembered the batteries. He decided to try each one, and sure enough, they would not run the engine for more than one or two minutes a piece. The moral of the story, says Bassett, is not to place any degree of trust in batteries, which have not been tested at their time of purchase. His three Brown engines, which have been in constant use over a period of years, have given perfect service and show little or no signs of actual wear.

After noting our own feelings during the routine of a contest, we wondered what Bassett's were like. As a rule, enthusiasm is at a fever pitch while tuning up the models. If the craft wins, then delirium usually follows. But unsuccessful entries generally result in a very downcast spirit. Some contestants express themselves more violently than others. At a gas contest last year, one young man placed his gas model, with engine in it too, in front of the wheels of his car, and deliberately ran over it! That, of course, was super-expression. We could not get Bassett to admit to any similar excitement.

"When I entered a contest, I was usually quite tense, but lately I have overcome this." And then, as he thought more about it, "I usually lay awake the night before and plan just how I was going to take my plane off and go over every detail of its adjustment. Of course, needless to say, I always go to a contest with the desire to win. After a competition I always feel satisfied, for, if I have not placed, I have at least gained some new knowledge and experience."

Somehow, there is little else to say about a contestant's feelings in a meet where he has not placed. Bassett's last sentence, sheepishly, leaves us as meek as the proverbial lamb.

Up to the present time, Bassett has invested between \$500 and \$1,000 in his hobby. Excluding the price of the engine, it costs him from \$15 to \$20 to build a gas model. When we especially consider that his present activity is confined mostly to gas models, and that he has built twenty of them, the figure will not seem so high. When asked if the effort was worth the money put into it, the answer was enthusiastically affirmative. Aside from a cash prize which he received in 1935, there has been no monetary return, nor was any expected. Maxwell does not intend to make any money for models for he considers it purely a sport.

"I hope that model building in the future, will not become a financial proposition," was his statement. On the subject of radio-control, Maxwell feels that it is undoubtedly a practical thing to operate. He sees no real reason at present to devote much effort to this endeavor because we

already have it on large planes. It cannot in any way aid the development of the larger craft. Self-timers apparently do not receive his whole-hearted approval either. Of this he says, "To be honest, self-timers seem to be one of the poorer solutions to the problem of judging who will be the winner. It would be much the same as towing a glider up to a certain height and then seeing which one could soar the longest. The best solution in my mind is to have a payload contest, or restrict the ship to some definite wing loading. With the self-timers it would be a contest to see who could get the most powerful motor so as to have his plane highest in the allotted engine time."

Model airplanes are far from his sole hobby. His first love was radio – or should we say, first squawk. He was, in addition, always interested in all sorts of engines in express wagons and other toy vehicles. On the aesthetic side, it is very interesting to note that he plays the violin and is intensely interested in music. He is also enthusiastic about sailing. A good close sailboat race thrills him almost as much as a model airplane meet. Perhaps this may be best attributed to the close relationship between the principles of sailing and flying. Personally, we think it is his sporting blood, and that Bassett would get as much of a thrill viewing a good horse race.

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