



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ANDY SHEBER

October 12, 1929 - March 19, 1997

Started modeling in 1960



Compiled and Submitted by JZ (06/2004); Edited by JF (07/2004), Edited by JS (08/2007), Reformatted by JS (01/2010)

Joseph Ziomek submitted the following biography at the request of Pete Waters.

In 1960, Andy helped start the Livonia (MI) Rib Crackers Model Club, an AMA chartered club. The Livonia Parks and Recreation Department initially supported the club.

Andy was part of the Rib Crackers 7-man U-Control Demonstration Team flying profile 35 size Control Line models. The team featured banner towing and 7-man combat. The club designed the U-Control *Foxy Special* biplane, which was powered by a Fox 59 and had a three-line Roberts System throttle control.

Two of these *Foxy Special* biplanes are in residence at the National Model Aviation Museum. One is white and orange and the other is yellow and black colors from the Curtiss *Hawk P6E* full-scale airplane.

The Rib Crackers demo team functioned through the mid-70s with Andy Sheber and others.

Andy created a scale model Cessna *320B Skynight* twin-engine (Fox 40 Radio Control) 3-line Roberts System Control Line model that was flown at the Kansas City Nationals in 1968 where it won the Testors Best Finish Award trophy. At the 1969 National Championships, it again won the Testors Best Finish Award trophy. The airplane was also shipped and flown in England at the FAI World Championships in 1970 and placed 9th in the Control Line Scale event.

Andy was invited to be an FAI Scale judge at the FAI Control Line Championships in Toulouse, France in 1972 and in Sweden for the 1976 FAI Scale Internationals.

In 1975, Andy and Joe Ziomek built a Radio Control 1/4-Scale *J3 Piper Cub* from Sid Morgan plans and powered by a Fox 76. This was the largest available glow engine at the time. This *J3 Cub* exists today, in the possession of Joe Ziomek. It has now been converted to electric power. Incidentally, the *J3* still flies beautifully today on electric due to its lightweight at 9 pounds empty and 13 pounds with batteries and motor. The *J3* flew magnificently in 1975 and led to Andy's inspiration to build large airplanes.

In late 1976, the success with the 1/4-Scale *J3 Cub* and Andy's building skills led to the selection of a biplane for a 1/3-Scale Radio Control airplane project, i.e. the *Pitts Special S2A*. Joe Ziomek obtained factory drawings of the *Pitts S2A* and drew outlines at 1/3-Scale for the airplane with an

80-inch wingspan and an 80-inch length. The airplane was built and flown on a Fox 76. The prototype flew very well, though underpowered.

This initial *Pitts S2A* success led Andy to build a very Scale *Pitts S2A* in Bill Holland Air Shows colors. This Bill Holland Air Shows airplane is now at the National Model Aviation Museum.

The two *Pitts S2As* were taken to the Toledo Weak Signals model show in the spring of 1977 and caused an immediate reaction. Bill Bennett of Circus-Circus and Tournament of Champions (TOC) fame saw the 1/3-Scale *Pitts* models and invited Andy and Joe Ziomek to participate in the TOC to be held in the fall of 1977. Peter Waters of Kraft Midwest volunteered to be the pilot of the two airplanes (Marion Cole and Holland Air Shows) and began to fly and develop the two airplanes for the TOC in Las Vegas.

This started a search for more power and a number of engines were tried leading to the Quadra gas motor selection. Much flying of the Joe Ziomek prototype for prove out of the Quadra was done. In addition, it was decided to add smoke to the *Pitts* and a smoke system with kerosene and machine cutting oil forced into the muffler with pressure from a Freon 12 gas reservoir tank injected the mixture into the hot muffler and caused copious amounts of smoke for the aerobatics.

After much development of the two airplanes, Pete Waters and Andy Sheber set out for Las Vegas and the TOC in November 1977. The two airplanes created quite a stir at the TOC, as they were the only Giant Scale airplanes that also used a new engine, Quadra, for power.

After the static judging, the first day of flying was in 25-30 mph winds. The prototype Marion Cole *S2A* and the Holland Airshows airplane flew when none of the other smaller airplanes dared to fly. The smoke system and the aerobatic performance was the highlight of this TOC. Andy's airplane placed 5th overall in this 1977 TOC. A video CD is available of this TOC flying from Joe Ziomek.

Andy decided that the 1/3-Scale airplane was too tough a project for the average modeler. It was decided to draw smaller airplanes, i.e., a 1/3-size *Pitts S1A* with 60-inch wingspan and a 1/4-size *Pitts S2A*, also 60-inches, and a *Pitts S1A* with a 40-inch wingspan. In addition, Andy made vacuum form models for the cowls, windshields, wheel pants, cabanes, and landing gears for all of these sized *Pitts* airplanes. He offered them for sale and was reasonably successful with these products.

As is usually the case, modelers gravitate to the full size airplanes. Andy Sheber obtained his private pilot's license in 1977 and in 1984 purchased a home with a commons landing strip behind the home. He purchased a Cessna 150 single-engine airplane to commute to Ohio for his job and kept it at his home. He flew it from the private strip in Salem, Michigan along with long time friend Pete Waters. Andy's wife Nancy also took flying lessons and was a "pinch hitter" for Andy when they flew. In 1980, Andy began having health problems, which led to his losing his private license. The airplane sold and Andy's health continued to deteriorate.

After his passing on March 19, 1997, the *Pitts* plans languished and Nancy Sheber sold the plans to Bob Dively who marketed the plans. The plans were then sold to Bill Stevick who today sells a 1/3 *Pitts S2A* semi kit (plans, cabanes, canopy, wheel pants and cowl). Stevick redrew the 1/3 *S2A* on 36-inch wide paper from the original 50-inch wide Mylar plans so that they could be reproduced on modern blueprint machines.

The 1/3-Scale *S1A*, 1/4-Scale *Pitts S2A* and 1/4-Scale *Pitts S1A* plans are still in their original form on 50 inch Mylar. The rights to the plans have been purchased and will now be redrawn for copying on 36 inch wide reproduction machines- let's hope.

The *Pitts S2* and *S1* are now enjoying resurgence in popularity especially with the advent of the ARF that allows the average modeler to assemble and fly these magnificent biplanes. The Sheber *Pitts* will continue to live and provide the heart-stopping aerobatics capability designed by Curtis Pitts so many years ago.

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