



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of GARY HOVER



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The following was submitted by Dave Shadel for Gary Hover's nomination for the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame. Gary Hover was inducted into the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 2017.

From: Dave Shadel, AMA 19236

Subject: AMA Hall of Fame Narrative for Gary Hover
AMA L10522

Gary first joined AMA in 1956 and started competing in various free flight contests with his dad by the age of 10. They traveled 2 to 3 weekends a month from Fresno to Bakersfield. His father, Fred Hover Jr., was an active free flight modeler, becoming a member of the Academy of Model Aeronautics in the late 1930s. He was very proud of his original number, 3200, which he was eventually able to reacquire.

He also learned how to build from his dad, something always cherished, and competed in events all over the region including the 1959, 1960 and 1963 AMA Nationals where he won 1st in Senior free flight. He still has the checkerboard pylon Nats trophy on his desk at home in Redwood City, California.

In 1963, he designed his first free flight called the Blitz. It was a 696 square-inch rocket, powered by a Johnson .36 and flown as a "C" class free flight. Typical aircraft of the day were the 750 Ram Rod or Ed Millers 832 Texan. Gary believed the higher altitude you achieved going straight up with the 15 second engine run, the better chance for a thermal. With the wide glide circle, the concept worked.

Gary took time away from the sport to attend college where he graduated from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, with a Bachelor's of Architecture Degree.

In May 1973, he got the itch to return to model airplanes. Unfortunately, the San Luis Obispo area did not provide any opportunity for free flight. Gary soon met a car salesman who changed everything relative to model airplanes and competition. Leonard Ledson had an RC trainer next to his desk that caught Gary's eye. The next weekend was his first experience at RC. After building a Monterey glider from scratch, he soon learned the challenges of flying off a hill, slope soaring.

He was talked into joining the local club, the SLO Flyers and became their president a few months later. Gary always believed that competition sharpens everyone's skills. Soon the club was challenged to a contest at the Camp San Luis Obispo field. In the history of the club, only

had two contests ever been scheduled since its inception four years earlier. By the end of Gary's first term they had 11 club events, with another 12 the following year.

One event the club solicited was the touted RCM Trophy Race for glider slope racing. Hall of Fame member Ken Willard, of *Radio Control Modeler* magazine fame, visited San Luis Obispo and witnessed the predictable winds that were roaring up the Los Osos Valley. Ken was very impressed, so a contest date was set. Unfortunately, on the date selected, there was virtually no wind. Ken renamed the site Bull Shift Hill. Fortunately, three weeks later, the rescheduled contest came off without a hitch, putting the SLO Flyers on the map.

Since the SLO Flyers inception, several club members made the trek to Bakersfield to volunteer, working at the BARKS Formula 1 Races held each May. His mentor, Leonard Ledson, an exceptional pilot, always wanted to fly in the Bakersfield event, so he bought a Stafford Minnow kit, as well as two K&B F1 engines, and enticed Gary to help build the Minnow. Fortunately for Gary, the closer the May date came, the colder Lenny's feet got. Leonard proposed a trade - the Ridge Runner slope racer for the Minnow and two engines. Since the Minnow was basically complete, Gary said sure, why not. The Minnow was readied to fly by April 1974 and entered in Standard Class at the Bakersfield Race. Bakersfield was a great race venue with wide open space, perfect for racing. Gary's Minnow was judged a #1 in static judging, not bad for his first pylon race. He eventually placed 19th out of 70 in that year's Standard Class.

From then on, Gary and Lenny's natural partnership flourished, with Lenny funding the needs and Gary building, now Little Toni's for both. Gary has fond memories of their competitive relationship with many of the favorites including House of Balsa Don Dombrowski and his teammate Joe Zdankowitz. Gary developed many great connections including with Kraft Radios' Dave Shadel, who later became a FAI World Champion and a member of the AMA Hall of Fame. Dave turned out to be a great friend initially because of Kraft Systems, but later by encouraging Jim Shinohara to allow Gary to become a member of the fledgling Samurai Racing Team.

1977 was a banner year for Gary, who placed 3rd at the Bakersfield Air Races, 4th at the AMA Riverside Nationals, and 3rd at the National Miniature Pylon Association's Championship Race in Valkaria, Florida. That 3rd place was the result of a loss in a very rainy fly off for 2nd place with the AMA Hall of Fame member Bob Smith.

In 1978, Gary obtained his AMA Contest Director's license when the SLO Flyers decided to host their own F1 race. Because of restrictions at their home site, the event was held at Camp Roberts north of Paso Robles, California. The East Garrison runway was utilized and the first California State Championship F1 Race was staged. The SLO Race eventually became the premiere event in the country if you were an F1 racer.

In 1983, Gary was asked to become the first AMA Contest Board Chairman for the RC Pylon. He accepted and helped craft many new rules to improve safety for racing. Soon Gary was asked to become a member of the AMA's Property Acquisition and Development Committee, chaired by

AMA President and Hall of Fame member Bob Brown. Gary's many accomplishments included developing the Master Plan for AMA's Muncie, Indiana 1,000-acre International Flying Site. The plan remains relevant today.

In 1995, Gary was asked to join AMA's staff as Facilities Director to oversee the development of the Muncie facility.

Among Gary's accomplishments:

- 1981: Formula 1 Nationals Champion.
- 1981: National Miniature Pylon Racers Association (NMPRA) National Points Champion.
- 1983: Appointed the first AMA RC Pylon Contest Board Chairman.
- 1984: SLO Flyers California Championship F1 Race Calcutta Race winner.
- 1984: Designed his first pylon racer, the Samurai Kaze, which won virtually every major F1 Pylon Race from 1985 through 1998. The true compliment came when a group of the Texas racers were able to convince the owner of the full scale GR7 to rename it "Kaze Killer," providing a photograph documenting their case.
- 1986: Designed the Stiletto, a highly modified P51 Mustang for FAI F3D competition. The Stiletto won the 1989, 1993, 1995 and 1999 World Championship Race. The 1989 and 1995 USA team all flew the Stiletto's. The 1989 World Champion Dave Shadel and USA team of Dub Jett, Bruce Richmond, and Gary Hover took four of the top five positions, as well as World Champion Team.
- 1987, 1991, 1993 and 1998: NMPRA F1 National Championship Race Winner.
- 1988-1989: NMPRA President.
- 1989: Member of the USA F3D Pylon World Champion Team, placing 5th overall at the F3D World Championship Race in Chesapeake, Virginia.
- 1990: Developed the first vacuumed bag molded wing for a RC pylon racer with the effort of Mike Forester. Mike was an avid San Jose RC glider enthusiast who had experience in vacuum bagging and wanted to experiment with something other than gliders. Gary provided Mike with the wing shape and his special "Kaze" airfoil templates that were used to build the wing mold. In December 1991, after building the first six wings, Mike became bored with the routine and taught Gary the process of vacuum bagging the Kaze wing. After that time, Gary built all of his Kaze and eventually Stiletto molded wings.

- 1991: Gary was approached by good friend Steve White, a design engineer for Boeing. He wanted Gary to be the customer for a Cal Poly Pomona aeronautics senior class project to design a better F1 pylon racer. The purpose of the 8-month project was to provide the 9 students with an overview of what it takes to develop a full-size airplane from napkin sketch to flying prototype, a process that would take 15-plus years to create. The students dedicated their time to perform a series of wind tunnel and performance tests by using the long wing Kaze as the base model. The result was the Loki, a mid-wing model they called the “fish” because of its fuselage profile. The students calculated the performance of the Loki to be about 205 mph based on 193 mph Kaze test flights from earlier that year. Two weeks later, the Loki was completed and test flown, and the team declared success when the Loki exceeded expectations by achieving 207 mph using the same engine, propeller, and fuel from the original tests in very similar weather conditions.
- 1993: As a member of the AMA Property Acquisition and Development Committee, Gary developed the Master Plan for AMA’s Muncie, Indiana facility. The plan was adopted by the AMA Executive Council and remains the current template for developing the site.
- 1993: Received the AMA Distinguished Service Award.
- 1993: Placed 2nd out of 93 contestants at the Madera Air Races in the AT6 class. The “Club Affair” was the effort of the local club who helped build the very heavy, yet very fast racer, again with the support of Boeing friend Steve White. Because of some of the innovations presented with the Club Affair, there were over 10 new rules added to the Giant Scale AT6 class rules. Club Affair Deux incorporated the new rules and proved faster yet.
- 1995: Gary was asked to join the AMA staff in Muncie by Executive Director Jerry Rouillard in the capacity as Director of Facilities.
- 1995: Member of the USA F3D Pylon Team, placing 10th overall at the F3D World Championship Race in Muncie, Indiana.
- 1995: Became an AMA Life Member (L10522).
- 1997: Member of the USA F3D Pylon Team, competing at the World Championship Race in the Czech Republic.
- 1998: At the insistence of old friend Ron Schorr, Gary un-retiring Kaze #3 and raced it for the last time, winning his 4th the NMPRA Championship Race and the 3rd for Kaze #3.
- Aircraft designed by Gary won the following F3D World Championship Air Races:

- 1987: Kaze flown by Dave Shadel in Melbourne, Australia
 - 1989: Stiletto flown by Dave Shadel in Chesapeake, VA
 - 1993: Stiletto flown by Richard Verano in Wangaratta, Australia
 - 1995: Stiletto flown by Dave Shadel in Muncie, IN
 - 1999: Stiletto flown by Chip Hyde in Linkoping, Sweden
- 2016: Inducted into the National Miniature Pylon Racing Association Hall of Fame.

In view of Gary's many accomplishments for the betterment of model aviation, I hereby nominate him for induction into the AMA [Model Aviation] Hall of Fame.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Shadel

Note: Gary Hover also received an AMA Superior Service Award in 2000.

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