



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of RICHARD W. OBARSKI



Born December 21, 1918

Started modeling in the late 1920s

AMA #560

Written and submitted by DO (10/2000); Transcribed and Edited by SS (07/2002); updated by JS (09/2007), Reformatted by JS (11/2009)

Career:

- Obtained a non-commercial glider pilot's license at age 16 and helped build a primary glider
- A member of the Purdue University Glider Club
- A charter member of the Chicago Aeronauts; served as secretary from 1935 to 1937
- 1937-1938: helped organize the Purdue Aeromodelers club
- 1937-1938: Various plans published in *Zaic Yearbooks*
- 1938: Won first place with the *Zipper* gas model at the Midwestern State Championships; this was the first major win for the *Zipper* gas model
- Early 1940s: Began directing contests
- 1945: Started a model manufacturing company, specializing in wheels for U-Control models
- 1945-1950: Belonged to the Model Industry Association
- Late 1940s: Gave U-Control model speed tables to the AMA for distribution to contest directors
- 1954: Won first place in open class stick at the National Championships (Nats)
- 1970s-1980s: Innumerable winnings
- Taught modeling and conducted contests as an assistant squadron leader in Goodyear's Air Scouts
- Set numerous records, which resulted in various magazine articles
- Received over 75 trophies and plaques
- Taught various aeromodeling classes
- Proposed Indoor Ceiling categories to the AMA long before they were adopted
- Member of the FAI indoor team selection committee

Honors:

- 1991: National Free Flight Society (NFFS) Hall of Fame
- 1998: AMA Pioneer Award
- 2000: AMA District V Service Award
- 2005: Model Aviation Hall of Fame

Like many youngsters in the 1920s, Charles Lindbergh's flight captured my interest.

Some of the beginnings of AMA were in part due to the efforts of Carl Goldberg, Frank Nekimkin, et al.

The Chicago Park District offered a meeting place and I joined in the early 1930s what would become the Chicago Aeronuts with me as secretary until I enrolled at Purdue University in engineering in 1937.

The Junior Birdmen with Hearst Newspaper sponsorship was born.

The Exchange Clubs sponsored the AMA Nationals (Nats) and later the Navy.

The Chicago Aeronuts president was Carl Goldberg who also operated Model Research Lab and sold supplies. Carl was our mentor and infused us with learning, effort, and enthusiasm at our monthly meetings. During this period, I became involved in a Chicago Parks project to build a Rhone Ranger Primary Glider and obtained a non-commercial glider pilot license. We converted it to a secondary glider.

Later I belonged to the Purdue Glider Club. Jim Cahill, Ken Harker, and I organized the Purdue Aeromodelers club in 1937-1938. We had monthly meetings in the basement of the Union Building and had a number of contests for both indoor and outdoor models.

I started my working career as an engineer at Goodyear Aircraft Corporation in January of 1942 until the end of World War II. During this period, I was contest director and was involved in a number of events, including large meets involving 200 to 300 contestants. Sponsorship was by the Akron Board of Trade, the Board of Education and the Woman's Chapter of the NAA (Frances Alexander). I was an assistant squadron leader in the Air Scouts for Goodyear, taught modeling, and conducted contests. Paul Litchfield, chair of the board of Goodyear, organized Air Scouts. He donated land and operated a scout camp.

I also started a model manufacturing company in 1945 and had over 400,000 streamlined wheels made for the then booming U-Control market. Wheels at that time were sponge rubber with wood hubs and threw the tires causing "crack ups." The sponge wheels also had a lot of drag. Hely Arc wheels were streamlined and had low drag. Chester Lanzo tested them in a vertical wind tunnel. In addition, Hely Arc Landing Gears were produced. Unfortunately, the rules were changed permitting take-off dollies and my business dropped off.

I sent several hundred U-Control Speed Tables to AMA to distribute to contest directors back in the 1940s.

Please refer to the following bits of information for the rest of the history and autobiography.

As an aside, I have also obtained six patents. Some for aircraft tire testers and dynamometers, one for a granular dispensing device and one for a Dead Bolt Key Restricting Device.

In conclusion, there is undoubtedly a lot that has been omitted and forgotten.

On the Pioneer Award (AMA) in 1998, my name was spelled incorrectly on the plaque (Obaraski). I did not feel compelled to have it corrected since the false fire alarm at the banquet was enough disruption.

My name was put up for the Model Aviation Hall of Fame some time ago. Another person submitted it later and was told not to bother since one had been submitted previously (Ron Granser and Vincent Sadwick).

Thank you for inviting me to submit my autobiography since I will be 82 this year and most of my contemporaries are deceased.

In conclusion, I wish it to be known that my dear wife, Genevieve, has fully supported my model activities over this whole span of time.

In retrospect, the 20-year hiatus away from modeling and raising six children has come back to us in abundance by their devotion and accomplishments.

*(signed) Dick Obarski
October 29, 2000*

Plans

1937 – Zaic Yearbook, P135, Curtis Robin
1937 – Zaic Yearbook, P138, Indoor Glider
1937 – Zaic Yearbook, P141, Tandem Outdoor Fuselage
1938 – Zaic Yearbook, P130, Helicopter

Articles and Records

- Indoor helicopter record – October 1940, article in Model Airplane News; time 4:35 minutes
- Indoor autogyro record – December 1940, article in Model Airplane News; time 2:26 minutes
- Outdoor Class C cabin model record – November 1942, article in Model Airplane News in the mid-1940s
- Indoor Paper Stick record – September 1987, National Free Flight Society 1990 Symposium, p. 21; time 30:55 minutes
- Two other symposium articles, dates unknown

The following article ran in September/October 1954 about Dick's success in the 1954 Nats held in Chicago.

Richard Obarski, engineer at Adamson United, was Akron district's only winner at the National Model Airplane Contest held in Chicago July 27 to August 1.

Obarski, who has been an active enthusiast for the past 20 years, won first place in the open class stick division, flying his stick model for 20 minutes and 45.2 seconds.

Competing with 1,500 other contestants from all parts of the United States and foreign countries, Obarski entered five events. In addition to the first place in the indoor stick event, he won fourth place in the outdoor Pan-American Airlines Load Rubber Event. He also received fourth place in the indoor cabin event.

Obarski has a dozen models, ranging from the indoor type to the outdoor gas-powered type.

It is interesting to note that the indoor stick model, which brought Mr. Obarski first place, flies at three miles per hour and weighs but .034 ounces. The outdoor gas model weighs five ounces and flies about 25 miles per hour. The gas model climbs to a height of 1,000 to 1,200 feet in less than 15 seconds.

The Chicago Championship Events were co-sponsored by the U.S. Navy and the National Exchange Clubs of America. Until 1954, the Plymouth Division of Chrysler Motors sponsored the model plane activities over the country. The Akron Council of Model Builders is sponsored by the Akron Women's Chapter of the National Aeronautics Association (NAA).

In addition to regularly sponsored classes, Obarski helps several neighbor boys with their problems in building model planes.

The following article ran in the 1990 NFFS Symposium on pages 21 and 22.

My First Gassie: Flying the Prototype Zipper, 1938

By Dick Obarski

Jim called me one Sunday afternoon last June and asked me to write about my first gas model! Could he be thinking of Carl Goldberg's article in the July 1939 issue of *Air Trails* magazine, "The 1939 Gas Model?" He said *Sympo 90* was featuring an update from Frank Zaic on the "gyro effect, pylon models and the Zipper" for interested flyers of Old-Timer models and it would add to the interest if I wrote about my experience.

Like most of the club members of the Chicago Aeronauts in the 1930s, I was a serious indoor flyer. Fellow member Carl's work on a new concept in gas models interested me, so I asked him to loan the drawings. The plane was not yet named.

His earlier gas-powered ships, the *Valkyrie* and the *Clipper* were designed for the old rules. The idea for a small 4-1/2 foot span, high-powered craft was inspired by the motor run limits of 30 seconds in 1938 and then 20 seconds in 1939. Others were studying the concept of "small, light and high powered," too. But, Carl decided to raise the wing about six inches above the fuselage center line and use a fair amount of polyhedral to handle the large amount of engine torque with the short span. This was opposed to the then popular "center of lateral area" theory (a few years later in *Air Trails*, Carl and the other CG, Charlie Grant, had a pro and con discussion on that subject). Carl's high wing configuration may have been from his years of success (first over 20 minutes) as a flyer of indoor stick. Carl in his "1939 Gas Model" article said that in a spiral dive, there is a gentle sideslip, the ship is banked, getting insufficient lift and the extra area above the CG tends to right the model. Otherwise, Carl followed design guidelines of the day – overall length 2/3 of the span, fuselage cross-sectional area per the length squared divided by a hundred rule, stab area 1/3 of the wing area, and fin area 6% of the wing. Wing loading was by NAA rules – 10 ounces per square foot projected area. He used his G-5 airfoil from earlier gas jobs. *Powerplant* was the Forster 99, an engine with 1/3 horsepower. This was the winter of 1937-1938. It took the 1938 flying season, several test models, and hundreds of flights to work the bugs out. Details: beefing up weak points in the structure, ignition wiring break corrections,

timer fixes, wing and stab keying, CG location and a little negative (1/2 degree) stab. When tests and adjustments were complete, climb calculated at 2,000 feet per minute. Later when the production Zipper was designed for the Comet Model Airplane Company, the Denny Airstream engine was used. Reginald Denny's engine was rated 1/4 horsepower and thrust was said to be over three pounds. The rules for a 495-square-inch actual area required over two pounds flying weight so in calm air with this thrust a near vertical climb resulted.

I completed my ship the morning of the Midwestern States meet in Chicago, made four successful test flights and then won with two officials. This was the first victory for the Zipper. The following month, at the Mississippi Valley Meet in Saint Louis, Carl took first and the Zipper's streak was under way. In 11 meets over a few months time, the Zipper came out first nine times and second twice. High production was started at Comet and the kit became one of the most widely built gas models of all time – many kids built one for their first gassie, too.

Biography (that ran with this article)

Dick Obarski: Dick has been a model aeronautical researcher and contest flyer since 1935. As a teenager, he was a charter member of the Chicago Aeronuts. Later at Purdue, along with Jim Cahill and Ken Harker, he started the Aeromodelers club.

Dick produced “drag tested” wheels under the Hely-Arc Products name in the 1940s for Control Line flyers. He is a mechanical engineer, now retired, and living with his wife near Tampa, Florida.

Ronald Ganser nominated Dick for the NFFS Hall of Fame at the end of 1989. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1990. Following is part of the Hall of Fame application that Ganser submitted.

November 20, 1989

*Mr. Anthony J. Italiano
1655 Revere Drive
Brookfield, WI 53005*

Dear Tony:

I would like to propose Mr. Richard (Dick) Obarski for the 1990 Free Flight Hall of Fame, because of his numerous and outstanding contributions and achievements over his past 50 years of activities in model aviation.

I have comprised a list that I am sure does not completely justify Dick's work in model aviation, which is as follows:

Records

- 1938: Indoor Autogyro
- 1938: Indoor Helicopter
- 1942: Outdoor Class C Cabin
- 1978: Indoor Helicopter

- 1987: Indoor Intermediate Stick Category (four)

Contest and Development

- Many Junior Birdman awards in 1930s and at Plymouth Aero League
- First place with a *Zipper* gas model at the 1938 Midwestern State Championships; this was the first major win for the *Zipper* gas model
- 1938: won a trip for being the meet champion in Saint Louis at the Mississippi Valley Contest; awarded a trip to New Orleans by the Chicago and Southern Airlines
- Has won over 75 trophies and plaques
- Helped build a primary glider and obtained a glider license to fly it at the age of 16
- Had many plans of his models published in the late 1930s in Zaic's *Yearbooks*
- October 1940: Helicopter article in *Model Air News* magazine
- December 1940: Autogyro article in *Air Trails* magazine
- Designed gas model *Foo 2U2*, now flown as an Old-Timer plane
- The winnings in the 1970s and 1980s are almost too numerous to list

Organizations and Leadership

- Secretary of the Chicago Aeronuts, 1935 to 1937
- Formed the Purdue University Aeromodelers with Jim Cahill while attending college, 1937
- Squadron leader of Goodyear Air Scouts, Akron; taught classes in 1943 to 1948
- Taught in evening recreation program for the Akron Board of Education from 1946 to 1948
- Also taught model building classes for the Chrysler-sponsored Plymouth Aero League
- In 1945, helped organize a plan for a permanent flying site for National Contest in the Akron area. Got a price of \$85,000 for a flat 18-hole golf course. John Thomas of Firestone, as chairman, arranged \$5,000 for starters, but the other rubber companies would not go along. Tried to get Chrysler with the Plymouth Aero League interested, but it did not pan out. Note this was done some 45 years ago. The information for a permanent flying site was previously submitted to the AMA in the form of a brochure.
- Dick also proposed to AMA, long before they were adopted, indoor ceiling categories
- Dick is an active contest director at the indoor Florida contests and the FAI indoor team selection committee member from District V.

Manufacturing

Richard W. Obarski had formed the Hely-Arc Model Equipment Company in 1945. This company made streamlined rubber wheels with aluminum hubs. These were made and sold primarily for U-Control models. Dick had Chet Lanzo wind tunnel test wheels for the best low drag design. Along with the wheels also were made formed landing gear and wheel locks. Over 400,000 wheels were sold to kit manufacturers and distributors. Mr. Obarski at that time belonged to the Model Industry Association (1945 to 1950). Also at that time, the company set up and had printed U-Control model speed tables, which were sent to the AMA for the use of contest directors in speed timing.

I had the extreme pleasure to become associated with Dick when a job relocation brought him to the Pittsburgh area. Dick called me one evening, introduced himself to me (none needed), and wanted to be brought up to date on the state of art of indoor modeling. I need not say what a rewarding friendship this has become. I am sure our comradeship has been witnessed at the many contests we have attended together. I have worked with Dick on rubber evaluation testing, the “torque burner,” and various model designs. He has always impressed me with his great knowledge and keen competitiveness and always willing to help.

I, therefore, would like to submit his name at this time as a candidate for the 1990 Free Flight Hall of Fame.

I thank you.

Yours truly,
Ronald Ganser
AMA 7532, Contest Director
NFFS Charter Member Number 72

The following biographical information about Dick ran in the NFFS publication in October 1991 after he was selected for the Hall of Fame. Biographies of other inductees were also included.

Richard W. Obarski – A versatile fellow with excellence in both indoor and outdoor activities. As an early member of the Chicago Aeronuts, he worked very hard to score high in competitions. His list of wins is very long. As an engineer, he developed new types of product test equipment. He also developed and produced products for the model trade.



Richard Obarski with model



Richard Obarski

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