The AMA History Project Presents:
Biography of OWEN KAMPEN
1922-1982 AMA # 230437

Written and submitted by FBB (10/2005); Transcribed and edited by JS (12/2005, 10/2008), Reformatted by JS (09/2009)

Career:

- During WWII: B-24 pilot with the 15th Air Force
- 1961: Charter Member, Madison Area Radio Control Society
- Nov 1964: first construction article, *Radio Control Modeler* (*RCM*)
- Dec 1966: two articles, *Cessna 150* and *Whiz Kid*, *RCM*
- April 1967: *Hosier Hot Shot*, *RCM*
- August 1967: *Bonzo*, *RCM*
- October 1968: *Ply Guy*, *RCM*
- March 1969: *Windsong*, *RCM*
- May 1969: *Rivets*, *RCM*
- August 1969: *Super Whiz Kid*, *RCM*
- October 1970, *Skyraker* and *Plymate*, *RCM*
- 1970: *Dick's Dream* and *Ace High* sailplane kits produced by Ace Radio Control
- May 1971: *Upstart*, *RCM* (also kitted by Ace)
- August 1971: *Pacer*, *American Aircraft Modeler*
- January 1974: *Wizzard*, *RCM*
- 1975: *Super Pacer*, produced by ACE

Honors:

- 1982: Model Aviation Hall of Fame

The following was written and submitted by Frank B. Baker. In his letter accompanying his biography submission, he wrote, "I may have missed a few models in the late 1970s, but the important models are put in perspective. It is too bad that Owen died at an early age, as he would be delighted by today's micro servos and radios and would have continued to be a productive designer of small Radio Control models.

Owen Kampen
Member of the [Model Aviation] Hall of Fame

Owen Kampen grew up in Madison, Wisconsin during what is now called the golden age of aviation. Like many boys of the era, he was fascinated with everything related to aviation. When Charles Lindberg landed the Spirit of Saint Louis at the local airport, Owen's father took him to see the famous aviator and his airplane.

In WWII, Owen became a B-24 pilot and flew with the 15th Air Force from Forggia, Italy. On many of his bombing missions, the Tuskegee Airmen escorted his group. On these missions, the Airmen often did a "jive" routine in their P-51s that livened up the mission. Returning from one

mission, Owen's B-24 ran out of fuel and he glided with four dead engines to a landing on an emergency airstrip on a small island in the Adriatic Sea. After the war, Owen became a graphic artist and in a few years returned to Madison where he taught commercial art at the Madison Area Technical College. He also was a well-known portrait artist.

Owen was a charter member of the Madison Area Radio Control Society that was formed in 1961. From the beginning, Owen built models of his own design. His first construction article appeared in the November 1964 issue of Radio Control Modeler. It was a twin-engine rudder-only model called the O.K. 2.02, as it was powered by Cox .020 engines. A pair of articles in the December 1966 issue of *RCM* followed this. Both ½ A models, a *Cessna 150* and the *Whiz Kid*, employed Midwest foam wings, were powered by Cox .049 engines, and each used an Adams magnetic actuator for rudder–only control. Both high-wing models were very simple and easy to build, features that were to be characteristic of all of Owen's designs.

The *Whiz Kid* was produced as a kit by Midwest and was the basis of several follow-on models. The *Super Whiz Kid* was an enlarged version of the *Whiz Kid* that could be powered by engines ranging from a .049 to a .15 and flown as rudder-only or with four servos as "full house." It was published in the August 1969 issue of *RCM*. In 1970, Ace Radio Control produced a kit of a 34" wingspan version of the *Whiz Kid* called *Dick's Dream* in honor of Owen's good friend Dick Adams, the manufacturer of the magnetic actuator, who had died recently at an early age. The final model in the high wing *Whiz Kid* series was the 1/2A "*Wizzard*" that had a 40" constant chord foam wing. The *Wizzard* was powered by a Cox .049 and used the now available small digital radios and ACE Bantam servos for rudder and elevator control. The construction article for the *Wizzard* appeared in the January 1974 issue of *RCM*.

A second major theme in Owen's designs was based upon the full-sized Goodyear race planes that were being flown in the 1960s. The *Hoosier Hot Shot* was a 1/2A rudder-only, 36" wingspan model that resembled these shoulder wing small cockpit racers. It was published in the April 1967 issue of *RCM*. In August of that year, the magazine's cover picture showed the full-sized Goodyear racer, *Bonzo*, it's famous race pilot Steve Whiteman, and Owen's ½A *Bonzo* model in the same paint scheme. There also was a construction article for the model. Midwest produced kits for these two foam wing 1/2A models and a third, a *Shoestring*, rounded out the trio. The May 1969 issue of American Modeler contained Owen's model of the *Rivets*, a Goodyear racer that was winning most of the races. This rudder-only model was powered by a Cox .020, had a built-up wing, and employed a "baby Adams actuator." The final model in the series of Goodyear racers was the ½ A *Upstart* that used the Ace Foam wing. A construction article was published in the May 1971 issue of *RCM*. Ace Radio Control also produced it as a kit.

A third major theme in Owen's designs was centered on the use of a folded 1/32" plywood fuselage. The first model was the *Ply Guy*, developed in conjunction with Don Dewey, the editor of *RCM*. In these models, a single sheet of 1/32" plywood was wrapped around the sides and top of the fuselage formers. The bottom was sheeted separately. The result was a light but very strong fuselage. The *Ply Guy* was a .19 size model with aileron, rudder, elevator, and motor

control. It was published in the October 1968 issue of *RCM*. The next model in the series was the *Windsong* glider that had a high aspect ratio, 74" built-up wing, rudder and elevator servos, and an optional 1/2A power pod. In this model, the complete fuselage was one sheet of 1/32" plywood wrapped around teardrop-shaped fuselage formers. It was published in the March 1969 issue of *RCM*. The final two models in this series were the .20-powered *Skyraker* and the .15-powered *Plymate*. The *Skyraker* was a very sleek model that looked much like the Navy's *F8U* fighter. The *Plymate* was a typical low-wing trainer. Plans for both models were published in the October 1970 issue of *RCM* in a single article. Several pages of photographs accompanied the article that showed the sequence of building a wrapped plywood fuselage.

In 1970, Ace Radio Control produced a kit for the *Ace High* sailplane that Owen designed to utilize a 70" wing using Ace constant chord and tapered foam wing panels. This was Owen's last glider design.

During the 1960s, the bulk of 1/2A radio control models were rather small, having wingspans in the 24-36 inch range, and wing dihedral was necessary for stability. Due to the Radio Control equipment of the era, most had a somewhat high wing loading and initially only rudder control. These models often flitted about rather than flying smoothly and it took skill to fly them. As the equipment became smaller and digital radios were available, rudder and elevator control became common. However, the Cox .049s was difficult to throttle and motor control was not the rule.

Despite all of the models having landing gears and wheels, the models were typically hand-launched. In the late 1960s, Roman Bukholt, another member of MARCS, designed a pair of 1/2A *Warbirds* that were kitted by Ace. The unusual feature of these models was that they used aileron and elevator control rather than the usual rudder elevator control. This set Owen to rethinking the whole design philosophy underlying ½A Radio Control models. He decided that landing gears only added drag and weight, and were unnecessary. In addition, the models were hand-launched anyway. Owen intuitively understood the concept of span loading and concluded that 1/2A Radio Control models were too small and that low aspect ratio wings were detrimental to stability. With the use of ailerons, wing dihedral would not be necessary for stability. He also felt that Cox .049/.051 engines had plenty of power to fly a low frontal area model at high speed. The result of this thinking was a complete re-conceptualization that resulted in the *Pacer*. A construction article for this model was published in the August 1971 issue of American Aircraft Modeler and adjacent to the plan was a full-page advertisement announcing an Ace kit for the model.

The *Pacer* was a miniature version of a typical .60-powered competition pattern airplane without landing gear. It had a tapered, high aspect ratio 42" Ace foam wing, a very long tail moment arm with large stabilizer/elevators and vertical fin. The fuselage was only 2" wide and the nose was tightly cowled about the Cox .049 engine. The controls were aileron and elevator via small Ace Commander or Bantam servos. The ready-to-fly weight of the model was at or just under 20 ounces. Compared to existing 1/2A Radio Control models, the flight performance was phenomenal. It flew very fast, made large smooth loops, clean axial rolls, and could do

consecutive vertical rolls. Once the engine quit, it had an exceptional glide. If one started high enough, it was possible to do a loop followed by a roll and still have enough speed to glide around a standard landing pattern. Paul Runge of Ace Radio Control said that the *Pacer* had a major contribution to the success of his company. The only other Kampen design based on the *Pacer* was the 1975 .15 size *Super Pacer* that had landing gear and four channel controls. It was produced by ACE, but never published.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Owen Kampen was often referred to as "the big man in small models." During that time, 1/2A models were a large segment of the Radio Control scene and Owen made a major contribution to the field. For this, he was honored by being inducted into the [Model Aviation] Hall of Fame. Much to our sorrow, Owen died in 1982, of cardiac arrest, at the age of 60.

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