



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of SCOTT CHRISTENSEN

November 8, 1942- December 30, 2008 Started modeling in 1948
AMA #47765



Written & Submitted by SC (07/2005) and NR (07/2005); Transcribed & Edited by NR (07/2005); Updated by JS (12/2005, 08/2007, 02/2009)

Career:

- 1965: after high school, college, and the Air Force, went to work for Fairchild Semiconductor in Mountain View, California
- Early 1970s: became League of Silent Flight member number 001 after completing the first level before anyone else in the San Francisco Bay area
- 1976: received an offer to work as a designer engineer for Airtronics
- Airtronics "Warlock .40 became his first commercial kit design and a very successful product for Airtronics and Cox
- Late 1979: received an offer from Sid Axelrod to become the Vice President of Top Flite Models, Inc. in Chicago, Illinois
- 1989: Top Flite Models sold to Hobbico in Champaign, Illinois. As part of this sale, Scott was employed by Hobbico and enjoyed the position of Director of Product Development
- 1991: received an offer to work for Joel Davis, owner and president of International Hobbycraft Co., Inc (IHC), as Vice President of IHC
- 1999: Received yet another offer of employment. This offer came from SIG Mfg. Co., Inc. in Montezuma, Iowa. SIG was looking for someone to run their R&D department and someone who could design and work with their then new Almost-Ready-to-Fly (ARF) program. Scott became SIG's Vice President of R&D, a position that he holds to this day.
- For the last twenty-six years, Scott has worked the Toledo Show.

The following autobiography of Scott Christensen was transcribed and edited by Norm Rosenstock in July of 2005.

I was born in Owatonna, Minnesota on November 8, 1942. My father, George L. Christensen, had been and remained an active modeler since his early youth in Minnesota. Shortly after my birth, my father was deferred by the government to Douglas Aircraft in Long Beach, California for defense work, moving us to Southern California. During this time, my father, an engineer, was assigned to the design and development of the remote gun turret concept for the Douglas A-26 Invader.



Scott Christensen

My first recollection of model aircraft activity with my father was in 1948. Dad and I often went to the Long Beach High School campus to watch the control-line modeling activity that was extremely active at that time. Dad, a lifelong free-flyer, decided that it might be time for me to get a taste of aero-modeling and purchased a Comet 54" Taylorcraft kit to build at home. He made a portable "building area" and set-up shop in the dining area of our small kitchen. Thereafter, every morning, at the crack of 5:00am, he would wake me up and, together, we would sit at the table and spend about 1-1/2 hour's together building the Taylorcraft, before he had to leave for work. During this time, dad was able to show me how to properly use razor blades, sandpaper, glue, etc. Being an engineer, Dad was always very precise in what he did and how he did it. I honestly believe that despite my young age, many of these hands-on "lessons" had a huge impact on me, affecting how I would approach my own modeling activities in the future. Ultimately, the Taylorcraft was completed, beautifully covered, and trimmed in Japanese tissue, ready for its first flights.

Dad and I took the model to the local high school on a Saturday morning. What happened next is as clear to me as if it were yesterday. I held the model while dad wound the rubber motor – only a hundred winds or so – with a hand drill. He placed the model on the ground and released the prop and model at the same time. The Taylorcraft quickly moved forward, lifted off, and flew beautifully for about 75 feet. It only got about 8 feet in the air but to me, its flight was majestic and captured everything that I have held as important in modeling to this day. The airplane that "we" built together, from a box of seemingly 2-dimensional sticks and sheets, was now a magnificent 3-dimensional flying machine that did not just fly; it flew beautifully! Of course, my father was elevated, in my mind, to sainthood and this early series of events probably shaped my future in model aircraft more than anything else.

After this, I used every nickel and dime I could come up with to buy and attempt to build every model airplane kit I could. Full-scale aircraft and model aircraft were always my only love. In those days, aircraft of any kind held true magic for most young kids and I was no exception. My friends were also like-minded and together we built many, many rubber powered free-flight models of every type, size, and sort. By the ripe old age of 10, I was already well experienced in building, covering and flying free-flight models – always under the engineering scrutiny of my dad. I became a "regular" at Brownie's Hobby Shop in Long Beach and that shop, with its incredible inventory, was yet another source of modeling "magic" to me. It was there that I discovered the 2-stroke model airplane engine.

Sometime in 1951, I approached my dad with my desire to own one of these engines for a Control Line model that I wanted to build. All things being relative, these engines were expensive and way out of the meager budget of a nine-year-old. Dad told me that when and if I could come to him with a full and complete explanation of how a 2-stroke engine works, he would pay for 1/2 of the cost of the engine. Off to the library, I read everything I could on this subject and eventually was able to recite, chapter and verse, the technical explanation of the workings of the 2-stroke engine to my father. True to his word, he offered me one-half of the cost of the engine of my choice. The Korean War was heating up at the time and I read in the local newspaper that the government was paying five cents a pound for bacon grease, redeemable at local collection sites. The grease was refined and used in the manufacture of ammunition. I started collecting cans of this nasty stuff from every house that I could reach with

my wagon, tethered behind my bike. I think that in the summer, fall, and winter of 1951, I collected enough used grease to keep the Battleship Missouri in ammunition for a year! I made enough money not only to pay for my half of the engine, but also enough to buy a new Sterling Corsair Control Line Scale model kit!

By this time, we had moved to Orange County, to the small orange growing town of Anaheim. This was a very small town at the time, with just a main street and a few businesses. However, one of those businesses was a bike shop that also had a hobby shop in the back. It was here that I bought my Sterling *Corsair*. This was my first engine powered model and a fairly difficult build for a kid of my age. Soon it was built, covered, and painted, ready to fly. Dad had never flown a Control Line model and was clearly concerned that all of my work and effort would soon be destroyed. He found a fellow employee at Douglas who was an accomplished Control Line pilot and arranged for this man to test-hop my new Corsair. The engine I had bought for this model was a beautiful new *Phantom P-29*. Earlier versions of this engine had been ignition types but had been converted to use the then new glow plug. It had all of the ignition timing gear on the front but that was just along for the ride. The *Phantom* was fired up after repeated prop flipping and some new words that I had never heard before. With the needle set at a fast “4-stroke,” I released the *Corsair* and it took to the air. It flew beautifully and was, to my eyes, the most realistic looking model airplane I had ever seen! With a little tandem time on the control handle, I soon learned how to fly it – and others to come.

By now, I was subscribing to *Model Airplane News*, *Flying Models*, *Air Trails* and any other magazines and books I could get my hands on that dealt with full scale and model aircraft. At the same time, I had two paper routes that gave me some money, along with my weekly allowance. With these funds, I bought, built, and flew every model airplane I could get my hands on, both free flight and control line.

In 1952, I designed and built my first model airplane. This was a rubber-powered, shoulder wing ship with a wingspan of about 18 inches. To design this model, I drew on my experiences with every commercial model kit that I had built up to that time. It had a simple flat-bottom airfoil, a polyhedral configured wing, a conventional tail group, and a longish fuselage. In short, there was absolutely nothing exceptional about this model other than it was the first model airplane that I ever designed on paper and built myself. Long story short, it actually flew nicely, flying for almost an entire summer until it was ultimately lost in a phenomenon that I had never encountered before – a thermal!

During one of my many bike trips out to the parking lot flying site at Los Alamitos Race Track, I saw my first radio controlled model airplane! This was in early 1953 and was a truly exotic sight. I was convinced that I might be capable of building and flying a Radio Control model. Using paper route funds, I purchased an Aerotrol single channel Radio Control system and installed it in my first Radio Control model airplane; a Guillow's *Trixter Beam*. In order to “legally” fly this model, I would have to have an FCC license and to do this I would first have to pass an FCC exam. I studied hard for this test, which I eventually passed. Single channel was normal in those days and the only control I had was rudder, driven by a single Bonner S/N escapement. The engine was a K&B greenhead .15. After several failed attempts, I finally was able to successfully

fly it in the winter of 1953. As my lumbering *Beam* made its first controlled turn, I knew exactly what my modeling future was to be.

After high school, college, and the Air Force, I went to work for Fairchild Semiconductor in Mountain View, California, in 1965. It was in the San Francisco Bay Area that I joined the Pioneer Radio Control Club and began flying Radio Control model aircraft as a full-time hobby. I was very lucky to be able to fly with many really good and well-known modelers, such as Ken Willard, George Steiner, Joe Foster, Whitey Pritchard, etc. I became very good friends with Ken Willard and together we flew and designed a fair number of models. It was Ken who encouraged me to publish one of my early Radio Control designs – the *Flugenghoster* – in the then new *Radio Control Modeler (RCM)* magazine. Ken and I traveled down to Sierra Madre, California, and met and flew with Don Dewey, the editor. One thing led to another and I wound up doing some review work for his magazine. In the meantime, I continued to design and fly my own models, many of which were 1/2A pylon racers for local club events. Don Dewey approached me to write a set of rules for this new event and these were published as the *RCM* 1/2A racing rules. I acted as the CD for the first two of these events, both of which were very successful.

Likely due to Ken Willard's influence, during this time I was asked to do some preliminary work with a new and as yet released covering product called MonoKote. I covered several models with this newly developed material and wrote several reports to both Ken Willard and Top Flite models with my input. Little did I know at the time what a gigantic product this would represent to modelers everywhere and what this small amount of work would mean to my future career!

Because my Radio Control modeling interests were always varied, I became friends with another group of Bay Area modelers who were involved in Radio Control sailplanes. I fell in love with this modeling discipline and promptly designed my first Radio Control sailplane, the *Pylonious*. During a particularly wet and dreary winter in 1968, a group of us got together to formulate a sailplane program, roughly based on the successful and well-known Diamond Program in full-scale soaring. We reasoned that if such a program could be presented to Radio Control sailplane fliers on a national, or even international, basis, it might serve to expedite Radio Control sailplane technology and at the same time, provide a real set of personal goals for individual fliers. We called this program the League of Silent Flight, or as it is commonly referred to, the LSF.

There were four of us involved in developing this new program: Duane Hyer, Keith Brewster, Le Gray, and myself. Because of our close friendships with both Ken Willard and Don Dewey, we felt that we had at least a way of getting the word out through the magazine. Ken was very interested in Radio Control sailplanes at the time and was very helpful in getting our efforts published in his popular *RCM* "Sunday Flyer" column. It fell to me to come up with letterhead stationary and to handle all correspondence with potential aspirants to this new program, a task I did for more than two years. The program itself offered five levels of accomplishment, each one being an order of magnitude more difficult as the aspirant proceeded. As an example of how difficult these levels were, there was literally no equipment, batteries or airframes available to even achieve levels 4 and 5 at the time they were written! We reasoned that if the program was really viable and if the challenge was really there, individuals and manufacturers would rise to these needs. And they did. Due almost entirely to the LSF and the overwhelming popularity of its

achievement program, the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) soon recognized Radio Control sailplanes as a legitimate segment of Radio Control in general and specific competition rules soon followed in the AMA Rule Book. The LSF became, and remains, a large and very viable program within the Radio Control community, ultimately becoming the Special Interest Group to the AMA for the Radio Control soaring community in general. To this day, I remain proud of my involvement in the creation of this organization and what the LSF offers to so many Radio Control sailplane modelers.

I was also very interested in Radio Control seaplane work and flew with yet another group of Bay Area modelers that flew these types of models exclusively. I designed my own flying boat design, called the *Curlew* in 1971. This design used an inverted "V" hull and was highly successful. It was ultimately published in *RCM* as a design article in 1972. I also designed another float equipped .40 size model, called the *Warlock*. This model was essentially a clean, nice looking Sport Pattern-type model that performed beautifully and apparently drew a lot of attention with some folks I had yet to meet.

In 1976, I received an offer to work as a designer engineer for Airtronics, a well-known and highly respected kit manufacturer that had been recently purchased by Cox Hobbies in Santa Ana, California. This was truly a dream come true for me and I accepted the offer and relocated to Southern California. At Airtronics, I worked directly for one of the finest designers of the time, Mr. Lee Renaud. From a design standpoint, Lee gave me a blank sheet of paper. He did however tell me that he really liked my earlier *Warlock* design and asked if it could be configured into a landplane for kitting purposes. The Airtronics *Warlock* .40 became my first commercial kit design and a very successful product for Airtronics and Cox. So much so, that I was asked to design a follow-on 1/2A version of this model. This became the *Warlock* .05 kit and it too was immediately successful.

Another notable Radio Control model that I designed for COX/Airtronics was the all-foam Piper *Turbo Arrow III*. At the time, Cox was working with Kyosho and had already sold thousands of their popular foam Cessna *Centurion* models. Cox was hungry for a follow-on product that would sell in similar numbers. I was assigned this task and was told that the aircraft was to be the Piper *Arrow*. This was my first all-foam model, my first ARF model and the first time that I had this much responsibility in terms of the development dollars. This project went well from day one and within a month or so, the completed prototype was well photographed and test flown at our Mile Square flying site. The airplane performed perfectly and needed not one single change. From this point we went to extremely expensive molds and ultimately into production. This kit produced a tremendous amount of revenue for COX and remains, for me, a milestone in my design life.

In late 1979, I received an offer from Sid Axelrod to become the Vice President of Top Flite Models, Inc. in Chicago, Illinois. I moved my family from California to Chicago and began my work with Top Flite in early 1980. Top Flite Models was an icon for me and to be able to work and design for this well-respected and venerable company was an incredible honor. Top Flite had just been sold to Replogle Globes and Sid Axelrod was retained to run the company. My responsibilities at Top Flite included the development of all new products, including kits, MonoKote related products and ultimately their first ARF product, as well. I worked at Top Flite

for 10 years and in that time produced a great many products, including the *Metrick* 2-meter sailplane, the *Antares* flat-wing sailplane, the *Wristocrat* hand-launched Radio Control sailplane, the *Phasoar* an Radio Control electric model, the *Elder* (based on my earlier *Flugenghoster* design), the *Hot Canary*, the *Kittywake* and more. It was a fertile time for design work and I worked hard to take full advantage of it.

I have always enjoyed the competition aspect of our hobby and have competed in many AMA Nationals over the years. During the 1984 Reno Nationals, I was fortunate enough to win a first in F3B with a model of my own design, the *Antares* – a design that I brought to market as a kit for Top Flite Models. During these same Nationals, I also placed a third in Standard Class Sailplanes with my *Antares* and finished in the top 10 in 2-Meter Sailplanes with my *Metrick* design.

In 1989, Top Flite Models was sold to Hobbico in Champaign, Illinois. As part of this sale, I was employed by Hobbico and moved to Champaign. Hobbico was a completely different kind of company, dealing almost totally with marketing efforts versus my personal interest in product design. None-the-less, I enjoyed my position as Director of Product Development and had the opportunity to work with many talented people. My position involved a great deal of foreign travel, providing me with yet more opportunities to work with the good people from Kyosho and O.S. Engines in Japan, as well as many hobby company principals from Taiwan. I enjoyed this kind of work and developed many life-long friendships with a great many of these foreign hobby product suppliers.

In 1991, I received yet another offer to work for Joel Davis, owner and president of International Hobbycraft Co., Inc. (IHC) in Northbrook, Illinois. IHC was – and remains – a unique company, providing a unique service to U.S. hobby manufacturers, in terms of foreign exports. IHC represented many of the most famous U.S. hobby companies in foreign markets, and to that end, appointed and monitored foreign distributors to market these U.S.-produced hobby goods. This was an excellent opportunity for me to expand my career and at the same time, use my acquired industry experience in guiding IHC to the best of the best in terms of U.S. hobby product manufacturers. In my capacity as Vice President of IHC, I was also able to literally travel the world, meeting and working with some of the finest hobby distributors in virtually every viable market on the globe. Of course, during these many trips, I was offered the opportunity to fly and demonstrate Radio Control model aircraft in every country I visited. In the course of these travels, I was lucky enough to become life-long friends with many of the people we worked with. To this day, these friendships represent the real payback in my career.

But being an active modeler, I still wanted to design and create models and missed this kind of work a great deal. In 1999, I received yet another offer of employment. This offer came from SIG Mfg. Co., Inc. in Montezuma, Iowa. SIG was looking for someone to run their R&D department and someone who could also design and work with their then new ARF program. I became SIG's Vice President of R&D, a position that I hold to this day. My position with SIG offers me the best of all worlds. I travel extensively to work with foreign suppliers and I am also able to design commercial model aircraft products. I work with some truly great people in a small town atmosphere that well suits my wife and me, at this stage of our lives.

Thus far at SIG, I have been able to bring to the market such well-known models as the SIG *Somethin' Extra* kits and ARF's, the popular Rascal series of models and many more. For a life-long modeler, such as myself, working for SIG and being able to positively contribute to their great product line, represents everything I have ever wanted and worked for in the hobby industry.

Design Work

Flugenghoster, RCM, October 1967
Curlew, RCM, August 1972
Pylonious, RCM, 1971
Warlock .40, Airtronics, 1978/79 Catalog
Warlock .05, Airtronics, 1978/79 Catalog
Piper Arrow, Semi-Scale Foam ARF Model, Cox Hobbies 1979 Catalog
Metrick, 2-meter Radio Control sailplane, Top Flite Models, Inc.
Antares, Standard Class Radio Control sailplane, Top Flite Models, Inc.
Elder, Sport Radio Control model, Top Flite Models, Inc.
Kittywake, Radio Control Single-float Radio Control Sport model, Top Flite Models, Inc.
Hot Canary, Radio Control Sport model, Top Flite Models, Inc.
Wristocrat, Hand-launched Radio Control sailplane, Top Flite Models, Inc.
Phasoar, Electric Radio Control sailplane, Top Flite Models, Inc.
Somethin' Extra, .40-Class Fun-Fly Kit, SIG Mfg. Co., Inc.
Somethin' Extra ARF, A Ready-to-Fly Version, SIG Mfg. Co., Inc.
1909 Demoiselle, Semi-Scale Indoor Radio Control model, SIG Mfg. Co., Inc.
Rascal R/C, Retro Radio Control Electric Kit, SIG Mfg. Co., Inc.
Rascal ARF, Ready to Fly Version, SIG Mfg., Co., Inc.
Rascal Forty ARF, Retro .40-Class Radio Control model, SIG Mfg. Co., Inc.
Rascal 110 ARF, Retro Giant Scale Radio Control model, SIG Mfg. Co., Inc.
Lil' Rascal ARF, Retro Scale Electric park flyer, SIG Mfg. Co., Inc.

League of Silent Flight

Model Airplane News, December 1968, "Silent Flight Whispers," by Bill Northrup
RCM, September 1969, "Sunday Flyer," by Ken Willard
RCM, January 1970, "Soaring," by Jerry Nelson
RCM, March 1970, "Soaring," by Jerry Nelson
R/C Soaring Digest, December 1997, "The LSF Story," by Scott Christensen
LSF Website: <http://www.silentflight.org/History/history.htm>

Norm Rosenstock wrote the following in 2005.

Hall of Fame Candidate Scott Christensen AMA 47765

Leader Member - Contest Director - Designer of major Kits for the modeling public

One thing led to another and Scott wound up doing some review work for Don Dewey's magazine, *Radio Control Modeler (RCM)*.

He continued to design and fly his own models, many of which were 1/2A pylon racers for local club events.

Don Dewey approached him to write a set of rules for this new event and these were published as the *RCM 1/2A* racing rules.

He was the Contest Director (CD) for the first two of these events, both of which were very successful.

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During a particularly wet and dreary winter in 1968, the group got together to formulate a sailplane program, roughly based on the successful and well-known "Diamond Program" in full-scale soaring.

"We reasoned that if such a program could be presented to Radio Control sailplane fliers on a national, or even international, basis, it might serve to expedite Radio Control sailplane technology and at the same time, provide a real set of personal goals for individual fliers.

We called this program the League of Silent Flight, or as it is commonly referred to, the LSF."

(Ref: - *R/C Soaring Digest*, December 1997, "The LSF Story," by Scott Christensen)

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It was ultimately published in *RCM* as a design article in 1972. He also designed another float equipped .40 size model, called the *Warlock*.

This model was essentially a clean, nice looking Sport Pattern-type model that performed beautifully and apparently drew a lot of attention with some folks that he had yet to meet.

Being an active modeler, he wanted to design and create models and missed this kind of work a great deal.

In 1999, he received yet another offer of employment. This offer came from SIG Mfg. Co., Inc. in Montezuma, Iowa. SIG was looking for someone to run their R&D department and someone who could design and work with their then new ARF program.

He became SIG's Vice President of R&D, a position that he holds to this day. His position with SIG offers him the best of all worlds. He travels extensively to work with foreign suppliers and is able to design commercial model aircraft products. Scott works with some truly great people in a small town atmosphere for which he is well suited.

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Summary

1965 - After high school, college, and the Air Force, he went to work for Fairchild Semiconductor in Mountain View, California

1976 - Received an offer to work as a designer engineer for Airtronics, a well-known and highly respected kit manufacturer that had been recently purchased by Cox Hobbies in Santa Ana, California

Design Work for Airtronics

1978/79 Catalog - *Warlock .40*, Airtronics,

1978/79 Catalog - *Warlock .05*, Airtronics,

1979 Catalog - *Piper Arrow*, Semi-Scale Foam ARF Model (Cox Hobbies)

The Airtronics *Warlock .40* became the first commercial kit design and a very successful product for Airtronics and Cox.

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Model Kits Designed for Top Flight Models Inc., 1979~1989

Metrick, 2-meter Radio Control Sailplane

Antares, Standard Class Radio Control Sailplane

Elder, Sport Radio Control model

Kittywake, Single-float Radio Control Sport model

Hot Canary, Radio Control Sport model

Wristocrat, Hand-launched Radio Control sailplane

Phasoar, Electric Radio Control sailplane

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Above photographs: Micro Radio Control model created by Scott Christensen

***Model: WACO SRE
Wing Span: 14 inches
Wing Area: 44.6 square inches
Weight: 32.4 grams***

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