



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of WELDON SMITH

March 17, 1921- Jan. 19, 2013 Started modeling in 1932
AMA #L20



Written & Submitted by WS (08/2002); Transcribed & Edited by SS (08/2002), Reformatted by JS (02/2010); Updated by JS (01/2013)

Career:

- 1932: Built first model, a 10-cent kit of Puss Moth
- Late 1930s: Won several Free Flight gas model contests in Northern California with own designs and Comet Zipper
- 1942-1943: Instructed U.S. Army Cadets in Stearman
- Entered U.S. Army Air Force in 1944 and flew P-39, P-40, P-47, P-63 and C-46
- 1961: Collaborated with the late Bob Baldwin on design of Radio Control deltas *Hustler* and *Talon Zephyr*; both were published
- Designed Stimulator, Prairie Duster and Quietus, all published; article on flying deltas published
- 1966, 1970-1976: Worked at the Nationals as Radio Control Flight Controller
- Spent three years building a highly detailed model of the RP-63G, which was featured in the Radio Control column of at least one of the model magazines

In 1932, I saw the first model finished by a neighborhood boy. He told me where to get a kit and I purchased a Puss Moth kit for 10 cents – the sum of which was hard to come by in the early Depression years. The kits included all the balsa needed, tissue, and even a vial of cement. The model actually flew and I was hooked. About 1936 the Baby Cyclone appeared. I ordered one and waited several months for it to come. Concurrently I ordered a Red Zephyr kit from Scientific Models. The engine cost \$15.75 and the kit \$5.95, I believe. The Zephyr flew well until at a contest at (what is now) Moffat Field, it spiraled in.

Most of my flying was done at the “mud flats” near Oakland, California, where I grew up. They were the “mud flats,” because they occasionally flooded from San Francisco Bay. After my Red Zephyr crashed, I designed my own planes. They all flew with varying results. But, I did win several contests in Northern California before World War II. Those of Joe Culver and Dick Schumacher inspired most of my designs, but I did build a Comet Zipper kit after overhearing Dick say that the performance of a Zipper he had witnessed impressed him.

In 1940, I learned to fly a Piper Cub at Sacramento while in college. In 1941, I obtained my commercial license with instructor rating and left school to take a job instructing. I was a civilian instructor at Thunderbird Field near Phoenix, Arizona in 1942 and 1943, training Army Cadets in the Stearman. During that time, I entered and won a contest at the field with one of my designs that featured retractable landing gear.

In 1944, I joined the Army Air Force and was assigned to the Ferrying Division of the Air Transport Command. I flew P-39, P-40, P-47 and P-63 planes, delivering them from the factories to various Army bases. I was sent overseas to fly the C-46 in Africa and India until December 1945. During the Army time, I was unable to do any modeling. In the spring of 1946, I joined United Air Lines and met my future wife, a flight attendant. I stayed with United until 1981 when forced to retire by federal regulations because of age.

Free Flight gas and glow models continued to be my interest from 1947 until 1952 when I stopped a few years while my family grew. I started Radio Control (RC) in 1957 and became interested in delta wings. Several were built with some success, but it was not until 1961 that Bob Baldwin and I put our thoughts together and designed the Hustler delta, which became a great success. We were thinking of the AMA Pylon event at the Nationals (Nats), which were coming to Glenview again in 1962. I drew up plans and built a smaller version of the Hustler called the Talon Zephyr, named after the zippers used to close and open the hatch. I chose the smaller size, built to the rules for a .15 engine in order to use the new Tee Dee .15 by Cox. I was disappointed in my attempt to win the pylon race by failing to fly the full five laps, but the plane was the fastest there. Both the Hustler and the Talon Zephyr were featured articles in model magazines. I had several other articles published in the 1960s and 1970s. Then again, in 1990 I had my first electric design in a magazine.

I have built only electric-powered planes since about 1986. The electric version of the Talon Zephyr performs as well as the glow model did. I have completed an electric model of the P-63, but have not flown it yet. It is not detailed since the motor and batteries weigh over four pounds. Since becoming exclusively an electric RC modeler, I fly every nice day. I have about 15 models that are ready to fly if radio is installed. (Nice days occur mostly during May through October in the Chicago area, so we have a long "building season.")

Contest Director

During 1998, 2000 and 2002 I was the contest director of regional Vintage RC Society meets.

Publications

- March 1962: Model Airplane News magazine, "Delta Hustler"
- 1963: American Modeler Annual, "Talon Zephyr"
- August 1962: Model Airplane News magazine, "Flying Deltas"
- March/April 1965: American Modeler magazine, "Stimulator"
- September 1990: Model Builder magazine, "Quietus"
- Early 1970s: American Modeler magazine (editor Ed Sweeney), "Prairie Duster"

Industry

In 1962, I consulted with Midwest Models on the Hustler kit.

In about 1963 or 1964, “fuseal,” the first wing seating tape, to my knowledge, was developed in my basement.

*(signed) Weldon Smith
August 2002*

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