



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ALFRED (AL / ALF) H. STEGENS



July 28, 1930 - May 19, 2015 Began modeling in 1940s

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The following is from the January 2010 issue of Model Aviation magazine. Stegens was inducted into the 2009 Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

It is a rare occurrence in our hobby where it can be said that mentoring offered by one person could help place all three fliers on the team that would represent the United States in F2A [CL Speed] competition at the World Control Line meet," wrote David Mark, Alfred Stegen's Hall of Fame sponsor.

Al's interest in model airplanes started in 1943 when he heard a model airplane engine running in a neighbor's back yard. This lured the 13-year-old Al into a lifelong fascination and love of model airplane flying. With money earned from his paper route, Al bought a used Cannon .29 ignition engine from his neighbor and mounted it on an *SF Hawker Hurricane* kit that he purchased from Ed Packard at Cleveland Model & Supply. He joined the American Airlines Gas Model Club and flew on Sundays in a nearby park during World War II.

In 1947, Al designed an airplane with 1.5-inch Heliarc wheels, mounted his RB Special .29, and tested it. Other modelers were running Forster .29s and Delong .30s, which had top speeds of 85 mph.

Fueled with Francisco Power Mist Green Label, which came in a clear glass bottle and turned dark brown when exposed to sunlight, Al flew 90 mph on his first test flight. A week later, at the Cleveland Junior Air Races, Al turned 102 mph in his first flight and won the .29 Class B Speed event handily, with the fastest-ever recorded time in Class B .29.

After the race, Andy and Fred Packard offered Al a full-time job at Cleveland Model & Supply. For the next six years, while working at Cleveland Model & Supply, Al competed regularly in local and regional events in Ann Arbor, Akron, Detroit, and other locations in Class B and C events.

In 1947, Al set a Class B world record of 116.13 mpg. In 1950 in Detroit, in a Chrysler-sponsored event, he set a Speed record of 128 mph, but the McCoy engine had a cracked crankcase, so Al repaired it with his Dremel and a longer head bolt.

Returning to the field, Al turned 134 mph, a U.S. record. In the same meet, Al took second and third in two other events.

Following a stint in the Army, Al went to work with his father and grandfather in the family distribution business, while continuing to fly in his free time. He joined the 100-member Lakewood Flight Masters Club and became involved in the standing-start .29 Proto class.

Al's ongoing experiments with propellers and engines enabled him to reach 125 mph in 1958 in B .29 Proto Class. Because he couldn't buy Class D propellers, he and Carl Dodge designed and built mechanized equipment to manufacture 9 5/8-inch diameter, 11-inch-pitch hard maple propellers, which they sold for 50 cents each.

In 1959, Al married his wife Lois. That same year, he switched to the K&B .15 and .29 displacement engines. K&B Chief Engineer Bill Wisniewski and Al remained good friends and competitors until Bill passed away in 2007.

Al had earned a growing reputation for innovative engines, propeller design, and speed. He and Carl Dodge, a Purdue engineering graduate, flew every Sunday at local and regional events, winning often. In 1965, they made their way to Willow Grove Naval Air Station to compete in the Nationals.

Bill Wisniewski told them it would be necessary to run 170 mph in B Speed if they wanted to beat Jim Nightingale, a West Coast flier, who was running a K&B modified "Wart." The event went to Al and Carl, who placed the winning speed on their third flight at slightly more than 170 mph to Jim's 169 mph. The next day, Al and Carl took first place in .29 Proto, turning 138.5 mph.

Except for his years in military service, Al had competed in all of Nationals since his first in 1946.

In 1966, Al and Carl ventured into Class D .60-.65 displacement competition with a new Rossi .60 engine. At a regional competition in Detroit, using a homemade propeller, they turned 180 mph, a speed not yet officially reached, for a first-place finish.

Al and Carl further modified the Rossi and flew it to a Class D record and first-place finish at 184.16 mph at the 1966 Nationals.

Al and Carl bought several TWA FAI engines from Bill Wisniewski with plans to compete in the .15-displacement Class A Speed. At the Chicago Glenview Nationals, they took first place with a speed of 164.10 mph. Bill Wisniewski, who had designed and built their engine, finished second at 163.57 mph.

Al's collection of trophies grew so large that it filled his basement and was eventually moved into storage. At one time, he held US National Speed records in 1/2A Speed, B Speed, B Proto, and C Speed.

In 1984, Al competed in an impromptu 1/2A Speed Race international event with a run of 118.7 mph, which was good enough for first place. In 1985, he introduced .21 Sport Speed. He drafted a set of rules and continued to fly provisional races until the early 1990s, when .21 Sport Speed became a recognized event.

In 1987, Al teamed with Chris Montagino and the pair continues to compete in events in the Midwest.

Al's full-time job at Cleveland kept him busy, but it didn't stop him from flying. He continued to pile up wins at local events while becoming more involved in mentoring new fliers and officiating.

In 2001, he came back full force, taking first in Cincinnati in .21 Sport Speed with 150.07 mph. From 2002 through 2006, he had four firsts, five seconds, four thirds, and one fifth-place finish. In 2004, with 18 countries competing in the F2A World Championships in Muncie, Indiana, he served as an official timer.

Al retired from Cleveland after 45 years; he was chief engineer during the last 20. He was granted 20 design patents and was inducted into the Vacuum Dealers Trade Association Hall of Fame for his contributions to the industry.

Al plans to continue competing. "His wins are only surpassed by his innovations, contributions to the sport, and his eagerness to mentor youth and young fliers," sponsor David Mark wrote. "Al's unselfish giving of time and experience to officiate and a unique memory makes him the unofficial historian of Speed model flying. After more than six decades, he has earned and is worthy of serious consideration for induction into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

The following biography was in the October 1964 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the section about those running for AMA's presidential and vice presidential seats, titled "About the Nominees." Don ran as a candidate for the District III Control Line Contest Board and was elected in 1965.

Al Stegens

Active in modeling 18 years, also being a member of AMA for this time. All 18 years spent in Control Line. Helped run Junior Air Races of Cleveland and FAI Speed eliminations in Cleveland. Circle Director in Speed at 1963 Nats.

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