



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ROBERT (BOB) D. LUTKER



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The following was written by Bob Lutker in May of 2014.

AMA History Project Biography of Bob Lutker

The Beginning

Bob began building solid and stick models at the age of seven in Fort Worth, Texas in 1936. Eventually, modeling involved gliders and powered Free Flight and Control Line models built from kits and from scratch. His first engine was a Brown Jr. bought from Johnny Casburn, a local kit manufacturer. Grover Godfrey and Bob were among the pioneering flyers of Control Line airplanes in those early days after the beginning of World War II.

Competition

His first competition flying was at a monthly Control Line model meet held at Russell Field, a grass strip airport in South Fort Worth in the mid-1940s.

In 1945, five of the Cowtown Sahibs Model Airplane Club members drove from Fort Worth to Alma, Kansas to compete in a large regional model meet that lasted several days. The group won many of the events they flew in, both Control Line and Free Flight.

His first national model airplane championships (Nats) to fly in was at the Dallas Nats in 1951. He won the Navy Carrier event, flying an SE-5 powered by a Fox 35 engine. He also won the Team Racing event with a plane of his own design powered by a K&B Torpedo 29.

Having previously won Nats events, the AMA requested that Bob be sent from Tripoli to El Paso, Texas to compete in the U.S. Air Force Nats at Biggs AFB for a place on the U.S. Air Force team. He would represent the Air Force at the Chicago Nats in July 1954. He competed in various events at El Paso, and did get placed on the Air Force team to go to Chicago.

At the Chicago Nats, he came in second in the Navy Carrier event, flying a scratch built Stearman PT-17 powered by a Fox 35.

The AMA asked the Air Force to send Lutker to The Hague, Holland with the team representing the U.S. at the FAI World Speed Championship. Lutker won the World Speed Championships on the U.S. team, and set a new FAI World Speed record of 129 mph. His plane was of his own design, powered by a Dooling 29.

Germany requested that the U.S. World Championship team attend the German National Control Line Championships, held shortly after that, as observers. The Air Force flew the team from Wiesbaden to Berlin for the occasion. It was a unique experience.

He was asked to compete in the European Championships Control Line competition held in Brussels, Belgium in 1955. He won second place in the Aerobatic event, with a plane of his own design powered by a Fox 35.

Leadership

Bob helped establish, and was a Charter member of, the Cowtown Sahibs Model Airplane Club in about 1943 in Fort Worth, Texas. The club, as it evolved from a Control Line club to a Radio Control club, was renamed the Fort Worth Radio Control Association. It eventually was renamed the Fort Worth Thunderbirds at the time it was incorporated, and became an AMA sanctioned club. The Thunderbirds still exist to this day, and have grown to be among the nation's outstanding clubs.

Bob served as President and Secretary/Treasurer of the Sahibs during the mid-1940s. He also served as Secretary of the Thunderbirds during the early 1970s.

Lutker established the Wheelus Flyers Model Airplane Club at Wheelus Air Force Base in Tripoli, Libya in 1954. He held the office of Secretary/Treasurer while there. Wheelus Air Force Base has long since been closed.

Bob served on AMA national model airplane management teams from 1956 through about 1972, when the U.S. Navy ceased hosting the Nats for budgetary reasons. Several Thunderbirds served with the teams at U.S. Naval Air Stations at various Nats locations in Philadelphia [Willow Grove NAS, PA], Chicago [Glenview NAS, IL], Dallas [Dallas NAS, TX] and Los Angeles [Los Alamitos NAS, CA]. Thunderbird Monty Smith, among others, served on AMA teams.

Contest Leadership

During the early years of model meets, Lutker directed many competitions in the Fort Worth area prior to the Thunderbirds having been AMA sanctioned. During WWII, gasoline was rationed so Free Flight took a back seat to Control Line flying. Radio Control models were yet to begin being a [big] part of competitions. [Editor's note: Radio Control was first flown in the Nats in 1937, but took a while to gain momentum as a big event.]

In 1955, Bob was the Contest Director for the FAI Free Flight European Championship model competition held at the U.S. Air base in Wiesbaden, Germany. The meet was run by a team of U.S. Air Force personnel.

By 1964, Maurice Teeter had been the Contest Director of the Dallas Nats for many years and was anxious to retire from the job. The Academy of Model Aeronautics made Bob Lutker an AMA Contest Director and asked him to accept the job of being Contest Director for the National Model Airplane Championships at the Dallas Naval Air Station in 1964. He accepted

the challenge and put together a team of local area modelers to assist. As it turned out, 1964 was to be the last time Dallas was to serve as a site for the Nats.

Publishing Experience

Having won the World Speed Championships in 1954 at The Hague in Holland, Bob was asked by a German model aviation magazine to write an article for them about the airplane used to win the meet and set the new World FAI Speed record. He completed the article, with drawings and photos of the airplane. It was published in 1964. (A copy was unavailable at the time of this writing.)

Bob seemed to be the newsletter writer in most every model club he was ever in, beginning with the Cowtown Sahibs Model Airplane Club, then the Wheelus Flyers Model Airplane Club, the Southwest Pylon Racing Association, and the Fort Worth Thunderbirds.

A local Fort Worth newspaper, *The Fort Worth Press*, asked him to write a model aviation column, publishing it for several weeks in the 1970s.

Photos of Bob Lutker



1954: Bob, FAI World Speed Champion, with his airplane.



Bob's new airplane, named Von Goblin, a stunt/combat model with a KB .29 engine and 49 inch wingspan.



August 22, 1954: The USA Team, FAI World Championship at The Hague. (Left to right: Richard Aubert, Bob Lutker, Dale Leighton (team manager), Arthur Putze, and Warren Godden.)



May 1954: USAFE contest at Wiesbaden, Germany.



May 1954: First place winners at the USAFE contest, Wiesbaden, Germany.

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

