



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of RON PETERKA

Born October 29, 1934 Starting modeling around 1943  
AMA# 241794



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*Ron Peterka submitted the following autobiography in January of 2006.  
It was updated by Ron in December of 2018.*

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**Ron Peterka**  
AMA #241794

## The Beginning

My interest, no, *obsession* with model aviation began at about the age of nine or so as I watched a neighbor working long and hard to start an ignition engine mounted on a very large Free Flight model. This would be about 1943, and the place would be a neighborhood of Los Angeles, California.

By the time I entered junior high school, I was building solid models carved from vaguely shaped balsa or pine blocks. Moving on, I built stick and paper rubber-powered models. Occasionally one would even fly for a short distance.

The advent of the inexpensive and small glow engines allowed me to purchase a K & B .035 engine, and then an Anderson *Spitfire* (.045 displacement). Buddies and I built and flew small Control Line models in a neighborhood vacant lot.

A highlight of that wonderful era was having Jim Walker see us flying one day and stopping to watch. He gave each of us a *Flybaby* model and we were in heaven. We flew the heck out of those models.

During high school, Free Flight became a possibility and I built a number of 1/2A Free Flight models. We flew at the Sepulveda Dam basin and at the open field that existed at that time at the intersection of Rosecrans and Western Boulevard. Both fields were active flying sites for Southern California. I remember flying Free Flight at night a few times. We fastened a single AA battery to the bottom of the fuselage and hung about 18 inches of wire to a small penlight bulb. It was a little hairy chasing in the dark, but we could see the models light clearly.

Time marched on and I married, raised three children, and began attempting to fly primitive Radio Control models - build a model, [fly once], build another model...

**Update - 2018:** Current age 84 and still building models. Recently received my 25-year pin from the San Diego Air & Space Museum where I have been volunteering since about 1993 in their model shop. Multiple models for the museum include a 12-foot wingspan B-17 for the WWII exhibit at the Museum as the latest project.

## Competition

My first competition experience was flying indoor rubber band scale models in a moderately sized gymnasium. I cannot remember ever placing, but I had a good time. Much, much later, I entered in my first RC Scale competition, in the Fun Scale class of a local contest. A local flyer had to explain the horizontal eight mandatory maneuvers that I never practiced before. The engine quit on almost every flight and I had a great time.

The plane was a Harold Krier *Great Lakes Trainer* with a .60 Super Tiger engine. I still have that engine.

Some years later (I am in my seventies now), I began competing in the Team Scale class at the U.S. Scale Masters contests. I built a large-scale model of the Stinson *Gullwing* that looked pretty good, but my piloting skills had not gotten much better. I could take-off and land with a few elementary gyrations in the middle. The main [problem] was that my shop was [filling] with models that had not crashed badly enough to throw away. A good friend and excellent pilot flies for me even today in competition.

In any case, after a few years of upgrading the *Gullwing*, we qualified for the Scale Masters National Championships in 2003. We placed sixth in team scale to my great delight. In 2004 and 2005 we qualified but did not do as well. We scored ninth in 2004 and eleventh in 2005. We expect to qualify in 2006.

**Update - 2018:** In 2008, the Gull Wing captured 1<sup>st</sup> place in Team Scale at the U.S. Scale Masters Championships in Sarasota, FL. The model now has over 500 flights and is on its third engine. It still flies beautifully but is retired from competition.

## Experimenting

In the past few years, I have enjoyed drawing my own plans and scratch building a number of scale and sport scale models. *RC Modeler* magazine published two of those models, a sport scale Weddell Williams racer for a .25 engine and a 1:7 scale model of a Stinson SR-5E. That is exact scale since I had access to the full-size aircraft to measure every detail. Both flew, and I received letters from modelers who built from my plans.

**Update – 2018:** In 2012, after 2½ years of work, I finally completed my 2<sup>nd</sup> Stinson SR-5 as a 1:5 scale version. The earlier 1:7 model was too small and proved to be underpowered as well. The larger model allowed extreme detailing and is powered by a Zenoah G26 gas engine. The new model flies well, and in 2015 it placed 1<sup>st</sup> in Team Scale at the Houston Scale Masters Championships. This model now has just over 125 flights recorded.

My current personal project is a 1:6 scale model of a Lockheed Orion 9 single-engine aircraft as a precision scale model with an 86-inch wingspan.

## Leadership

Over the years, I belonged to a number of clubs. In Los Angeles, I belonged to the Lake Area Radio Kontrol Society (L.A.R.K.S.). I had very limited RC success at that time. We formed an impromptu club in Alhambra, California, but I cannot remember if we had an official name.

When I retired, I joined the Palomar RC Flyers in San Diego County. I am still active in that club, as well as in the Miramar Radio Control Flyers, the International Miniature Aircraft Association (IMAA), and the U.S. Scale Masters.

I served as club librarian for many years in the Palomar flyers, and was Contest Director for three sanctioned fly-ins and two scale contests. I [continue to be] a Contest Director.

My location, living outside a country town 35 miles from San Diego, makes it difficult to accept an office in a club. [It is] just too much traveling for the meetings and such. I am an active community volunteer to make up for the lack of working with the club.

### **Publishing experience**

In 1963, after taking a community college writing course, I joined up with a buddy and we submitted a 1/2A scale Free Flight Bucker *Jungmeister* construction article. [My friend] built the model and I drew the plans and wrote the text. To our surprise and pleasure, [they] accepted [the article] and we shared the payment.

Since then, I have written a number of articles and model construction projects. I am fortunate enough to have a number of ‘how to’ articles published in two national model magazines. (I included a list of the major projects [at the end of this article. Copies of the three published cover photos are in the AMA History Project’s biography files])

I write a fairly regular column for two club newsletters in an attempt to increase interest in scale modeling, which is my favorite interest. The National Association of Scale Aeromodelers (NASA) newsletter, *Replica*, published several articles on scale modeling subjects.

**Update - 2018:** *Model Airplane News* published plans for my 1:5 scale Stinson SR-5. The newer model has been campaigned in Team Scale and plans are still available from the magazine. It won 1<sup>st</sup> place at the Houston Scale Masters Championships in 2015.

### **Educational involvement**

Around 1992, I became involved with the San Diego Aerospace Museum, working in their model shop as a volunteer. The model shop builds various display models for the museum. I worked on subjects as diverse as a full-scale model of the Apollo II Moonlander to a 1:6 scale model of an old time Free Flight model for the museum’s “History of Model Aviation” display.

Some assignments were team efforts, and a few involved starting from a simple three-view [and ending with the completed] construction. I am particularly proud of the Boeing P-26 “pea shooter” that is displayed in a case at the museum entrance. The model portrays the finished appearance of the full-scale replica built in the museum shops.

One model club I am a member of [presents] a number of educational [programs]. The club puts on an annual “Flights of Fancy” aviation program at the club field in conjunction with the San Diego Aerospace Museum, where the kids attend classes [teaching] different aspects of aerodynamics and modeling. The day winds up with buddy box flights with RC trainers. I am an

active participant in that effort, as well as giving occasional talks to other groups about model or full-scale aviation.

### **Personal background**

Born in 1934, as I write this, I am 71 years old. I have been married 52 years now and have three grown children and six grandchildren. **Update - 2018:** 84 years old and three great grandchildren.

I operated a Shell gas station in Los Angeles for fifteen years and then obtained an Aviation Mechanics A & E license for a career change. I worked for TWA for a short time and then spent seven years at a jet engine overhaul facility where I rose to inspection foreman in the quality control department.

From there, I accepted a teaching job at Glendale Community College teaching in the aircraft mechanic program. I retired from that job in 1990.

I hold a pilot's license for single engine lands (SEL) with an Instrument rating, and for a long time owned a Cessna 182 in partnership with my best friend. We flew the Cessna all over the U.S. (Alaska, Mexico, Central America, Haiti, and Canada), [what] I estimate [to be] 250,000 miles [total]. [I also] have about 30 minutes [of experience as] pilot in command in the Goodyear Blimp thanks to a former student who worked on the blimp ground crew.

### **Publishing Experience (byline articles)**

- September 1963: *Model Airplane News*, construction article, 1/2A-FF Scale Buker *Jungmeister*, plans and photographs, partnered with Kingsley Kau
- May 1993: *Scale R/C Modeler*, letter and photograph, my first serious scale model, *Gee Bee Model Y*
- September 1996: *Scale R/C Modeler*, article, One Way to Share the Fun, "Why not volunteer your model - building skills for display in a local aviation museum"
- March 1997: *RC Modeler*, article, Sport Scale Weddell Williams construction article, plans and photographs, cover photo
- October 1999: *RC Modeler*, article, "It didn't have to happen," dissecting ways to prevent model crashes
- January 2000: *RC Modeler*, article, "Scale details," making lightweight simulated screws, photographs
- December 2000: *RC Modeler*, product review, Stinson SR-9 *Gullwing*, photos, cover photo
- May 2001: *RC Modeler*, article, "Flights of Fancy," reporting on San Diego Aerospace kids program put on by Palomar RC Flyers model club, photographs
- August 2001: *RC Modeler*, article, "Top Dawg 2000," photographs, report on Palomar Flyers Scale Fly-in
- June 2002: *RC Modeler*, article, "From the Shop," my history in modeling, autobiographical
- April 2004: *RC Modeler*, construction article, Stinson SR- 5 *Reliant*, plans and photographs, Cover photo

- October 2004: *RC Modeler*, article, “Success at last,” photographs, story about my first Scale Masters Championships participation

Numerous articles for at least three different model club newsletters, including “How-To” and comment articles, as well as many “Planes and Pilots” reviews of historical aircraft or pilot combinations.



*Ron Peterka and his Stinson SR-5. (Photo source: Ron Peterka)*



*Ron Peterka with his Stinson SR9 Gullwing  
(Photo source: Ron Peterka)*

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