



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of GORDON BUCKLAND



Written by GB (09/2012, 2013), transcribed by JS (01/2013, 09/2013)

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Introducing your new Soaring columnist

In 2010, I suggested that I would like to organize a major F3B contest in Florida. Many of my local Orlando Buzzard club members responded with, "What is F3B?" this was the catalyst that sparked this tale, as I began to realize the original FAI RC Soaring category (today's Grand Prix of RC Soaring) was almost forgotten in Soaring circles in the USA.

Let me tell you a little history about myself. My early experience in Soaring began in Australia as a teenager. At 13 years old, I was exposed to full-scale Soaring and for a couple of years I rode my bicycle 10 mile to and from the local Warwick aerodrome every Saturday that my parents would let me.

Full-scale sailplanes were winch-launched there and I would drive a former army Jeep up and down the runway to retrieve the wire after each sailplane was launched. I eventually graduated to driving the Ford V8-powered winch that towed the gliders up. That sure was an unforgettable thrill for this 15-year-old.

My hard work every Saturday was generally rewarded with a gliding lesson (sometimes with the final evening "hangar flight" in a training Blanik or an old wooden Bocian), and that made the effort thoroughly worthwhile for a school kid with no budget to pay for flying lessons.

I also had a keen interest in model aircraft beginning in primary school with a variety of rubber-, glow-, and diesel-powered CL, FF and eventually RC single-channel (push button) balsa models. At age 16, I started my first job and within eight weeks I had purchased a five-channel Futaba digital radio.

I taught myself to fly with a mixture of aircraft available in the 1970s, such as the Jedelsky-winged Honker, an Ace All Star biplane, and an Ace Pacer. But gliders were my passion and a 60-inch Silent Squire built from plans was my workhorse, followed by a 100-inch Aeroflyte Trident.

I flew predominantly alone using a bungee or sometimes hand towing. I enlisted the help of friends to pull my creations up, while I did the important stuff like holding the transmitter. I dabbled a little with a Cox TD .049 power pod, but didn't like the mess it made on my Sailplanes.

In 1982, I was introduced to winch launching and the F3B concept by members of the Brisbane Model Soaring Club when the Australian National Championships were conducted in my

hometown. After experiencing this exciting form of competition that requires diverse thermal and piloting skills, I was hooked.

I began to work on the League of Silent Flight (SLF) task program and started attending Soaring contests in Australia with immediate success.

Winning a Queensland F3B state title in 1983 with a 115-inch foam Southern Sailplanes Ricochet created memories that would last me a lifetime, but the RC Soaring hobby was placed on the back burner in 1987 and forgotten altogether as a wife, career, and children became my priorities.

After immigrating from Australia to the US in 1999 for work, in late 2008 I “discovered” the Orlando Buzzards flying field. That reignited my passion for Thermal Soaring and F3B after more than two decades away from the hobby.

F3B in the US had dramatically declined in popularity in the last 10 to 15 years, apparently because of a lack of motivated helpers needed to conduct contests and practice the speed and distance tasks. This was disappointing, but in 2009, as I indulged heavily in the local Thermal Duration culture in Florida, I never stopped thinking about the excitement and superior thermal skills that are developed from flying in F3B competitions.

Meeting Mike Lachowski at the 2010 Nats was a turning point. During the Two-Meter Nats contest, Mike and Glauco Lago set up an F3B course and gave me a taste of today’s F3B with some wicked Espada R launches off of 200 meters of monoline. I managed a sub-20-second speed run after a handful of launches and, with adrenaline coursing through my veins; I was again hooked on Speed.

Mike encouraged me not to give up on F3B in Florida and promised to support me if I would conduct a Florida contest in the winter. And so “The Gator”, as it has become affectionately known, was born. Twenty pilots, including four from Germany, assembled at the nearby Indian River Kontrol Society (IRKS) flying site in Cocoa, Florida, in late February 2011 for the first Florida F3B contest in more than 20 years.

The Gator F3B was an incredible success. The entire US F3B team, pilots from the East Coast, and the four German pilots wanting to taste some US competition attended. I obtained the cooperation of four local Florida pilots who bravely signed up for The Gator, having never flown in or even seen an F3B contest.

It is important to have sufficient helpers to staff Base A and Base B during distance (Task B) to signal the arrival of each Sailplane at the turning point on the course. We were blessed to have many IRKS club members – CL, helicopter, and Giant Scale enthusiasts – come out to help us with pressing the buttons on the F3B signal system that Mike Lachowski had provided.

We also had the enthusiastic support of the club president, Gerry Armstrong, and IRKS Soaring stalwart, Kris Van Nostran. They garnered support from other club members and worked tirelessly to ensure that the contest was successful.

The eventual winner of the inaugural Gator was David Klein, one of the three US team members.

Thorsten Holtmeyer from Germany was second and Kyle Paulson, another US team member, placed third. The big winner was US F3B Soaring, with invaluable exposure on the East Coast and more than \$1,500 raised for the US F3B Team to attend the World Championship in China.

I was chosen to attend the World Championship in China as a helper and I set to work assisting the US team with a website to raise the necessary funds to get the team and models to China and back. The World Championship was a revelation to me. Despite its lack of contest experience, the US team had all the necessary skills to compete with the German F3B powerhouse. With increased contests participation and diligent practice at the tasks of speed and distance, the US team could dominate at future world championships.

What is it that makes F3B so attractive to many top contest pilots, but seems to have been virtually forgotten by the average US Soaring pilot? There is a perception that F3B requires too much work to set up and run practice sessions or contest.

At least eight people are required to officiate at the bases during the distance task, but often during small events, these eight are the pilots who are not competing in that particular round. This is similar to timers who help pilots during a duration task.

The real benefit of practicing and contesting the F3B tasks is that a pilot's thermalling skills are significantly enhanced. A pilot improves tremendously in his or her ability to read air, predict lift, recognize lift, and gain the most benefit from that lift through more accurate model control. Nothing can replace those skills and it is no accident or coincidence that most of the top Thermal Duration pilots in the world are good F3B pilots.

The second Gator F3B contest was held again in Cocoa Beach, in March 2012. The Gator had now been accepted by the World Cup organizers in Germany as a World Cup event and the renowned CD from the Czech Republic, Roman Vojtech, ran the event.

Some world-class Speed times were flown with four laps of the 150-meter course being done in the 13-second range. For three days, Florida saw some of the fastest runs in history and was treated to an awesome display of RC Soaring by the highly talented US F3B Team members. Tom Kiesling won the second Gator, flying his Fosa. His blistering speed runs in extremely windy conditions were testimony to his stick skills.

F3B needs some concerted effort from the Soaring community for it to grow in the US. More contests will result in improved representation at the world-championship level. More pilots who are genuinely interested in improving their Thermal Soaring skills need to participate. There are many talented fliers in the US who could reach the next level with the skills they could pick up in F3B.

Next year we'll hold the third Gator F3B contest on the East Coast, and this year in California there will be other opportunities for pilots to practice and improve leading up to the F3B Team Selection contest for the 2013 US F3B Team.

If you have experienced Thermal Duration Soaring, but would like to move it up a notch and develop some enhanced Soaring skills, F3B might just be the ticket for you. You don't have to buy an F3B-specific model to begin with because you can fly all of the B tasks with any molded

Thermal Duration Sailplane. F3J Junior, Dillon Graves, and I flew Xplorers as backup models at the last Gator and we were able to fly low, 20-second speed runs with these F3J models.

Come out and give it a try next time you see an F3B contest advertised. If you're on the East Coast in late February, why not come and join us at The Gator? We will show you a great time.

Although Aussie born and bred, my wife, Sheralyn, and I are naturalized US citizens and I am proud to be your new "RC Soaring" columnist. I look forward to bringing you some great coverage of the big Soaring events in the US and around the world. As the junior team manager for the US F3J Team, I will be covering the World Championship in South Africa, and you will see the report here.

Until then, fly downwind and soar.

Sources:

Indian River Kontrol Society

www.irks.org

Team USA F3B

www.teamusaf3b.com

Team USA F3J

www.teamusaf3j.com

LSF

www.silentflight.org

The following was published on the Model Aviation magazine website, describing columnists for the magazine, and added to the AMA History Project files (at the time called the AMA History Program) in September 2013.

Gordon Buckland

I have loved all aspects of flight since flying Rubber-Powered stick models and paper airplanes during Primary school. Growing up in rural Australia, I began building and flying FF and CL models and graduated to RC at 15 years old with a Cox .049-powered Honker. Dabbling as a teen in full-scale gliders and developing a love of Soaring, I also built an 80-inch AeroFlyte Trident and scratch-built a 60-inch Silent Squire sailplane from RCM plans—a life-long love of Thermal flying ensued.

A Dodgson Maestro Mk III soon followed and at 22 years old, I entered in my first Thermal Duration contest—the Central Queensland Championships—and placed 3rd. This instant success saw me join the Brisbane Model Soaring Club and enjoy the thrill of competition.

I was active in RC F3B Sailplane competition from 1982 through 1987, winning a Queensland F3B championship along the way. As I was married and started a family, my parental

responsibilities grew and model aircraft took a back seat for 23 years, though I did pursue my love for aviation in Australia by obtaining my private pilot's license in 1999, before immigrating to Orlando, Florida, as president of Kwik Kerb USA, Inc.

I accidentally came across the Orlando Buzzards "Soaring Contest" sign beside a road late in 2008 and the long forgotten passion for RC Soaring was re-ignited. Since February 2009, I have returned to TD Soaring with a purpose, completing the LSF (League of Silent Flight) program twice to become a two-time Level V.

I have been a very active contributor to the RC Soaring community, with a passion for writing, including the NatsNews in 2009, 2010 and 2011. I have also previously written a piece for Model Aviation about the 2010 World Soaring Masters. I have built and maintained a number of Soaring websites, including those for the Orlando Buzzards RC Soaring Society, the Gator F3B Soaring event and flying site, the US F3B Team, and the US F3J team. I also publish a contest report on RCGroups after every contest I attend.

Currently flying Soaring USA 3.5m Xplorers, I am the US Junior team manager for the F3J team, which will compete at the World Championships in South Africa in early August 2012.

My wife Sheralyn, is supportive in my Soaring adventures and attends many contests with me. I have a daughter Tanya, in Australia and two adult sons, Jamie and Nathan, in Florida



Gordon's "RC Soaring" column run bi-monthly, in the January, March, May, July, September, and November issues of Model Aviation. His email address is gordon@buckland.com.

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