

The Stiletto

By Les McDonald

Chronicles



Three-time World F2B Champion, Les McDonald's Stiletto is legendary in our sport. Follow along as Les takes us on a journey of remembrance of his years designing and flying the many iterations of this outstanding design.

that inspired all the eventual Stilettoes. Notice I said profile, which is not to be confused with planform, since the Novi's elliptical wing was beyond my building skills.

I had no interest in semi-scale. Traditional Stunters did not seem to exclaim enough fantasy and the jet styles had too many frills, even though I was totally enchanted by Jim's and Dave's models. I know this seems to be at odds with what I wrote earlier. I will admit I have always admired Stunt models in all their shapes and themes but I wanted to create my own program.

That first Stiletto used a modified version of Jim Kostecky's Formula S wing. I built this wing—as I did all my other C-Tube wings—on a simple two rod wing jig. I also borrowed the stab/elevator shape and construction from the Formula S. The design's main feature was the use of only sheet wood; no blocks were used in its construction. In fact all the early Stilettoes—with the exception of two foam wing versions—used this same basic construction. I have never been an innovator, inventor, or clever designer so it was imperative to keep things simple.

I have always been able to give my planes a nice finish and this one looked pretty good. It was painted all white with metallic and light blue trim. With the addition of some modest ink lines, she was kind of sharp in a functional way. I never gave much thought to the idea that this same basic design would continue on and become so popular.

I do not remember when I started flying this first Stiletto, but it must have been around the fall of 1970. This seems to be important to some people in regards to the fact that it might be Classic legal. We have pretty much determined that it is not. I do remember those first flights though. It flew well right from the start. That was a good thing because I was clueless on how to trim a ship properly. I could accomplish some rudimentary adjustments but knew nothing about engines, props, and all the details that make any effort successful.

Even though I was stumbling along, I flew this plane a lot. It was by far the best model I had built to that point and with it I won a few Florida contests. In fact I won the 1970 KOI meet and, although no big name fliers were there, one of the judges told me after the flying was done that I could have given Ron Pavolar some good competition.

Ron was a New York transplant and by far the best flier in this area back then. He was one of those guys that never worked hard at all this. He never seemed to practice, he had a

The first Stiletto

I'm a lucky guy. In my life I've experienced many things, some good some bad. One of the really great adventures was being able to fly Stunt, at a high level, during what could arguably be considered the "Golden Years" of the event. I started flying at contests around the Southeast in 1969. I live in Miami, Florida; not exactly a hotbed of Stunt activity, so I had to figure things out on my own. Magazines were my only contact with the Stunt world; no videos, no internet, no *SN*. Oh poor me, what's a guy to do?

Al Rabe had brought his Bearcat to the 1969 King Orange contest and I finally saw the pattern flown by a Nats level flier. I was impressed at the precision, power, and business-like performance. It rained a good portion of that day so I spent the afternoon, in Al's rental car, listening to stories about planes, people, and subjects I was about to dedicate my life to.

The first Stiletto was built in the summer of 1970. It was a very basic design that was powered by a Fox .35. Jim Kostecky and Dave Gierke were my magazine heroes at the time. I had seen Jim's green Talon at the base flying field in 1968 during my Air Force years at Bunker Hill AFB, which is located near Peru, Indiana. Some AF Captain had bought it—the same plane I had seen in *Flying Models*. It was magnificent.

When Dave's Novi IV article came out I knew what I wanted; a purpose-built Stunt model. This plane had the profile



Here is the first Stiletto. It used a modified version of Jim Kostecky's Formula S wing and was powered by a Fox .35.

the top level Stunt fliers. I simply wanted to participate in a culture about which I had become deeply excited.

I had read somewhere that Bob Gieseke practiced every day, so that's what I did. Just flew that Stiletto over and over, by myself. My little Fox .35 finally gave up. Not by simply wearing out, but by

blowing up during a climb into the

fairly basic plane and he had a ton of natural talent. I really enjoyed his friendship and to this day respect his skill.

I wanted more. The madness had begun and I had decided to enter the Nats.

I was going to the Nats—without a chance or thought of winning—to witness, in person,

The first Stiletto is shown in these two photos ready for finishing and in its final paint scheme.



Overhead 8. It made a snapping noise, the prop and spinner flew off, and I took off running, seeking some sort of line tension. I never got close. The model came straight down and was done. I was devastated. The subsequent autopsy showed the crankpin sheared. It was what an engineer would call a catastrophic failure.

Plan B

My Nats debut was in doubt. After a day or so of sulking I rebounded and started a new plane. It was another Stiletto with, of course, some modifications.



That cottage was about 300 square feet, with half of it dedicated to Stunt planes.

Another C-Tube wing was built with a little thinner airfoil and a higher aspect ratio. The stab/elevator got a bit longer in span and a bit narrower in chord. My wife at that time, Nancy, and I were living in a two room cottage so my building area was a sheet of plywood on the bed. All my woodwork took place there, sanding and all. Being a good husband I was considerate enough to do the spray painting in the yard. Nancy and I slept on the sofa. It all seemed normal ...

That cottage was about 300 square feet, with half of it dedicated to Stunt planes. So the words cluttered, crowded, and dusty are a good description. Needless to say trying to construct a Stunt plane in this confusion is risky. Nancy was a trooper, and for reasons never explained she tolerated this lifestyle. Somehow in all this mess I sat on the new Stiletto's fuselage, breaking it big time. After a quick evaluation it was apparent trying to repair it would take too long and it sure wouldn't be any lighter. Another new plan was needed as the Nats were getting closer and I have never been a fast builder.

I had started building a modified Formula S some time before I built Stiletto #1 and the fuselage was pretty well complete. I just needed to hollow the blocks and provide the wing cut-out. So I proceeded to build what was basically a Stiletto with a modified Formula S fuselage. This plane was completed in about six weeks. It was painted a light brown with dark brown and dark orange trim. Powered by the, then new, O.S. Max .35S engine (what an improvement over the Fox, especially with the required muffler at that time ...), I

Bob Lampione. He and Gene Schaffer had seen the column, looked up my phone number, and just called me out of the blue. We talked for a long time and for me it was thrilling. These guys were fun and it was wonderful having these top level fliers show an interest in my program. We spoke on the phone several times after that and promised to meet at the Nats.

*Little did I know at that time
that my life would soon entwine
with many of those people.*

The '71 Nats

Nancy and I arrived in the late afternoon at the beginning of Nats week and headed straight for the big workshop hangar. My enthusiasm was at a fevered pitch. This was a Navy Nats and stuff was happening everywhere. I saw faces from the magazines; not only Stunt guys but famous free fliers and RC people as well.

The next morning Bob Lampione knocked on my motel room door and immediately started to introduce me around to the other fliers. Little did I know at that time that my life would soon entwine with many of those people.

The Tropicaire was an excellent example of my craftsmanship, but my flying lacked any true precision and polish. Since I was not a threat to anyone in the top 20, I received quite a bit of help with my flying. In thinking back it was probably more in the way of advice than help, especially from Bill Simons. He thought I was kind of cool because I nicknamed my wife "Leroy." For some reason I started calling her Leroy when we moved to Atlanta Georgia and I was working for Lockheed. Again, for reasons never explained, she didn't seem to mind.

I paid close attention to everything during the entire Nats week. I could feel the competitive tension among the top guys, so I kept my mouth shut, listened, and observed.

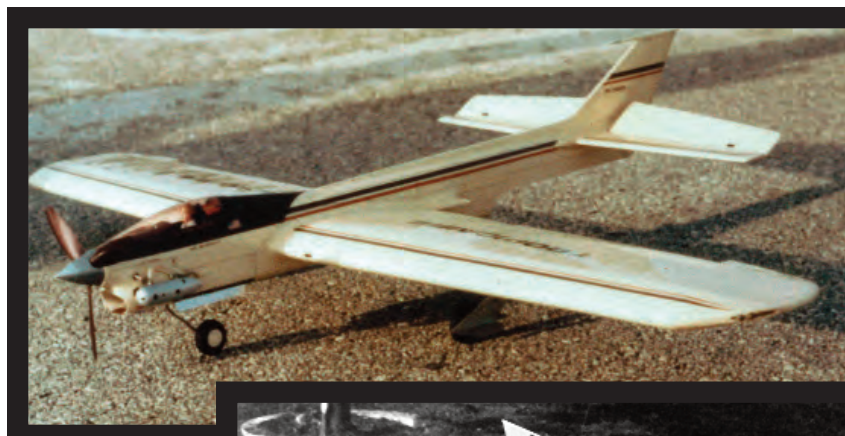
I spent as much time as he would allow with Bill Werwage. He won that Nats and was the current World Champion, so he was "The Man" in my mind. Billy and his USA-1

were the embodiment of Stunt at the international level. I placed somewhere in the top 20, but most importantly I had learned so much about the competition and made a whole bunch of new friends.

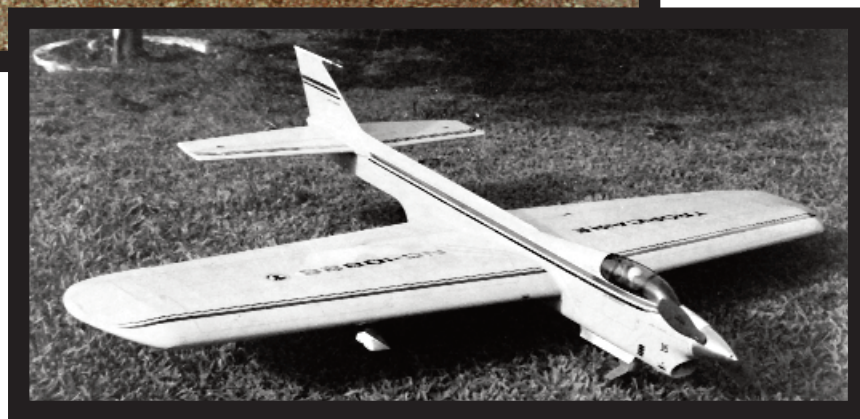
The 1971 Nats simply validated my desire to be a good Stunt guy, part of the special group, if there was such a thing.

Some new friends

That fall I started building Stiletto #3. I consider the



Les considers his Tropicaire design to actually be Stiletto #2. It featured tricycle landing gear and a Formula S-type fuselage design, but the wing was an original design by Les.



named it Tropicaire. That had a nice Florida ring to it, but actually it was the name of a local air conditioning company. And, no, they did not sponsor me. I was very pleased with this plane. She looked good in the air, had a really nice finish and flew very well.

Earlier that year I had submitted a line drawing, a couple of photos, and a brief description of Stiletto #1 to *American Aircraft Modeler*. To my absolute joy it was published in John Blum's Stunt column. I felt like a rock star. One evening, while working on the Tropicaire, I received a telephone call from



Stiletto #4 featured Les' multi-piece top block treatment that would become a trademark of the design.

Tropicaire to be Stiletto #2 since that's what it would have been had I not been so clumsy and careless. This plane would have a similar wing to the one that I used in the Tropicaire except with square tips. The stab/elevator also had the squared tips just as Stiletto #1 but with two major changes. This Stiletto was the first to use the multi-piece top section and canopy that I continued to use throughout the rest of the series, and it was fitted with a foam wing. Bob Hunt did the wing for me and it was a piece of art. At some point, just before I started putting the finish on, I realized the weight was approaching "porky," so work on it stopped and to this day I do not remember what happened to it.

About the same time I was working on Stiletto #3, I made a trip to the local hobby shop and there was approached by Captain Michael Defreitas, a pilot for British West Indian Airways. His request was simple and straightforward. Would I be interested in traveling to Port Of Spain Trinidad with my Tropicaire to fly demonstration flights in their first annual model plane exhibition? It was also requested that I spend some time helping the local CL fliers improve the construction and general quality of their efforts in a workshop setting.

Details and arrangements would be forthcoming, and so began a relationship with modelers from all over the Caribbean that I have cherished all my life.

Of course all expenses would be paid and compensation could be funded. I thought, "I can get paid to do this?" I work cheap, always have and always will, so I said, "How about surrounding me with smiling faces and cover my bar tab?" We closed the deal with a handshake.

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began a relationship with modelers from all over the Caribbean that I have cherished all my life.

My experience in Trinidad was incredible. The travel arrangements were first class, literally. Not only did I travel in the First Class section of the BWIA jet, so did my Tropicaire! We had an entire row. They provided an entire house—a really neat house—for Jim Mackey and me to stay in. Jim was a local RC expert and his tasks for the weekend were the same as mine; fly demos and help the locals. They treated us like movie stars and it seemed the entire event was very successful.

Helping the club guys was an absolute joy and the demo flights were easy. Not being a contest, I added some drama to my flights with low pullouts and lots of body gyrations. The crowd seemed to like it, and it was a *huge* crowd.

The exhibition ran for two days, and each day over 1,000 people paid a modest admission fee to attend. Jim and I were there a total of four days.

We helped the locals on Friday, flew demos on Saturday and Sunday, and then on Monday just hung out with all our new friends. Each evening there was some social function or party to attend and on Friday we did a live TV show during the sports segment on the nightly news. I returned to Miami on Monday night exhausted but thrilled about my excellent adventure.

Lipstick on a pig

I started working on Stiletto #4. Using my new multi-piece fuselage, this one featured a larger wing and stab. The choice of power was still the O.S. .35S but I overestimated the power these little motors could produce. The wing area was around 620 square inches, so you already know where this is going. Construction used my basic C-Tube wing and built up stab/elev setup with a longer nose moment to offset what would probably be more weight. It actually came in at a reasonable weight and had a sporty look to it. With lots of ink lines and trim paint it showed off my slick finish.

In reality I had put lipstick on a pig. I tried and tried but could not make this thing fly well. My Tropicaire just flew better, but I think I was in denial and kept working at it. I finally crashed it, not intentionally, I could never do that, but it did put an end to my frustration. I wanted a Stiletto for the Nats but it seemed I just couldn't get there. Like a tough date, ya' gotta keep trying ...

It was beginning to look like another Nats with the Tropicaire. This was not all bad for one simple reason: I could fly now. I had learned so much about flying the pattern, trimming, engine runs, and a bunch of little details. I looked forward to being, at least, moderately competitive.

In early 1972 I received a call from Capt. Mike at BWIA. Another air show was being planned and would I please attend? He explained this one would be much bigger so could I please invite the current F2B World Champion, Mr. Bill Werwage, to come down also? They had already contacted some of the biggest names in RC and also wanted to round things out with a contingent of CL Combat fliers from the US. Somehow I was able to arrange for Billy and a group of Combat guys to hook up with the promoters and everything was set.

The list of talent at this event was very impressive and, once again, I made a lot of new, lifelong friends. Like before, I had a wonderful experience but the thing I remember most was

Billy's positive comments about my new found flying skills.

For the next several years I was fortunate enough to be invited to more of these Aeromodeling Exhibitions in both Trinidad and Jamaica.

The '72 Nats

Bill Werwage and I—along with our wives, Nancy and Mary—had decided to share a motel room at the 1972 Nats. He had just won his second World Championship title, so what better way to learn even more than from “The Man” himself?

I did find out, though, that women are a lot more picky than men when it comes to excess water in a bathtub that will not drain.

Actually it went pretty well up until Mary dropped a shampoo bottle cap down the bathtub drain. I soon learned two things. First: All the lodging proprietors around Glenview NAS were thrilled to have their establishments filled. Second: These same proprietors were not overly concerned with customer service. The patrons—us—seemed to be kind of messy with all the epoxy, castor oil, and general grime we create, so we just had to make do at shower time. I did find out, though, that women are a lot more picky than men when it comes to excess water in a bathtub that will not drain.

I had grown a mustache to celebrate my attendance and I soon discovered everyone else had grown one too. Simons, Schaffer, Lampione, and others sprouted lip hair and it became evident right away: We all just wanted to be like Werwage.

I had a much different attitude at the '72 Nats. I had the Tropicaire flying well and I had practiced a lot. I was there to compete, not just fly and socialize. I still had the excitement and enjoyment of being a part of all this but it was now time to find out where I would be in the 1972 pecking order. Anywhere in the top 10 would be good enough.

Things looked mighty bright from the start. Appearance points were generous and qualifying went my way. I was thrilled because I placed first on my circle—ahead of Werwage. The biggest thrill was that evening when Billy told me of his concern about Al Rabe and me. He thought that we would be tough competitors in the finals. I was on cloud nine. Already the '72 Nats was a success for me.

Eighteen of us moved on to the final two flights and when it was over Al Rabe, with his Sea Fury, placed first. Bob Gieseke was second and Bill Rutherford placed third. I finished in seventh, just behind Billy, but most importantly ahead of Phelps, Silhavy, and Trostle. The whole gang was there and I was comfortably in the mix. Mission accomplished. Billy had inspired me with his recent victories at the World Championships and I believe it was around this time I started dreaming about being on an FAI World Championship team, just to be a part of it. It all seemed so exotic and special. I was still in “new guy mode” big on expectations and short on experience but it was exciting to think about.

Fresh-cut grass

In September I attended the “Eastern FAI Semi Finals/Mid America Championships” at Lexington Kentucky. A good placing there would allow me to enter the Team Selection meet in 1973. This was by far the coolest contest—outside the Nats—that I had been to so far. Actually it was two contests on the same weekend, and most of the well known Midwest fliers were there. Throw in Gene Schaffer and Al Rabe and I knew it was special.

The country side around Lexington is beautiful and Kearney Field made for a scenic setting. It was my first exposure to an honest to goodness dedicated CL site with paved circles, fences, trees, and the smell of fresh cut grass. I had been to one other dedicated field, in Athens Georgia, years before, but it was not anything like this.

All the contests I had been to before were either full size air fields or parking lots. Those were fine, but this event had a feel to it that was new to me and I loved it. The competition went well. In the FAI event Gene Schaffer won with Al Rabe placing second and me in third. I won the Mid America contest and even though Gene and Al had left for home I placed ahead of Lew McFarland, Jim Silhavy, and Dennis Adamisin.

Dirty Harry

I think it was during the long drive back to Miami that my life made the turn to “Stunt Addiction.” In 1972 I was a young married guy building and flying Stunt planes almost every day but still doing normal, young-married-guy things. I was having dinner with friends, going to the movies and riding dirt bikes on Sundays with my buddies. I suppose Nancy tolerated all the time, energy, and money I spent on the airplanes because we still functioned as a normal couple and we did have a lot of fun.

I was working for a sheet metal engineering company, running an NC controlled Strippet punch press, and making close tolerance aluminum parts; mostly used in medical devices. Not really a career, but a decent job. My real background was in aircraft structural repair. But in 1972 the airplane and airline industry was in shambles. Aircraft repair, at that time, was the largest employment opportunity in Miami, and if you did find work, the pay was horrible. I had a reasonable amount of job security at the engineering company so I simply had to show up, do a good job, and collect a pay check, which, in fact, is how I spent my entire working life. I was not career minded. All my buddies were settling into jobs and careers with longterm benefits while I earned just enough to pay the bills, build planes, and go to contests.

Clint Eastwood once said, in a Dirty Harry movie, that “A man's got to know his limitations.”

Winds of change were in the air, not only for me but the Stunt event as well. I totally immersed myself with my contest ambitions and looked forward to the 1973 season.

At this point my main interest was in flying the pattern. I had enjoyed showing off slick Stunt ships and appreciated the respect I was given considering my basically rookie status but



A “Trick Shirt” and faster rats

Stiletto #5 was simple and shiny. I used the same wing design and construction that was used so successfully in the Tropicaire; only the tips were different. The fuselage was built, like all the early Stiletto's, with sheet wood; no blocks. The tail set was also made from flat sheet. The cowl was built from sheet with not much of a radius anywhere.

During one of my listening periods with Billy, in Trinidad, he convinced me that the smaller planes turn better when fitted with a two-thirds-to-one control system ratio than with the more popular

one-to-one ratio. The system required less power and was easier to trim. It sounded good to me. He also pointed out it was junk if the plane was heavy. That point was moot, because a heavy plane is junk anyway. So I planned to use this control ratio hook-up in Stiletto #5. Since it was so simple it just had to be light. The #5 Stiletto still had the triangular vertical fin and rudder since I was unable to come up with anything artsy, and, heaven forbid, I would be challenged with a radius.

Just when you're getting ahead in the rat race, along come faster rats.

As I was building #5 it was obvious I needed a little something added to my program. I wanted to make my performance a bit more professional so I headed to JCPenney and picked out a basic dark blue shirt and then to the fabric store to buy some little white stars. Nancy sewed a row of stars up the front, over the shoulder, and down the back, threw on an AMA patch, and, with the now standard white pants, I looked like Mario Andretti. I knew the boys would be hard on me, but deep down I knew what I lacked for talent I could gain with showbiz. (Look back at the old pictures.) After I moved up the “food chain,” Al Rabe started wearing that nasty orange and white Hawaiian shirt.

Actually I think no one had the audacity to carry this trend any farther.

It also seemed I was in the middle of a generation change. Silhavy, McFarland, Lampione, Trostle, and some other veteran fliers were scaling back their efforts. Dave Gierke and Jim Kosticky were gone (not forgotten though) and, of course,

the true key to success was flying the pattern. To be able to fly head and shoulders above everyone else was a noble quest. It was time to look at the big picture, be realistic, and analyze my complete program.

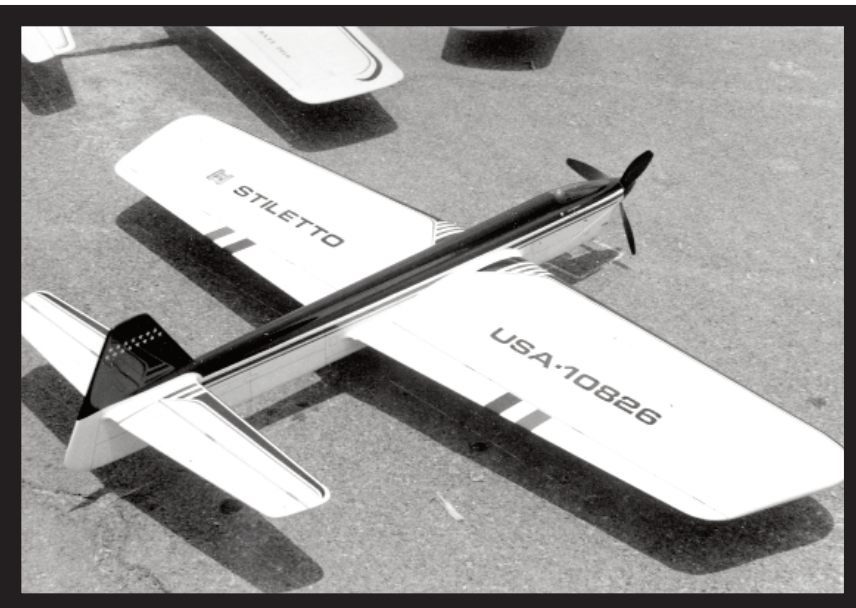
Nineteen seventy three was a team selection year and I needed to make some gains. By now I had pretty much stopped doing normal “young-married-guy” things. No more dirt bikes, movies, or dinner with friends.

Clint Eastwood once said, in a Dirty Harry movie, that “A man’s got to know his limitations.” And, limitations I had. I did not have the talent of Bob Gieseke nor Gene Schaffer. I did not have the artistry and experience of Bill Werwage. I was not even close to Al Rabe’s technical ability or level of perseverance. We also had the movie star good looks of Bob Whitley and Bob Baron’s determination. I had to work with what was available in my remedial world. My mantra became, “Keep the next plane simple. Make it shiny. Practice and practice some more.”

I wanted to make my performance a bit more professional so I headed to JCPenney and picked out a basic dark blue shirt and then to the fabric store to buy some little white stars.



Les made several trips to Trinidad to fly demonstrations and instruct the local fliers there on how to build and fly better. Here he is in Trinidad with Stiletto #5 (this photo and below).



new talent was coming in. Bob Hunt, Wynn Paul, and Jerry Pilgrim came on the scene just to name a few. What's the old saying? Just when you're getting ahead in the rat race, along come faster rats. Dennis Adamisin was still a Senior, Fancher and Walker were starting to look East, Bill Simons and Jim Young were still lurking around, and Dave Hemstrought was about to reappear. I was faced with an infestation.

A little better

Around this time Bill Simons sent me a control handle he was no longer using. Up until then I had been flying with a small EZ Just Hot Rock and he explained this would be much better. It was. I believe it was made by Art Adamisin. It was heavy and durable and I never again used any other handle. It was my security blanket until my last flight at the World Champs in 1984.

Shortly after I began flying and trimming the #5 Stiletto Remel Cooper said he would like to come to Miami and spend a few days hanging out with me and watch me practice, maybe help a little. Why not, he's a nice guy and our wives, Linda and Nancy, have always enjoyed themselves at the various contests talking about wife things. We had stayed with them during contest weekends in Jacksonville and always enjoyed "The Girls." Remel and Linda were the parents of five, blonde, blue eyed drop-dead-gorgeous young girls. They were polite, smart, good natured, and a joy to be around, which was a stretch for me because I've never been much of a kid person. Our tiny little two-bedroom house was full, active, and we enjoyed every minute. It was like a camping trip to them. Just imagine two grown men with seven females and one small bathroom ... We were now *really* close friends.

During the flying part of our visit, Remel sheepishly commented I had an angle on the right side of both my inside and outside square loops. He said I might try turning a bit more on the upper right corner of the inside squares and not quite so tight on the bottom right turn on the outsides. I flew another pattern, tried what he suggested, and asked if that was better. "A little" he said, "But give it more this time." Another pattern with the same question: "How was that?" "A little better" he said, "But you really need to make a bigger adjustment in those two corners." A little annoyed off I go again. I really cranked the inside corner and virtually let off on the bottom right outside corner. Same question: "How was that?" He replied, "A little better, you're getting there." Now I'm getting a bit testy and he's wondering why I'm not paying attention.

By the time it was dark I was only flying inside and outside square loops and we were screaming at each other over the motor noise. We bonded that day and during the next morning's flying session I had it. I could see

from inside the circle the Stiletto was now going straight up and straight down on the vertical parts of not only the square loops but the square eights as well. After a flight or two Remel sheepishly said that I was now dropping the top loop into the lower one in the vertical eight. I flew another pattern with perfect square loops, tightened up the top loop in the vertical eight and asked, "How was that?" He gave me a look and said "A little better" and we started all over again. At the end of the session I was confident in my square loops and vertical eights and Remel simply pointed out that I needed more help "with a few other things." He also expressed an interest in building one of these Stiletos for himself. I love this guy.

I hooked him up with drawings and some parts for his Stiletto and he, along with his beautiful family, made the 700-mile round trip many, many times over during the next four years. Besides flying we would sit for hours drawing lines on paper and spheres with him explaining the geometry I was trying to master.

Wynn and Keith

Armed with a good flying Stiletto and my new handle I was ready for 1973. The Nats that year were at Oshkosh, Wisconsin and the FAI Team Trials were in St. Louis, Missouri. I had stopped going to local contests on a regular basis the year before. A local contest for me was 350 miles one way. I lived far away from the action and through the years the travel became brutal; a necessary evil, but evil just the same. I attended as many contests as possible, but working made my schedule difficult.

By now the nearest event I went to was 1,000 miles one way. It would be an understatement to claim I was an excellent night driver. I could probably write a book about some of these trips. Tickets, wrong turns, flat tires, and waking up at 75 mph would only be the beginning. One time, upon returning from Europe, I awoke from a rest area nap, in the middle of the night, and had no idea where I was. We're not talking which road, we're talking which *country*. It was at least 20 minutes and 20 miles until I realized I was not in Belgium, France, or New Jersey. I was in South Carolina. Fear and relief simultaneously ...

Wynn explained to me that he and Keith Trostle had been discussing, in detail, the idea of forming a special interest group within the AMA.

Sorry, I slipped ahead a few years—back to 1973. That was going to be an interesting year. The Nats in Oshkosh were to be one hundred percent AMA on a civilian airfield, for the first time. But more important was the phone call I received from Wynn Paul. Wynn and I had become pretty close friends by this time. He seemed to know everyone well, was an upcoming competitor and lived right in the middle of the action. His quest for knowledge, enthusiasm, and respect for the traditions of our event was contagious. I always enjoyed our conversations and still do.

Wynn explained to me that he and Keith Trostle had been discussing, in detail, the idea of forming a special interest group within the AMA. I was one of the first to hear of this and was quite impressed with the outline of objectives that would surely make it better for all of us. This became our main topic of conversations in the next few weeks and it would be suggested the idea of me becoming the Vice President of this new endeavor. I stated that I was, "very honored to have been asked" but that I was not much of an administrator. "Not important," Wynn said. "Many names were tossed around before yours," he told me. "Most of the top fliers are really intelligent and may over-think the details that Keith and I want achieve," Wynn explained. "Look," he said, "The bottom line is it's you or Billy." Billy was one of the smart ones but he never answered his phone and his driver's license is suspect ... "You in or out?" Okay, count me in. I love talking on the phone about Stunt and I have a driver's license most of the time.

In July Nancy and I headed for Oshkosh, 1,800 miles to the North.

The '73 Nats

A memorable Nats this was. It had a different flavor than the others. Not as much practice space, but it was so windy you could fly whenever you wanted. I hate wind, always have and always will, so I didn't practice very much. My limited understanding of propellers and engine run characteristics made it that much more intimidating. The air at these "up North" contests was always so different than South Florida and I found it difficult to adapt. I would start fooling with line rake and tip weight, change props, and then really get into trouble. By the time the first official flights started things were usually back to the same settings I came with. Run what you bring ...

Because of the wind, I spent a lot of Nats week socializing. There was lots of talk about Keith and Wynn's new association and some interest with Harry Higley about an article for *Model Airplane News* featuring the Stiletto. A big treat for me was meeting and becoming friends with Bob Gialdini and Dave Hemstrought; worthy fliers from days past. They were both cool, classy, and would have an impact on me personally in the coming years.

I managed through the wind during qualifications and headed for Saturday's finals. Once again the top 18 flew two flights to determine the final placings. Saturday was breezy but not windy. So now I was really nervous, since I hadn't practiced much. The constant fear of embarrassment was always there. The fear of failure always filled my head. I had not yet learned how to think and mentally prepare. I never did overcome my fear of flying a totally horrible flight or even the constant concern of some major or even minor disruption to my routine. I suppose that's why I practiced so much. And in Oshkosh it paid off with a third-place finish. Remel Cooper deserves much of the credit here for this one and also for my later successes. I realized long ago, for me to be good at this, I would not be able to do anything else. Of course I did do normal human things, went to work, brushed my teeth, stuff like that, but not other model plane things. I never flew anything other than my own contest plane during the season and never flew anything "for fun." I felt guilty if my thoughts or efforts were not completely focused on the mission at hand.

The FAI Team Selection contest was just a few weeks away and the new association, PAMPA, seemed assured of a good start. I had a deal started for a feature magazine article and I had just placed third at the Nats, so let's get to St. Louis and see how it all shakes out.



Stiletto #6 was a departure in design for Les. He incorporated a tapered top block and a new vertical fin shape. He went back to the straight top block configuration for the remainder of the models in the Stiletto series.

Off I go again in my trusty Datsun 510, logging 1,300 miles to Buder Park just outside St Louis. It was Labor Day weekend 1973.

The '73 Team Trials

This was to be a reality check for me. It was hot. Really, really hot, and we all had problems because of the heat. Bob Gieseke was adding white gas to his fuel to achieve enough economy to get through the pattern and others were doing things to compensate for the high temperature. During afternoon practice my little O.S. .35 would—at about the square eight—take off dead lean, with fuel boiling in the ports. I finally learned to keep it under shade with a chilled towel wrapped around the nose before each flight. This was a placebo and I simply flew the entire contest with no power. It gets hot here in Miami, but the air stays thick. This Missouri stuff wasn't even good for breathin'. *(Note: Missourians please direct your letters to Les McDonald. —Ed.)* My lack of experience with the propulsion end of the airplane was evident and I wound up in fifth place. I was lucky to be that high up in the standings. Gieseke, Schaffer, and Werwage would be the F2B Team Members representing America in Czechoslovakia the next summer. I, on the other hand, would have to wait two more years.

On the way back to Miami three things were evident. The first was the totally obvious fact that I needed to make some large advances in my ability to adapt to conditions that were so different than at home. The second was the fact that gasoline for my car was extremely hard to find. The infamous gas shortage had begun. The third was the apparent lack of compassion for my fifth place from the Missouri Highway Patrol. Way over the posted speed limit and it was jail time

(See, they got you for that Missouri air comment! —Ed.) I didn't have enough cash for bail and law enforcement in 1973 didn't accept MasterCard. I was "in custody" all day and finally worked a deal to wire them the fine within 24 hours. I had been in this situation before but never so far from home, alone, and with a Stunt ship in the back seat.

O.S. Max 35S—\$17.95 retail

I had started construction of the #6 Stiletto casually back in the middle of the summer. It was simply to be a backup to #5 and was identical in every way except the fuse top and vertical fin. Instead of the top profile being horizontal like all the others it tapered down and then blended into a fin and rudder very reminiscent of Lew McFarland's Shark 45.

I was in no hurry to get this one built for one simple reason: humidity. Around here in Miami painting these things must be done in January or February. Even though I now had a small workroom to build in, spray painting was still done in the yard. I finished up the #6 Stiletto in early February. This one had a very nice finish with the now traditional Stiletto paint scheme. Test flying and trimming would come later. The weather in South Florida is glorious from December until early May. The air is so perfect it's a joke to do honest testing; anything works well. You soon find when the heat and humidity kick in that the flaws start showing up. I always waited until Daylight Saving Time and then hit it every day, weather permitting, all summer. I was not overly bummed about not making the team. I simply had to get better in two years. I could build a good straight, light airframe. I could apply a nice finish and not add too much weight. I could also make these things fly pretty well. My biggest liability was the front end. I would run those little O.S. .35s until the front bushing wore out then buy and install a new



Stiletto #6 in the foreground and Stiletto # 5 in the background: The top block and vertical fin shape differences are very noticeable in this comparison shot.

engine. If I didn't like the way it ran I would buy and install another. If that one didn't act like I wanted it to, I would use the one before that one. That was my "motor program" until 1975.

My "propeller program" was very similar. Try all the various 10 x 6 props available and sometimes even a Grish nylon three blade. I had the skill to paint and balance them. Pitch? I don't need to check the stinking pitch! I got more props in my box ... Some of my very talented competitors had programs similar to this but they seemed to be able to adapt to the shortfall with the gift of flying ability.

Distractions

I was a busy boy that winter. I finished up Stiletto #6 and then started #7. The seventh Stiletto was to be a duplicate of #6 except with one-to-one controls. It was never completed. Never made it to fillercoat and here's why: A magazine article for *Model Airplane News*, RC cars, a new job, and Bill Werwage.

I'm sure any one reading this who is over fifty five years old raced slot cars back in the sixties. I did and was good at it. Not *national* good, but South Florida good. When I left Miami for the Air Force a fellow by the name of Art Carbonell became the big slot car cheese around here and, when RC car racing became popular in the early seventies, he started driving for Anderson Racing, a respected local operation. His skill in setting up and racing these cars was noticed and he moved away to St. Louis to drive for Team Delta, a premiere outfit on a much bigger stage. He was very successful, driving for various teams through the years and he became a World Champion.

That left Gil Anderson without a driver and he contacted me. He figured I could learn how to do this based on my slot car prowess. I started racing Gil's RC car in January '74. This was a very steep learning curve that I tried to master and even though I provided some sparks of potential we only achieved modest results. The time and effort brought my Stiletto agenda to a virtual halt.

I did find the time to do the Stiletto article for *Model Airplane News*. I make a big deal out of the smallest things so

when something big like this came along I agonized over every word, every detail on the plans. All of a sudden, when starting the article, I remembered hanging on to every word and detail I had read from Gierke, Kostecky, Gialdini, and others. This would define my life. Okay, I reasoned, I'm not Gierke, Kostecky, Gialdini, or others. No one is gonna hang on anything I write. Just do it and maybe they can sell a few plans. Somehow I was able to do the words and ink the plans. I hoped they were happy because I sure was relieved after I sent it off.

By now the new Stunt association had a name and was moving into projects, agendas, and communication unheard of a year before. Keith and Wynn gave PAMPA the legs it needed to run with. Structured within AMA guidelines it was soon to become the special interest group that all others

would try to emulate. As Vice President I really didn't contribute much. For example, skill level classes were suggested and I did not agree. I felt the existing Junior, Senior, and Open categories were fine. In hindsight I admit the various skill classes were a great idea so I'm glad my sword was dull. Keith and Wynn were doing all the work, making things happen, and we all still benefit from the basic mission they set out to accomplish. Obviously some have tried to broaden the scope and tweak the direction of PAMPA but to this day the politics and passion simply create history within this group of amazing people.

Keith and Wynn gave PAMPA the legs it needed to run with. Structured within AMA guidelines it was soon to become the special interest group that all others would try to emulate.

One afternoon in March, while visiting Orange Blossom Hobbies, a conversation started between the owner and myself. The owner, Mr. Lew Quick, whom I had known since I was eight years old, had suggested I might be interested in working for the hobby shop. The fast growing radio control industry was allowing them to expand once more and they needed help. I had worked for them in the past, working part time in the slot

car store. I was in high school then so it was a perfect Saturday job. As the conversation progressed the only part I remember was when he said "I always thought you made good money at the metal shop; that's why I never offered you a job before." There's a cartoon somewhere in that statement, but shortly afterward I accepted the offer and gave my two weeks notice to the metal shop.

Up to this point I had only flown Stiletto #6 a few times. It seemed to be okay but my head was filled with all this other stuff so I didn't get much flying accomplished. The magazine article had taken more time than I ever anticipated. The RC car racing was an exhausting, humbling experience. and starting a new job in a week had me fried mentally. There were too many things to think about and not enough room to store the information.

In early April 1974, with only a few days to go at the metal shop, I received a phone call from Bill Werwage. Perhaps you may be unaware that Billy had been a professional musician for many years. He was playing at a nice hotel in Atlanta that week. He said he had brought the old USA-1 and was experimenting with an HP engine. He wanted a power unit that could be made super quiet and was trying all sorts of things. He explained all the expenses were covered up there, the room was great, we could keep our planes at Tom Dixon's house, and we could help each other. I would simply be a band member that was "sitting out" and not playing.

Once more Nancy said "go for it" and I was on my way with Stiletto #6 in tow.

Billy would work from about 9:00 p.m. until 2:00 a.m. and I would "sit out" in the bar. This was not an unfamiliar setting

for me. We would sleep from about 3:00 a.m. until about 7:00 a.m. and then pick up our planes from Tom's basement shop. We flew all day, went back to sleep from 5:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. and then Bill went "back to work" and I went back to "sitting out."

We did this for a week. I was his launch stoooge and he helped me trim Stiletto #6. There was a lot more though. Class was in and I absorbed what I could. I watched Billy shim sleeves up and down. I watched him try different head shapes. I watched him open up and then restrict muffler outlets. But, most beneficial to me, was watching Billy work with props. It became obvious the next step in the Stiletto program was to be a larger plane with a SuperTigre .46. That wasn't going to happen in 1974 since my Stiletto #6 program was in place, but I did sand and reshape many 10 inch props. Lots of enthusiasm produced minimal results, but I was learning ...

My Stiletto article appeared in the June issue of *Model Airplane News*. I was thrilled and a bit disappointed. Thrilled because I knew to be a famous Stunt guy you had to have something published. Disappointed because I felt it wasn't a very exciting article and had no earth shaking features on the plans. I remembered the wonderful drawings in Bob Gialdini's Olympic article in the 1963 *American Aircraft Modeler Annual*, the humor in Jim Kostecky's Talon piece in the December, 1968 *Flying Models*, and the helpful tips provided, in print, by Dave Gierke in all of his articles. Whatever, I'm going to be known as a builder/flier not a writer, so let's get to it. Wait a minute; these guys fly good too. I'm still not worthy. **SN**

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The Stiletto

By Les McDonald

Chronicles

The 1974 Nationals were contested in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Lots of heat and humidity, very much like Miami, so I figured for once I had an advantage. Yeah right. Ted Fancher and the other west coast guys couldn't even breathe in this air but in a day or so they could still fly. They were taking salt tablets, drinking tons of water, and sweating like politicians in church but their stuff still looked good in the air.

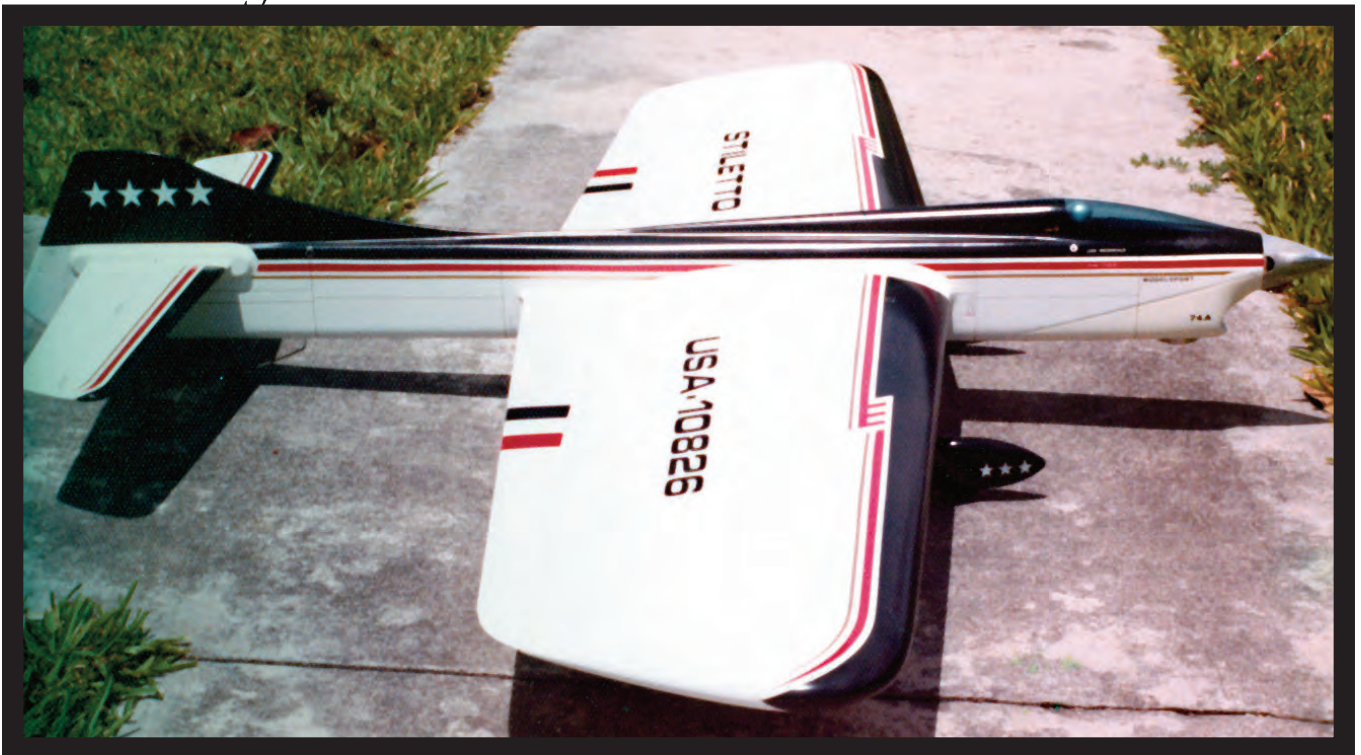
Stiletto #6 had the tapered top deck with the Shark type fin and early in the week Simons nicknamed it "Sharklette." In the air it just did not have that "Locked In" look even though it

was very stable during the flat and vertical sections of the pattern. Note to self: All future Stiletos must be *straight* on the top.

This was the first PAMPA Nats with Keith Trostle as the event director. It went well and was considered a success. Because of Wynn Paul and *Stunt News* we were all well aware of the format, times, and places to be in advance; it was great.

I tied with Jerry Pilgrim for top appearance points. His plane was magnificent. It was bright yellow with the neatest red flame trim I have ever seen. Super clean and tasteful, I was honored to start out with the same number of points he had.

Stiletto 6 had the tapered top deck with the Shark type fin and early in the week Simons nicknamed it "Sharklette."



Here is Les' Stiletto #6 that he flew in the 1974 Nats in Lake Charles, LA. In this photo the model is shown just after the final clear coat had been applied and it is patiently waiting to be rubbed out to a high gloss. Note the angled top block which, in Les's opinion, didn't present as well as the straight-top-block versions.



In 1975 Les made the jump to a larger airplane and produced this 700-square-inch, ST.46-powered, foam-winged beauty. He called it, appropriately enough, the Stiletto 700!

When the flying started I was never in contention for the win. Gieseke, Schaffer, Rabe, and Simons had everyone pretty well covered. I qualified well but in the end wound up in fifth place. We all may have been looking forward to bigger engines but that little red Nobler equipped with the Fox 35 was still magic. Magic enough that Bob had just won the World Championship and now the Nats.

The plane I took note of was Bill Simons' Scorpio. It was big but it had corner. I looked at his Scorpio long and hard and even though I didn't measure anything I made some mental notes. I always thought I had a photographic memory, but sometimes I would forget to put film in that camera.

It was a good Nats. There was plenty of practice space, it was well organized, and there was a banquet to finish it all up. It's nice to be able to visit and socialize after the contest but I was anxious to get home and start the 46 size plane. I was still committed to racing the car and had just started learning the hobby business from the inside. Working in a hobby shop—

especially a large one—is different than you would imagine.

After Lake Charles, flying for the year was over. I had won the Winston-Salem contest in June, placed fifth at the Nats in July, and did an exhibition in Jamaica earlier in the year.

No commercial value

With everything that was going on, the *Model Airplane News* article, the car racing, and the new job I was overwhelmed—almost. The week spent with Billy put things into perspective. I did not care about anything other than earning a spot on the FAI team. The *MAN* article was done and I would complete my responsibility to Anderson Racing. I started drawing and sourcing parts for a 46 size Stiletto. Now that I worked for one of the largest hobby operations in the world, I was able to get help with stuff I needed for this new program. The shop I worked for, Orange Blossom Hobbies, was only the retail portion of a larger operation. The corporation grew from the slot car industry and included a

“What a magnificent piece of work with no commercial value.”

Fear of failure or embarrassment was my motivator.

distributorship, an ad agency, the retail store, and manufacturing connections in Taiwan. Please don't think everyone just threw stuff at me. I paid for most of it, but it was nice to make a few phone calls and be able to get good wood blocks or hard to find engine parts.

This didn't happen over night or because of my competition success. It happened because of the company I worked for. For many years I would keep my Stiletto in the store during the day since my practice field was closer to work than home. That way I could hit some practice each evening before going home. One day the owner, Lew Quick, looked at the Stiletto, then at me, and casually said, "What a magnificent piece of work with no commercial value." Pretty well sums it up I guess ...

In the Zone?

Three items were definite for Stiletto #8. It would be powered with a SuperTigre 46. I would use a foam wing from Control Specialties, and it would have an airfoiled stabilizer/elevator assembly. I liked the radiused fin leading edge on Stiletto #6 and #7 so I would draw that in, and the parallel top was a no-brainer. Since I was convinced it would be a tad heavy, I would use one-to-one controls and be sure I had provisions to flow plenty of air through the front end. I would get night sweats thinking all this would twirl around on .018 diameter lines, but I had no choice there.

I started this project with a vengeance. The noble quest of flying head and shoulders above everyone else was a pipe dream. It all came down to being able to maximize what is provided during a competition. The wind, the sun, your flight order is what it is. Contests that are won with some margin in the score are won by the guys who have their stuff working. That's why we practice and test. I could never adjust to what the judges were "looking for." I had to be comfortable with the plane and a gazillion things had to take place for this to happen. I remember being comfortable only once during the finals at a contest and that was at the FAI Team Trials in 1979. The top guys always fly the same. The winner is usually the one with the plane, prop, sun, reference points, engine sound, background, and comfort zone all in alignment. Simply put: When the equipment is working well, you fly better. Duh!

Some guys fly better on certain fields or in certain situations than others. I was more comfortable on open flying fields, not the dedicated park circles, but my greatest success was on park-like circles. Go figure.

I recently read on StuntHangar.com that I had mentioned, many years ago, about "Being in the zone" to Pat Robinson. I have decided "The Zone" is simply the place where all these things fall into sequence and you're comfortable. Maybe some fliers live there; I didn't. Fear of failure or embarrassment was my motivator.

Rest in peace Mr. Anderson

By October my deal with the RC race car was over and shortly afterward Mr. Anderson died of a heart attack. I never knew he had a bad heart and only wish I could have given him some better results at the track. These people are dedicated and work just as hard as we do, in a nastier environment even. I still think about all the times we argued. Me whining about the tires and the settings and he telling me the tires and settings were good if I could drive the stupid car a bit faster.

The 700

When my wing arrived from Control Specialties I was amazed at the strides Bob Hunt had made in foam wing technology. This thing was a piece of art and it was light. I was sure this was some super wing made "just for me." I sent him



From any angle, the Stiletto 700 was a sensual design. Les didn't really like the way this model presented on the ground. There are many who would disagree with him on that! He did, however, like the way that it presented in the air and also the way it flew, especially the way it performed in the square maneuvers.

The winner is usually the one with the plane, prop, sun, reference points, engine sound, background, and comfort zone all in alignment.



In this close-up of the nose of the Stiletto 700 you can see evidence of the damage from the 1975 Nats mishap; just a few minor cracks. Note the functional air outlets. These were made from formed 1/32 plywood. There were holes under the outlets and baffles within the nose to direct the heated air out.

Some weight in the tail brought it to life and although this was not an attractive plane on the ground it presented itself in the air really well.

the templates and a planform drawing and he simply pointed out, "This is how they all come out now." I was impressed.

I never did produce real plans for any of my Stiletos except for the two published articles that I did. I would draw out what I wanted on heavy brown wrapping paper, in pencil. The foam wing made this is even easier.

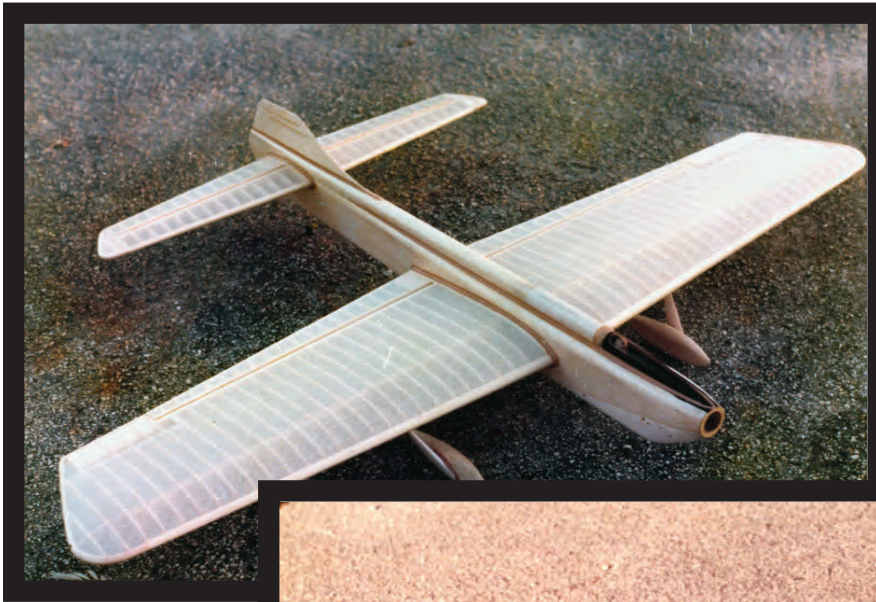
The Stiletto 700 took shape. No more than a bigger airframe with a 46 engine. I used the same bellcrank, pushrods, leadouts, and control horns I was so familiar with in the 35 ships. The stab and elevators were constructed from sheet with very few parts. This was an airfoiled affair about three quarters of an inch thick with a slight undercamber built into the elevators. A conventional Stiletto fuselage with a deeper belly for more side area and some little scoops on the front sides were added to pull out hot air. It went together easily and I had it in the air by March. It was a bit heavier than I wanted but that seems to happen with all of them.

It flew well from the start and never needed to be cut or added to. I worked with the front end right away. These airplanes were non-adjustable. Move the leadouts, add weight to the nose or tail, change tip weight, tweak the flaps, and fiddle with engine offset. That's it. In my case that was good. Given the current planes with all their adjustments along with a

handle that allows all the various parameters, I never would have slept. No movable pipes, no carbon props. I messed with the muffler, tried different venturis, shimmed the head, fooled around with fuel, made sure compression was good, and then cut, shaped, pitched, carved, and balanced props. Many times I just used a standard propeller of some sort.

Right from the start the 700 flew better in rough weather than anything I had before but it still wasn't perfect. Some weight in the tail brought it to life and although this was not an attractive plane on the ground it presented itself in the air really well. *(There are many who would argue with you, Les, about the 700's appearance on the ground. Many of us thought it was one of the most beautiful models of all times whether in the air or on the ground. —Ed.)* It was way underpowered by today's standards, but it was a horse in 1975. For a large plane it turned well, pivoting nicely right on the CG.

Always looking for more, and not at all happy with flying on the .018 clotheslines, I tried .014 solid lines for the first time. These supplied instant improvement ... for eight or ten flights. After that it didn't groove any more; something just wasn't right. I had made several sets of solids with slightly different lengths so I tried another set. All was good for a few more flights and then there was the same loss of feel. This went



These photos of Vince Schentzer's version of the first I-Beam Stiletto (Number 11) are obviously out of sequence in the Stiletto story. We decided to run them here because Les introduces Vince in this installment and we wanted to acknowledge his craftsmanship. Don't worry, we have more photos of this gorgeous plane to show you when the story catches up! Right from the start Les was impressed with Vince's ability to grasp advanced concepts and master building and flying skills rapidly. Evidence of that is that fact that the Stiletto pictured is Vince's fifth stunt model!

on for several days until I discovered the culprit.

I had always practiced at a place called Masters Field, a Navy airbase built during World War Two and the site of the early King Orange contests. The runways on which I flew were constructed from crushed sea shells. This surface was like some industrial strength cutting table with diamond flakes, obviously put there in 1942 to scratch

and gall solid flying lines. I went back to the .018 cables but I always did keep a fresh set of solids in my tool box, just in case (but I never did use them).

By April I was flying in the mornings on my way to work and in the evenings on my way home. Many times waiting for the sun to rise high enough for sufficient daylight to fly and try something I had changed or modified at home the night before. I did this for years. I don't know why, but Nancy still put up with it.

Now I have a "Flying Buddy"

During all this testing with the 700 I met Vince Schentzer. He would stop every evening on his way home from work and watch me fly. For the first week or so we didn't speak but eventually he introduced himself. He was fascinated by the plane and what I was doing. Like all of us at some point in our lives we found some sort of magic watching a Stunt plane in the sky. He did have some background flying Control Line sport planes as a kid so he came by the store and I hooked him up with a Stunt kit, engine, and all the other stuff.

I had no interest in helping a newbie. In what seemed like no time he was out flying his new Stunt ship, every evening, at



the other end of "my" runway. We became friends, although I didn't help him very much. He would look for advice and ask questions in the hobby shop when I was at work, not at the flying field. Within a month or so he could fly the pattern and shortly after that he scratch built a Stunter that was pretty much his own design. I started helping him a bit at the field and then in his workshop. Our wives became friends and all of a sudden I had a flying buddy.

To Vince this was a hobby. Like most guys, he just wanted to build a pretty plane and fly a presentable pattern. He was totally aware of my goals, cognizant of the time and dedication it required, and understanding of the imbalance of my lifestyle.

Remel, Linda, and "The Girls" came down and I introduced Remel to the 700. I had learned to listen and pay attention to what he was saying. No screaming now; just constructive criticism that I accepted.

Remel now had his own Stiletto program working well and it was obvious that someone was helping him. Other people were flying Stiletto's also. Ronnie Farmer had one that was very neat, from *MAN* plans reduced ten percent with, I believe, an O.S. Max 25 engine.

The Southeastern Championships

I just stood there—handle in hand—for about fifteen seconds.

My big debut with Stiletto #8—the 700—took place in June at the Southeastern Championships. This was always a very neat place for a Control Line meet. I had been there before but in 1975 it had achieved AAAA status, and was extremely well attended and organized. The site was the huge parking lot adjacent to the Convention Center in downtown Winston Salem North Carolina. Plenty of practice space, nearby motels, restaurants, and all the conveniences of a city right there. The wives loved this place—I think ...

There was an impressive entry list also. Schaffer from NY, Trostle from DC. The whole Southeast bunch was there also: Randy Smith, Tom Dixon, Dave Hemstrought, Remel Cooper, Tommy Luper, and others.

Other stuff was going on also. There was Pro Wrestling in the Center and a Tractor Pull in the stadium nearby. This cross section of humanity was all lodged and feeding in the local establishments. In the motel “The Girls” were totally fascinated by the wrestlers and insisted on following them around. They were polite, gracious gentlemen but we soon became concerned that one of the smaller girls might be accidentally eaten at the breakfast buffet by one of these huge men! All “The Girls” did survive the weekend and this mixture of cultures actually blended quite well.

A little coaching help from both Remel and Hemstrought

They were polite, gracious gentlemen but we soon became concerned that one of the smaller girls might be accidentally eaten at the breakfast buffet by one of these huge men!

turned this into my biggest win so far. The first round was flown in turbulent wind. The 700 came through leading Gene with a 531 to his 520. After a big rain storm went through the air settled for the second round. Gene and I had separated ourselves from the pack a bit and squared off in really good air. In the second round Gene flew well and received a 548. Confident that was “good enough” he headed back to New York before my flight. Too bad because I wished he had been there for my 584.

I finally had a program that worked in changing conditions.

With the Nats just a few short weeks away, I headed back to Miami. Constant refinement is always needed and the pressure

mounted. I wanted to clean up my flying even more and by now Vince could help. My real objective was a top three at the Nats so I would be in a good position for the Team Trials coming up in early September.

The '75 Nats

The 1975 Nats were in Lake Charles again. I liked that site since the weather was very much like Miami and there was plenty of practice space.

Before the Nats I had spent quite some time with Vince trying to determine the perfect line length for the 700 and I remember that 66 feet, eyelet to eyelet, seemed ideal. I also fitted up a new engine since I had been flying so much.

Nats week started like the others before. Seeing old friends and making some new ones. A few test flights trying some different props and then by Wednesday some coaching from Remel and a few tips from Bob Gialdini. After a few minor corrections I just flew on my own. Around mid day, just before processing, I was doing a level lap in the middle of a pattern when the down line let go. Hanging on the up line the 700 did three or four super tight inside loops, stalling a little more each time around, then “whack” into the runway. I just stood there—handle in hand—for about fifteen seconds. I was frozen in time, stunned I suppose. Then someone ran over to the plane, looked at me, and said, “It ain’t too bad!”

Like I proclaimed in the beginning of this story “I’m a lucky guy.” The spinner had hit a tar strip between the concrete slabs softening the impact. I could see that my .35 size leadout had broken on the down side. The hit was directly vertical so the engine went straight back, bending the mounting bolts but not hurting the motor mounts and, thankfully, it had stopped running. The prop survived. The horizontal stab tips were going forward a bit so I knew that the spar had broken. A few scuffs, cracks, and some cosmetic damage, my only real questions were, “What was the condition of the wing? How was it on the inside?”

I gathered my thoughts and got busy. Normally I would return to the motel room so I could repair it in peace, but so many people followed me back to the hangar we started fixing it there. Later that same afternoon Ted Fancher clipped a tar strip, chipping the prop and shaking the front end off his beautiful plane. He, too, was in the hangar trying to do a much more extensive repair than I was dealing with.

My wing seemed to be okay. Had it been damaged it would have been Bob Hunt’s wing! I was damaged also, but thanks to everyone’s help I got my head back into place and with the 700 repaired I lined up for processing and appearance judging. Test

My wing seemed to be okay.
Had it been damaged it would
have been Bob Hunt’s wing!

flights would take place the next morning. Ted was also up and running but his situation was about to deteriorate big time.

I gave up one or two appearance points, and I'm certainly not complaining. My life had ended just a few hours before but I knew, until the test flights, I was still living on borrowed time.

Repaired leadouts, different engine, and some epoxy in the tail, I can't sleep. I could have though. A couple of flights with several tweaks and a handle adjustment, and all seemed well. The wing hadn't folded, the spare engine was fine, so please just let me get through this nightmare. My situation was rosy compared to Bob Gieseke.

On the first day of competition he somehow picked the handle up upside down and that resulted in a crash in which he broke the fuselage in two places on his little Red Nobler. Shortly after that he was back at the motel trying to salvage what he could. During all this commotion we heard a huge crash. While Fancher was sorting out his repair job a Kwik Link let go and turned his efforts into dust.

In qualifications I placed first on my circle. Scoring high in the First Round, I passed in the Second Round and watched Al Rabe put in another flight. He had qualified easily in the First Round and was merely hoping to jump ahead of me for a little "Psyche." He came up five points short. So far, so good, now on to the Finals.

Minus Schaffer, Simons, Rutherford, McFarland, and the Adamisin boys, the usual suspects, filled the final spots for the two flight finals. The new face in the top group was Jerry Pilgrim with that magnificent yellow and red flamed ship. Round One was tight. Gieseke may have wounded that little Nobler but you couldn't tell. At the end of Round One Gieseke was in first place one point ahead of me. Rabe was in third, only ten points behind.

For Round Two the breeze came up a bit and Bob's score

All of a sudden I'm a serious contender; my moment of glory had arrived.

went down a bit. All of a sudden I'm a serious contender; my moment of glory had arrived. Nice takeoff, good wingover, and then a little change in the wind direction. I should have done an extra lap before the inside rounds but I didn't. Bad decision.

My inside round loops were to the left side, not directly down wind, and they were a bit egg shaped. Not bad, but enough to take the edge off a really good flight. After landing, some people thought it may have been good enough. I was hoping most of the judges liked eggs over easy please. Turns out they really liked the pattern except the inside round loops. My score went down a bit. Bob Gieseke had won again, besting me by one point. Al finished ten points behind me for third, Pilgrim in fourth place.

I had made a small error and paid the price. All things considered I was, once again, lucky. The broken lead out could have led to a much different conclusion.

I'm getting there

60 Stunt News



Here are the contestants who flew for a berth on the 1976 World Team. The 1975 Team Trials were contested in Dayton, Ohio. In the back row, left to right, are Jim Young, Les McDonald, Al Rabe, Fred Miles, Dan Shaffer, Bob Hunt, Bill Werwage and Mike Dietrich. In the front row, left to right, are Kent Rogers, Bob Gieseke, Gene Schaffer, Jerry Pilgrim, Dave Hemstrought, Joe Musumeci and Wynn Paul.

By now I was considered one of the top fliers, which was one of my first goals. I did not take this position for granted and enjoyed seeing my face, with the Stiletto, in the various magazines. There was so much still to be learned. Compared to the people I was competing against I was a rookie, but they also were aware I was gaining expertise and experience every season. I knew from the beginning there was no secret, no divine cosmic event that made anyone a good competitor. It was just hard work and dedication. That's easy to say but life altering in execution. I justified all this by oversimplification. "The more you practice the luckier you get."

The '75 Team Trials

Well I didn't practice much before the up coming team selection. I was not tired, nor "burned out." The Stiletto 700 worked well, I simply had no competitive back up and, since smacking the concrete in Louisiana, no way of knowing what strains and cracks lurked inside. After the accident at the Nats I had flown maybe four or five test flights and the three contest rounds. I tried to think it through before the trials. Let's see, there were going to be four contest rounds and I probably wouldn't be able to practice much anyway because of the limited space in the Dayton park flying site. I hoped and prayed the 700 could give me ten or fifteen more flights. After that I'd build two new planes. That would give me a back up while I prepared for the World Championships. At this time I was convinced that if the 700 held up, I would be on the team.



Punch in the stomach soon to come.

I had been doing this long enough to complain about some stuff. Not loud or vocal but I would sometimes voice my displeasure about the weather or the flying surface, the travel time, things like that. I had not whined too much about judging since, up to now, things had pretty much gone my way. I had not been given anything nor had points I felt I deserved put on some other flier's score sheet. This was about to change and the two-year-old that lurks somewhere in all men was about to make an appearance from the Stiletto guy.

I was thirty years old, youngest of the top fliers. My goals made it essential that I be on the 1976 team. I couldn't fathom the idea of waiting two more years and all the work it would require. Being World Champion was not the issue, being on the team was. I might never win the Nats or be the World Champion but I had to make the team, at least once. For years I had dreamed of being included with that inside group of select fliers; historical names from the past and present: Wooley, Silhavy, Gialdini, Werwage, Gieseke, Phelps, Schaffer, Still, Palmer, Williams, Southwick, and McFarland. In 1975 that was the whole list; the only Americans to represent the United States in World Stunt competition. Think about the names on that list, each with a deep history of flying Stunt. I had set the bar high.

The site for the team trials was a dedicated Control Line park just outside Dayton, Ohio. A few trees around the park perimeter made the place scenic, the nearby electric plant made

it turbulent. No whining yet since it was turbulent for everyone. Intermittent rain, wind, and sudden dead calm were present the entire weekend.

I did several practice flights on Friday and found the prop

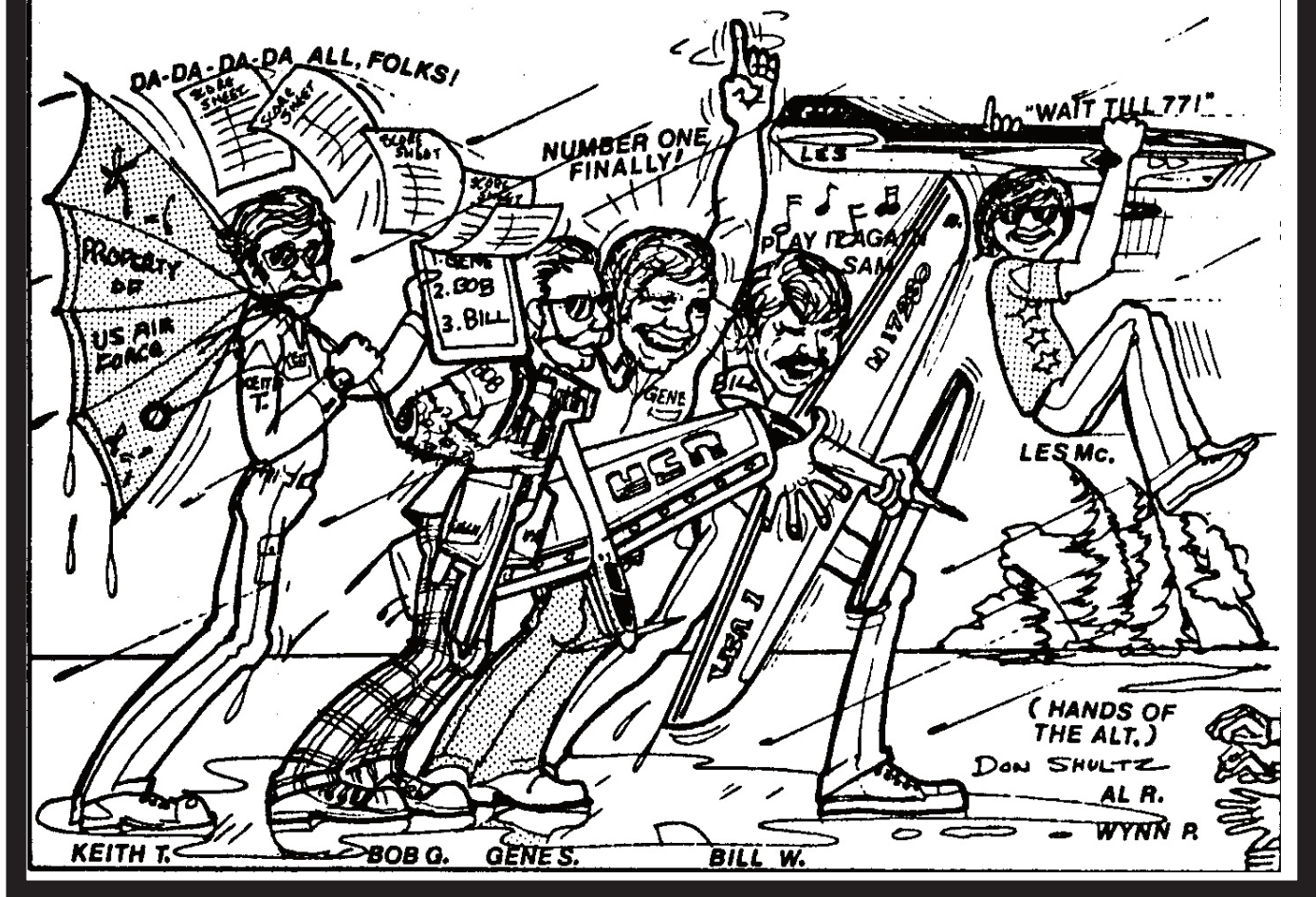
I don't know about the other guys but I could never "rise to the occasion."

and settings were okay. Because of the rain the air was heavy so we all had power and I don't recall anyone struggling. Of course somebody always has a glow plug problem or a tank issue but the favored five or six seemed in good shape.

One good flight is not enough at an FAI contest and we all knew it. Your highest score from the first day is added to your highest from the second day. You may fly a brilliant pattern on Sunday but if you had not shown something good on Saturday you're in the weeds.

Bob Gieseke had the lead all day Saturday and in the First Round I moved past Schaffer by .66 of a point for second with

FAI 1975 TRYOUTS



Billy in fourth. In the Second Round on Saturday Gene moved ahead of me, with Billy still in fourth. At this point I became very concerned since I was positive both Billy and I had out flown Gene. Bob and Billy were always the most consistent fliers at any contest. They both had a few things that weren't perfect but only minor flaws that would be overcome by the rest of the pattern. Gene and I flew closer to the edge. This simply translates that when we didn't get everything just right, the flaws were more obvious than with Bob or Billy. Please remember I am viewing this from a completely biased position and I truly felt Bob, Billy, and I had flown the best so far. I still wasn't over the top since I was in third place but I wanted so much for Billy and I to move up.

By Sunday afternoon I was over the top. After the morning's First Round Billy had moved around me into third and Gene was in first place. The wind picked up for the Second Round and since Bob was safely on the team, he passed on his second flight. My last flight was near the end of the order and I was miserable. In my eyes, instead of trying to knock Billy off the team I should be celebrating, watching Gene try to pass me. I certainly didn't owe a thing to Billy, he knew that, but I took off on my last flight twenty one points behind Bill Werwage hoping for some miracle to make up a big points deficit. I don't know about the other guys but I could never "rise to the occasion." Whenever I tried to "amp up," that Stiletto would be in all the wrong places so I stayed cool and did a pretty nice

Dave had heard enough and the things he explained to me, on that trip, have stayed with me my entire life. He didn't make me a better person but he explained to me how to "Man Up" during disappointing times.

“Just go home, kiss your very tolerant wife, enjoy life, and stop making yourself crazy.”

flight but the points didn't come. I was in fourth place and the contest was over.

I reluctantly congratulated Gene, said goodbye to Bob and Billy, thanked Keith Trostle and his crew for a well run event and then climbed into the van with Remel Cooper and Dave Hemstrought for another long drive home.

I have a problem with Fourth Place

This was no disappointment; from my seat it was human tragedy. I was mad at no one individual, only the fate of my position. We had all flown the best we could and the judges scored each maneuver as they saw it. This wasn't motorcycle racing. Gene hadn't bumped me off the track; he simply flew his plane and outscored us. Perhaps had I been able to channel my anger at someone or something Mr. Hemstrought would not have been forced into the lecture he was about to provide me. You see shortly after leaving Dayton the reality of not making the team came over me, as Meatloaf says, “Like a tidal wave.”

I started whining early in Ohio and kept it up until the middle of Kentucky. Dave had heard enough and the things he explained to me, on that trip, have stayed with me my entire life. He didn't make me a better person but he explained to me how to “Man Up” during disappointing times. I won't go into the details here but by the time we hit North Carolina I had stopped feeling sorry for myself and by South Carolina I had an entirely different outlook of my very fortunate life. I was still mad but was hiding it well enough to start planning the next year's effort while still on the road. Thanks Dave and Thank You Remel.

Doc Jackson and Cape Florida

For several weeks I led somewhat of a normal “young married guy life.”

I retired the 700. Although a good flier, I never did care for its appearance while sitting still. Bob Hunt's foam wing served above and beyond the call of duty. It had survived the Nats incident and for that I was grateful, but I just wasn't a foam guy.

I would concentrate my efforts towards the '76 Nats so I planned on building two new planes at the same time. That turned into one of my more moderately dumb ambitions.

I gathered the materials and drew up the Stiletto 660. The second plane would be identical with one exception: the wing would be one inch wider in chord. I would build these at the same time, finish and all, and then, like Werwage, I would have a “fly off” and use the best one.

For several weeks I led somewhat of a normal “young married guy life.” A park ranger named Don Scott was

coming by the hobby shop several times a week with some of his ranger buddies and buying a lot of 1/2A stuff. They were messing around with the little planes on a parking lot in one of the most beautiful places on Planet Earth.

It turns out Don was the superintendent of Cape Florida State Park on the tip of Key Biscayne. Popular during the daylight hours it was closed each day from sunset until sunrise. Vince and I soon had access to this paradise any time we wished. We had a ball with the rangers during their off hours, many times staying overnight, fishing, talking, and having a few beers. As you would imagine the 1/2A planes turned into .15 size planes and then eventually several of my new ranger friends built .35 Stunters. I wasn't helping them build or fly but I kept them supplied with goodies.

Our wives and the rangers' wives all became good friends and it was great to be doing normal married guy things once again.

One of the points Mr. Hemstrought pounded into me during the trip home from Dayton was that if a true injustice had been done to you other people would speak up. That's why you keep your mouth shut. He explained this is a general observation, something a man needs to be comfortable with, not part of a Stunt clinic. Okay then I asked, “Will you do my whining for me?” “No” he said, “Just go home, kiss your very tolerant wife, enjoy life, and stop making yourself crazy.” Thanks Dave and Thank You Remel.

I have always enjoyed being around Dr. Laird Jackson and was very happy when he called me at work one day that Fall. He was in town or passing through Miami, I don't remember which, for one of his medical meetings. We all knew him as “Doc” but I never realized he was a big deal in medical research. He wanted to talk about something and asked if we could meet.

“Love to, How about dinner?” He responded that he already had previous plans with doctor people. “How about later?” he asked. No problem. So Nancy and I picked up the good doctor, along with his wife JoAnn and a six pack or two. Off to the State Park, on a glorious tropical evening, where he presented his proposal. In the next hour I knew normal married guy things were back on hold.

Doc speaks very softly and with all the noise from the

“Hey Doc you want another beer 'cause I just thought you said something about ...”

ocean surf and tropic breezes blowing through the palm trees I had trouble hearing when he said, “You wanna be on the team?” Huh, what? Then he said, “Can you make the

I hugged and kissed Nancy and then told her good bye. She understood, she knew. I would be building and flying, and doing nothing else, for the next ten months.

arrangements and be prepared to go to Holland next July for the World Championships?"

"Hey Doc you want another beer 'cause I just thought you said something about ..." "Just listen, here's the deal, can you do it?" This had nothing to do with injustice, but some of Dave's wisdom was in the air that night.

Yes, of course I can, in fact I am already building two ... "Not important to me right now" he said. "Bob Gieseke is going to the championships as an individual, to defend his title. It's allowed by the FAI but it's never been done before. This still gives us a three man team plus Bob. It simply increases the chance of another win for the US. We all figured you would go so the finances are in place and, by the way, Werwage and Schaffer agreed to go along with all this."

To this very day I honestly do not know what took place that allowed me this amazing opportunity. Billy was Billy and Gene was Gene, good people at the top of this Stunt

game. I knew Bob Gieseke had suffered a terrible family tragedy in the recent past and I knew flying that little red Nobler was helping to keep his mind off a horrible memory. I just don't know all the circumstances but I will be forever grateful.

Thanks Doc, AMA, PAMPA, Bill, Gene, and Bob. Thanks Dave and Thank You Remel.

We dropped Doc and JoAnn off at their hotel and headed home. I hugged and kissed Nancy and then told her good bye. She understood, she knew. I would be building and flying, and doing nothing else, for the next ten months. I truly am "A Lucky Guy." *SN*

I truly am "A Lucky Guy."

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The Stiletto

By Les McDonald

Chronicles



Nineteen Seventy-Six was starting to look like a very busy year; stupid busy. After the Team Trials that past September I had planned on building two new Stiletto's and trying, once again, to win the Nats. I wanted also to do normal young married guy things, for a short time anyway. Cookouts with friends, movies, stuff like that, at least for Nancy's sake.

After Doc Jackson's visit everything changed and stuff started coming at me in rapid succession. There would be no young married guy things in the foreseeable future.

During the process of drawing up the #9 and #10 Stiletto's I received a phone call from Dick Mathis. I didn't really know him personally but I was aware of his Stunt flying success with the Chizler and his writings about the mental part of competing

in Precision Aerobatics. He also had a book published about Control Line to his credit so when he told me of his desire to kit the Stiletto 35 that was featured in *Model Airplane News* I didn't hesitate to say, "That would be great." We spoke several times, mostly about wood sizes and the business part. He wanted to produce a kit exactly the same as the *MAN* plans, with no modifications or compromises. A few parts would need to be spliced and I suggested a bit longer landing gear but in the end it would be a duplicate of the one I flew. There hadn't been a new Stunt kit produced in years except from Sig so this was somewhat of a breakthrough. I wished him well and proceeded on with my preparations for the upcoming year.

I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted to improve on the new Stiletto's. Working from my experience from #8 (the 700),

She explained the baby is due in August, the World Championships and Nats are done by July.

I started drawing on the brown wrapping paper. The 700 was roll sensitive so #9 and #10 would be provided with a bit more airfoil at the tips, to be able to carry more tip weight if needed. The fuselages would be a little less deep and the cowls would be designed for good airflow, easy access, and service. The flaps would be flat, no airfoil, for sensitivity at neutral. The wing would be just a tad thicker with a small decrease in the leading edge radius. This time the stab and elevators would be from sheet, for building simplicity. I just wanted two very basic, easy to trim, good flying, nice looking Stunt ships. As it turned out I was one for two; more on this later.

Names and numbers

The first four or five Stilettoes had designation numbers assigned to them. For example; Stiletto #6 would have the marking 74A, being the first completed in 1974; Stiletto #5 would be marked 72C, the third Stiletto built in 1972, and so on. That ended with the 700 and never continued. The two new Stilettoes were simply called the 660 and 710—roughly the estimated wing areas.

I never gave any of my planes a personal name. The last Stiletto I built had “Diane” in script on the cowl, put there to please my 6-year-old daughter. The same plane had “Orange Blossom Special,” in small print, on the wing. I suppose to pay some homage to the store that unwittingly supplied me with so many propellers over the years. Now, in my later years, I name everything. For example; My Tundra truck is “Chester,” my Honda Interceptor motorcycle is “Virgil,” my wife’s Accord is “Riley,” my BMW Supermotard is “Gomer.” This goes much deeper. My air compressor is “Dale.” I have a Thermos bottle called “Edward” and even a screwdriver named “Denise.”

None of these items can come close to the adventures I shared with my Stilettoes and yet I treated them as “beasts of burden.” I suppose they represented many hours of frustration and aggravation.

Back to the task at hand.

A young married guy thing

Building two Stunt ships at the same time was a major chore. Things like cutting out the wood parts, bending landing gear wires, and fabricating the control pieces was easy. Sanding filler coat, masking paint lines, stuff like that, just went on and on.

Right in the middle of all this I was confronted with the real shocker. “You’re what?!” That was the only thing I could say after Nancy told me she was going to have a baby. It was obvious I had been participating in, at least, one young married guy thing. Nancy and Doctor Sal had already done the math but I was still not comfortable with the immediate future. Like I stated in the beginning of this piece, Nancy was a trooper. She explained the baby is due in August, the World Championships and Nats are done by July. She assured me it will be okay.

I knew when Werwage saw that tape I would be tossed from the club.

Since I had always considered my needs and wants above all else, I proceeded on with my preparations for the upcoming season.

I just wanna fly

By March I was really tiring of this “two planes at the same time” ordeal and cheated. The planes were painted, the blue and red trim had been applied, and I just needed to do the gold outlines. I thought about the masking tape, the newspaper, the airbrush, and the time that would be required to apply the outlines. To this day, when I see the 660 in the AMA Museum, I regret that I “went weak” and used striping tape for the gold. I knew when Werwage saw that tape I would be tossed from the club.

I still had to rub out and polish these things; it never ended. I built nice Stunt ships but never truly enjoyed it like most of the guys seem to. In retrospect I wasn’t real fond of trimming and practicing, I just wanted to fly. I had not yet discovered winning and how important it was going to be—in my mind anyway.

Finally the 660 and 710 were ready to go. I had three months to sort out my “competition presentation.” Vince was around to help and Nancy was doing well. Remel would come down and coach after I had one of these things flying to some acceptable level.

By April the M&P Stiletto kits were on the hobby shop shelves and advertised by the mail order houses. There were some issues with the kit concerning the quality of the wood, the rib cutting, and an error on the plans, but it sold well and I really had no control over any of it. This was long before laser cutting and CAD plans. One of my park ranger buddies built and flew one and it seemed okay for him. A new improved version was coming in the future but that’s for later in the story.

It was Spring of 1976, daylight savings was about to start; it was flying time. I followed the same schedule I had been using for the past several years.

I would keep my Stiletto at work, in a glass showcase (a very smelly showcase) and then, after working nine or so hours, head back to my practice site and fly until dark.

Nancy and I were living in the Dadeland area of South Miami. My practice site was in North Miami, my Mother lived in Northeast Miami, and I worked in Central Miami, near the International Airport. I would get up at 5 in the morning, load up the plane, and drive 27 miles to the practice site. I always wanted to be in the air by 6:30, do a few flights, and then drive 7 miles to my Mom’s house and get cleaned up so I could be at work before 9. I would keep my Stiletto at work, in a glass showcase (a very smelly showcase) and then, after working



Les displays the sleek profile of his Stiletto 660 on finals day. We know this photo was taken during the finals since Les only used the "Trick Shirt" on the last day of a competition. Photo: McDonald collection.

Remel Cooper made several 700-mile round trips to whip me into shape.

nine or so hours, head back to my practice site and fly until dark. That was 84 miles round trip every day five days a week. At night I would work on stuff to try the next day. Sundays were home days, with Nancy, unless of course some Stiletto problem needed immediate attention. Monday was my day off and it was always totally wasted by doing non-Stunt-related chores.

The big deal fly-off I had anticipated for the previous five months turned into a non-event. The 710 was a dog, perhaps a show dog, but it had a tail and fleas. I did work with it and gave it a chance, but it was eliminated from consideration within two weeks. It would not turn well and refused to fly level. The problem was so obvious someone should have slapped me in the head months before. The stab and elevator just did not have enough area. Stiletto's historically have smallish tail surfaces and this one demonstrated what happens when you don't give some basic design parameters enough thought. At that time I felt it had been a waste of time and energy but I did use it as a test mule for a year or two and then eventually sold it to a collector from Spain.

The basic set up for the 660 was established quickly; I don't remember any big struggles. No added "widgets" or cutting, just the usual twists and blobs of clay. I tinkered with several 46s so I would have a back up and built a few fuel tanks. I made up a spare flying line set and prepared all the hardware for the upcoming European adventure.

By May the 660 was working well. It had a decent corner

and stayed flat in both the insides and outsides. I wished it grooved a little better but I could hit the bottoms with consistency and line tension seemed adequate. Vince commented it looked really good in the air and expressed a desire to build one.

Remel Cooper made several 700-mile round trips to whip me into shape.

During one of Bob Gialdini's visits to my home in Miami, he talked to me at great length about the intersections in all three of the round eights and the importance of that one nanosecond that the model is perfectly vertical in the intersection of the Horizontal Figure Eight, perfectly horizontal in the intersection of the Vertical Figure Eight, and perfectly aligned with the wingover path at the exact apogee point of the Overhead Figure Eight, at the transition points.

Bob Gialdini had been selected to judge at the 1976 World Championships, so it was a no-brainer for Remel to help me get it right. I wanted to be sure Mr. Gialdini felt his words weren't wasted on an empty head.

A box, a passport, and 4 gallons of toxic fuel

By that time I had worked out an arrangement to be supplied with K&B 100 fuel in any quantity I needed. I was using the X2C lubricated variety since it ran longer and burned cleaner than the basic 100 with castor oil. X2C was an early generation synthetic and, through no one's fault but my own, would create a major problem right from the first engine run in

By 1976, I was hoping this “Hot Stuff” wouldn’t just evaporate and allow all the glue joints to let go. I would actually have nightmares about this.

Holland. My good friend Don Pinckert, an RC boat racer and world record holder, warned me of the pitfalls of using all synthetic based fuel but I simply did not pay close attention to what he was telling me.

I had also become familiar with “Hot Stuff” instant adhesive and used it extensively in constructing the 660 and 710. I remember so well walking into someone’s workshop in Jamaica in 1974 and seeing Jim Martin and Norm Page bending over a table. I heard Jim tell Norm, “A little puff of smoke will come up when it’s dry.” Surely I was being “punked,” but in 10 minutes I was gleefully playing with the little blue, wax dipped bottle of glue and discovering for myself that not only did this glue work very well, it did indeed produce a puff of smoke as it cured. By 1976, I was hoping this “Hot Stuff” wouldn’t just evaporate and allow all the glue joints to let go. I would actually have nightmares about this.

There was so much to do. Months before getting prepared to leave it seemed exotic and exciting, but once I was into it, it was just work.

A daytrip into downtown Miami to apply for a new passport, that’s an adventure all to itself. A box in which to transport the Stiletto was another undertaking. Four gallons of fuel needed to be sent up North so it could be shipped by boat to Holland. Forms and releases were filled out. Clothes, tools, spares, and all the things needed for three weeks far from home were prepared.

The AMA took care of the round trip from New York to the contest site. They also handled the entry fees, which included food and lodging for the actual contest period—about five days. The only other financial help came from a “Practice Fund” allocated by the AMA and some money from PAMPA contributions. This totaled up to a bunch of money and was greatly appreciated but a big financial burden still fell on each team member. Three weeks on the road costs a lot.

I did notice that these modest contributions came from personal accounts and not the companies.

Once again, “I’m a Lucky Guy.” Because of my position in the hobby industry I was able to convince many associates and vendors what a “wise investment” into our business relationship this would be. This “shakedown” didn’t cover all the expenses but it really helped a young, not so normal hobby shop employee with a very pregnant wife at home. I did notice that these modest contributions came from personal accounts and not the companies.

Time to go

Nancy and I had two identical, “His and Hers,” Butterscotch colored, Datsun 510 sedans. I installed a “roof rack” on “His,” bolted my very substantial transport box to the rack, placed my Stiletto 660 in the back seat, and headed for Bill Simons’ home in Northern New Jersey.

He would deliver me, with all my stuff, to JFK at the appropriate time to hook up with Doc Jackson and the rest of the team. It sounded simple enough.

This was to be about a 33-hour drive. Please be aware and remember that the Interstate system, in 1976, was yet to be complete.

I didn’t dare turn the engine off during refueling stops and a roadside nap was out of the question.

Thankfully I had planned to spend a few days with Simons because with all the commuting between home, work, my practice site, and various contests “His” was not a low-mileage vehicle. Somewhere on Interstate 95, in Virginia, “His” burned a valve. Just pressing the accelerator kept the speed up until another valve “lost its edge.” The old Datsun just couldn’t top 50mph and I’m sure the box bolted to the roof didn’t help the cause. I soon discovered “drafting” and started “tucking in” behind every 18 wheeler I could keep up with. I didn’t dare turn the engine off during refueling stops and a roadside nap was out of the question. All of a sudden my obligation to the team loomed large. No matter what, I had to reach the Simons’ house. I felt very alone out on that highway.

“Simo” had mailed directions to his house but, as the ailing, smoking Datsun approached New York City I missed an exit and found myself entering a tunnel. I am a child of the suburbs, intimidated by large cities, and now I was in the big one. Too tired to panic and yet smart enough not to ask for directions, I found my way out and, finally, into Northvale New Jersey. At 4 in the morning I pulled up into Simo’s yard, shut off the engine, and fell asleep behind the wheel.

At daybreak Bill Simons tapped on my windshield and at that very moment he seemed like an Angel sent to rescue me and place me into the comforting, nurturing hands of Doctor Laird Jackson.

I entered the hallowed kitchen of the Simons residence, drank about five cups of coffee, and was smothered by the feeling of well being. I was now surrounded by people I truly admired and trusted.

I sat at that kitchen table and thought about all the Stunt fliers that had been right there, over the years, smoking



Here's the 1976 United States F2B team. Clockwise from back row left are Gene Schaffer (6th place), Bob Gieseke (3rd place), Les McDonald (1st place) and Bill Werwage (2nd place). Talk about domination! Photo: Laird Jackson collection.

cigarettes, drinking coffee, and discussing all the topics that seem so important to us. Bill and Tootie had children and it was easy to surmise many times there were just more, bigger kids in that kitchen. Tootie would complain what a bunch of slobbers they were but you could tell she loved every moment (*I don't know,*

I was totally preoccupied with the upcoming contest, but do remember the breathtaking views of New York City. Crossing over one of the bridges I could see there were hundreds of huge sailing ships in New York harbor for the celebration. The sheer size of the skyline was hard for me to comprehend and the

Les. I spent countless hours in that kitchen and downed hundreds of cups of coffee there and never really felt overwhelming love from Tootie. She was a trooper though ... — Ed.)

I stayed with them for two days. The first morning was dedicated to delivering "His" to the local Datsun dealer for an engine rebuild and arranging for Nancy to send funds—that we didn't have—to cover the cost of the repairs. I didn't care. I had made it this far and would deal with getting home later in the month.

That evening Bill Simons and I visited the local flying field. Gene Schaffer was there but he too was packed and ready for the trip to Holland so he wasn't flying, just hanging out. I had always envied these guys. So many good Stunt fliers living in close proximity to each other, tossing around ideas in "Simo's" kitchen with that "Your hobby is your pal" mentality. In reality there were some ego issues. It seemed as though they were constantly trying to establish some sort of pecking order and contest success was not a factor.

On this particular evening Bill and Gene were not speaking to each other. I had the feeling the New York/New Jersey fliers were some sort of dysfunctional family, living out bumpy relationships. You just knew that if an "outsider" spoke up they would all band together and eliminate the "intruder." I was smart enough to realize that I was an "outsider" so I kept my mouth shut.

July 4, 1976, was America's big Bicentennial weekend. With the 660 packed into the box we headed for JFK.

As we know now things can change in a matter of minutes and I only wish I had paid more attention to what I was experiencing.



Les anticipates a qualifying flight while pumping some of Doc Jackson's "Special Blend" into the 660. Photo: McDonald collection.

Twin Towers of The World Trade Center were magnificent along the water's edge. As we know now things can change in a matter of minutes and I only wish I had paid more attention to what I was experiencing.

The 1976 World Championships

Once at the airport I couldn't believe how many team members and supporters come on these trips and how Doc Jackson could manage all these people, some with the huge boxes. Somehow he had it all under control and simply told me, "From here on you just concentrate on the competition, everything else will be handled for you." Billy and I handed our passports to Jo Ann Jackson, since she now would become our personal "handler." Bob Gieseke wasn't there. His father had passed away the week before so he had family business as a top priority. Doc assured me that he would join us in a few days.

*Off we go on a KLM airliner
headed for Amsterdam.*

Off we go on a KLM airliner headed for Amsterdam.

The plane ride is long so there's a lot of socializing between the team members. After a few drinks even the non-

aeromodeling passengers join in. Back in the JFK terminal you could see their curiosity as to who we were and what were we going to do. One man was convinced I was a musician taking my own "Harp" to the Netherlands.

Gene had decided to bring his new bride along on this trip. An ex-Rockette dancer, Sue was blessed with lovely long legs enhanced by a very feminine derriere. I reasoned that she could cook too because I had noticed back in New Jersey that Gene had "put on a few pounds." Billy was being a bit rough on Gene about this and we both received a tongue lashing from Mrs. Schaffer. Why me, no telling, but she didn't like me either.

Sue was sitting in a window seat and at one point she needed to move about the cabin. As she stepped over a rather rotund Gene, in his seat, Billy casually said "I never thought I would see the day when the moon jumped over the cow." From that moment on Doc realized it was in the best interest of everyone to keep Sue as far away from Billy as humanly possible. In actuality Gene had been extremely trim and fit at the team selection the previous September, and that's the way we had remembered him.

Upon arrival in Amsterdam we cleared a very polite, efficient Dutch Customs and set about the business of gathering our fuel, a van, and finding our hotel. The most serious business finding a place to practice—would start as soon as we unpacked the planes and fuel.

In short order Doc provided the Stunt team with transportation. An ugly, orange panel truck with a light switch

clutch. Since I was the “junior” team member I rode in the windowless cargo area along with the planes and support equipment.

The hotel turned out to be a conference center, in a beautiful wooded area, near the small town of Zeist. Billy and I shared a small but comfortable room. This place was a treat for me. After so many stays at the Days Inn, Red Roof, Best Western, and all the others around America, I was finally in an old European lodge. There was even a large dining room in which great food was served, but because of our practice situation we only ate one or two meals there.

Since I was the “junior” team member I rode in the windowless cargo area along with the planes and support equipment.

I had been told in advance that finding a place to practice had always been a problem in the past. This time was no different. Here in America we can always find a place somewhere. A ball field, a parking lot, or an empty school yard, but when you have no idea where to look for these places you need to improvise. At the very crowded “official training area” we ran into Louis VanDerHout. He was the top Dutch Stunt guy and was thrilled his American friends, Gene, Billy, Bob, and Doc were in his country. He knew his American friends were used to doing many, many “training flights” and invited us to use a facility near his home in Hertogenbosch—50 miles away!

A bird in hand is worth two in the bush, so off we went. The facility Louis used for practice was a huge parking lot with shallow berms, similar to an old drive in movie theatre. We could fly there all we wanted, except on Thursday morning. It would then be used for the weekly cattle auction until about 2 in the afternoon. We all knew how to take off and land so the undulating surface was no big deal. It may have been a long drive but we had room for two or three circles and unlimited access. A small food market/deli was nearby and Louis’s home was only a short drive away. We managed all these arrangements during the first day and a half. Stunt guys—including Doc who is an honorary Stunt Guy—are very resourceful.

Back in Miami, a month or so before leaving on this trip I requested one of our warehouse employees to ship 4 gallons of “my fuel” up North. That would be 4 gallons of K&B 100 (X2C). What I unpacked in Holland was 2 gallons of K&B 100 (castor oil) and 2 gallons of K&B 1000. The 1000 contained 25% nitro. A quick calculation had me “out of gas” in two and a half days. I did not know it at the time, but this would soon be just a minor annoyance, since I had not yet discovered that both my SuperTigre 46s were damaged.

At least I have enough fuel for now so let’s see what we have. Billy and I mark off a circle, roll out our lines, and are ready to go—kind of.

I flipped the 660 to life and, in an instant, the nastiest

brownish gold color goo I had ever seen came blowing out of the exhaust.

I had not heeded the warning, given to me months before, about all synthetic fuel. It was obvious. The reason it burns long and clean was simple. The engine burns it all, leaving no residue to protect the “innards” from rust. When you fly every day the moisture doesn’t have time to attract rust. This thing had not been run for almost two weeks—plenty of time to grow toxic particles.

Thinking I just needed to “blow her out” I did that first flight anyway, and, as you can imagine, I was low on power. Billy flew next, and since he’s never satisfied, he agreed the thin, hot summer air took away power. After another flight or two there *was* a difference. He was using a highly modified HP40 that had good compression. In my airplane lived a SuperTigre 46 with very little compression. After a quick disassembly and inspection I found that my backup engine was in the same miserable shape. The piston ring was pitted and the bearings had warts.

Doc came checking on us and I explained the problem. Doc had always been under the impression that Stunt guys always complained about something and it was usually just between our ears. He was convinced he could solve Stunt guy problems with some well chosen words of encouragement. Then he heard my engine. In his soft voice he said, “Sounds like crap.” Then the good doctor asked, “What do you need?” “Power, I need power,” I exclaimed. His answer was almost immediate: “You have it in the truck.” You’ve been whining for two days about the 25% fuel you got by mistake. There’s your power.” Whoa, doctor smart man. The K&B 1000 fuel gave me back the power, but I didn’t have enough fuel for the week, which was the first problem anyway.

Thinking I just needed to “blow her out” I did that first flight anyway, and, as you can imagine, I was low on power.

I’m a lucky guy. Back at the lodge that night we meet a US military man. Sgt. Don Schullian was there as a spectator and just wanted to shoot the breeze with Billy and me. “Sorry Sarge, I can’t visit, I need to come up with an engine or find some nitro.” “Wow, nitro is hard to find in Holland,” the good Sgt. exclaimed, “But I can get some for you in Germany.” The very next day Doc was in possession of 1 full liter of nitromethane. US military people are very resourceful. Thanks Sgt Schullian.

That afternoon Doc had blended up some fuel for me to try. “See how it works; we can tweak it if necessary,” he said. After trying a few different combinations Doc hit the perfect brew and whipped up enough to last the entire week. Doc also worked up some juice for Billy. Thanks Doc. One night we were invited to visit with Louis VanDerHout and his wife Trudy, at their home. She fixed a pleasant supper and we drank a few beers. Out came the guitar. Louis, aside from being a good Stunt flier, had some talent with it also. Billy and Gene

both had professional musical backgrounds, so a “jam session” took place, and although I didn’t participate in the music, I had a front row seat for a very entertaining show. I think Doc drove those 50 late-night miles back to the lodge ...

The next day Bob Gieseke and his son Joe were due to arrive in Amsterdam. I, being the Junior team member, was sent to meet them. With great enthusiasm I headed from our practice site to the Schiphol Airport near Amsterdam. There was one problem. This was the first time I’d looked out the windshield since arriving in Holland. I had been riding in the windowless cargo area of the Ugly Orange Van and had no idea where I was or where I was going. I’m a Stunt guy, cunning and resourceful; the airport is big so I can find it. Bob Gieseke is big, in my eyes anyway, so I can find him. Problem solved—kind of.

I’m a Stunt guy, cunning and resourceful; the airport is big so I can find it

The airport is easy, the Giesekes a bit more difficult but done. After Bob and Joe get their rental car I nonchalantly say, “Follow me to the lodge.” Somehow I manage a wrong turn and deliver us into downtown Amsterdam. Without a clue as to where I am going Bob follows me right up a sidewalk/bikepath. I soon realize where I’m at and can’t believe Gieseke actually followed me with complete trust. With an infantry of bicycles heading our way I slam on the brakes and make some hand gesture to Mr. Gieseke hoping he will back up and he responds by flipping on his windshield wipers.

Eventually I find the lodge and help Bob and Joe get settled. “You guys ready?” I say with a smile. With no idea in which direction to head I say, with total optimism, “Follow me to the practice site.” It was almost dark when we arrived. Bob looked around and makes some comment about how Les made the small country of Holland seem bigger than Texas.

With no idea in which direction to head I say, with total optimism, “Follow me to the practice site.”

From this point on I was the designated Stunt van driver for two reasons. First I had mastered the light switch clutch of the Ugly Orange Van and second I knew my way around Holland—just about all of it!

Finally we are all together and working pretty well. Billy’s plane, the Perroquet, is a small Ares type I beam ship. Done in white with beautiful green, yellow, and red scallops, it flies with authority. The engine is a modified and lightened HP 40. On long lines it looks and sounds good. Bob is, naturally, flying a Fox 35 powered Gieseke Nobler and Gene had a very nice, sleek silver ship called the Hallmark, this time with a single fin, and an ST46 for power.

On his first day at the practice field Bob walked over and asked if we had anything to drink. “Yeah in the truck, help yourself,” I said and then Billy and I went back to whatever it was that had our attention. A few seconds later we looked at



Les fires up the ailing Super Tigre for his “official” practice flight in Utrecht while Billy contemplates the near future. Photo: McDonald collection.

We saw Bob's head pitch backward and jerk the green bottle from his lips.

each other and then in unison screamed "Stop!" We saw Bob's head pitch backward and jerk the green bottle from his lips. We ran towards the Ugly Orange Van and apologized to our beloved, spitting Bear. The water was in a yellow bottle, the green one had Doc's nitro in it. Notice I said "Doc's nitro." Had he needed it for his motor it would have been "my nitro." He did have some minor lip damage, but he is a tough old Bear.

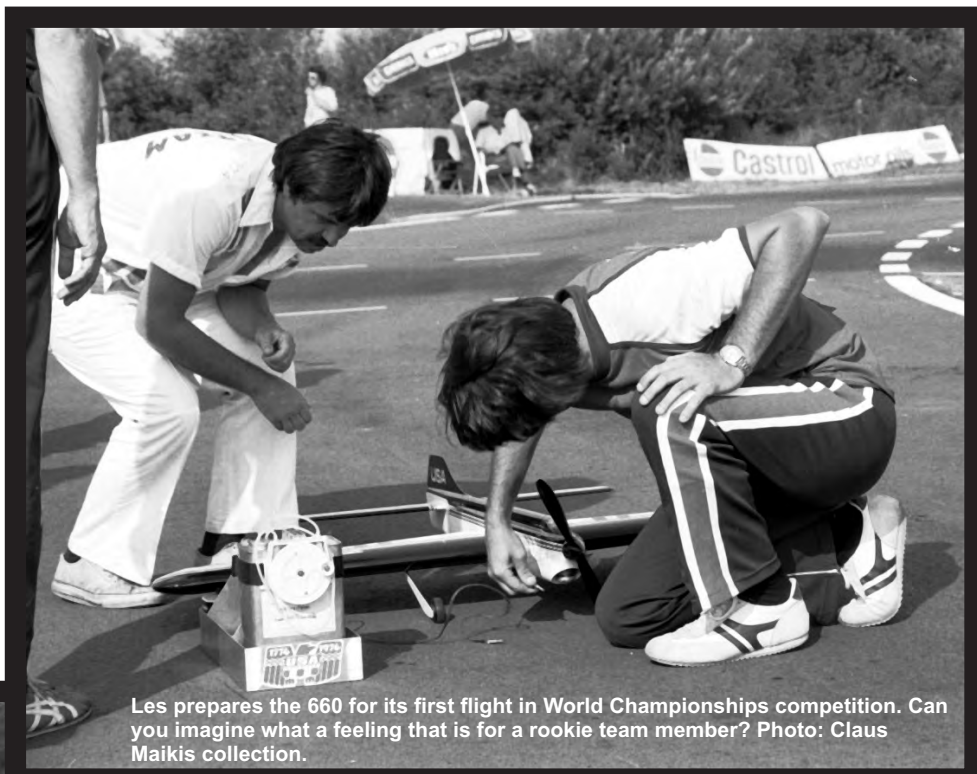
I was still not confident my engine would survive. It seemed okay but it wasn't terribly strong and I knew the difference between ring seal compression and nitro compression.

On the first day of competition a giant embarrassing problem arises. Louis VanDerHout wants to ride his motorcycle to the contest site so he asks us if we could keep his plane and stuff in our truck and meet us in the morning at the contest site. "No problem, when is your first flight?" He tells us it's at 7:15 a.m. "You can count on us, Louis." Duh.

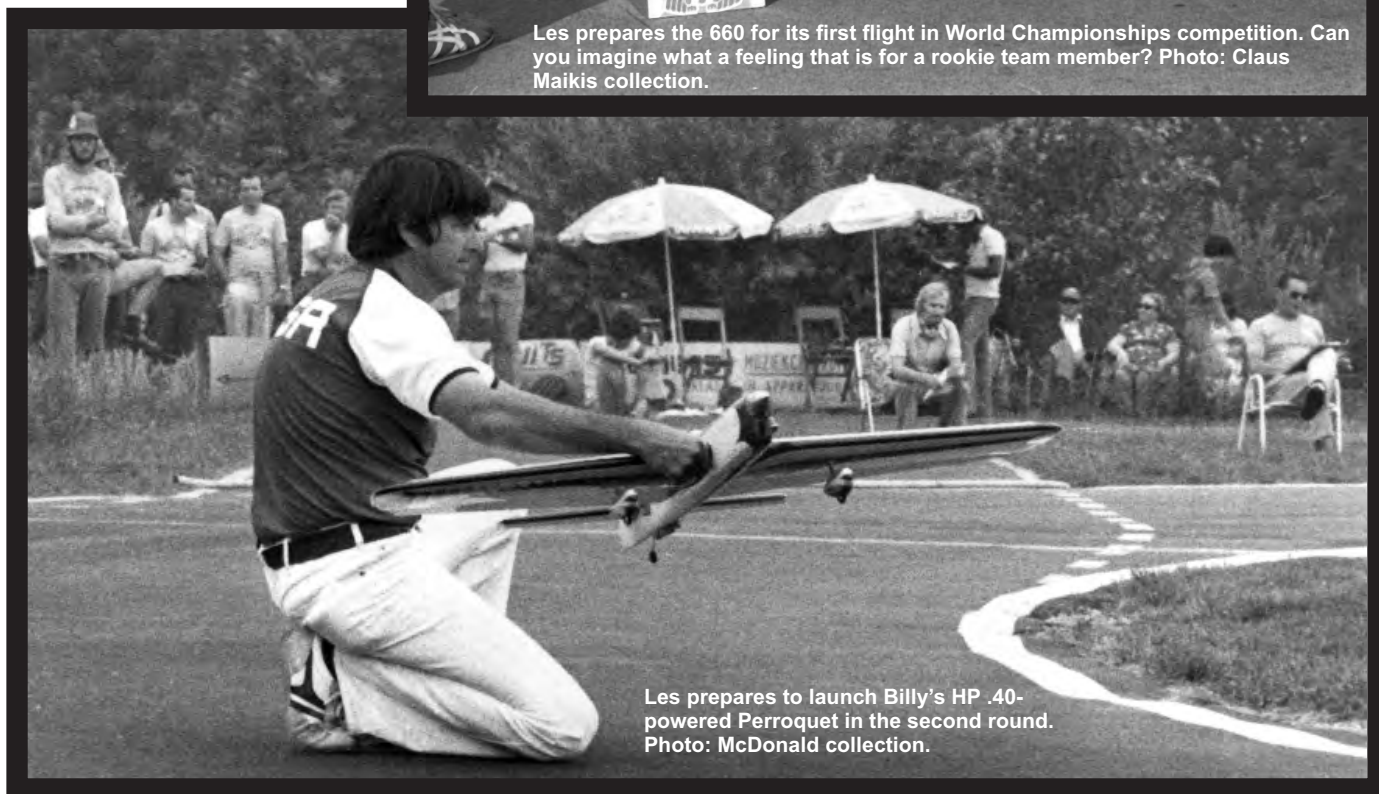
Gene is scheduled to fly at 9:00 a.m. so we leave the lodge a bit after 8. On the short drive to the contest site the realization is crushing; we have Louis's plane in the back of our truck. As we

approach the parking area we see Louis, hands out, shoulders shrugged.

Doc pleads with the jury, trying to right our mistake. This is terrible. I volunteer to give my flight time to Louis—not possible—I'm a team member and my points are needed. Bob volunteers his flight time since he's independent. No way. Eventually the jury allows Louis to fly later in the first round,



Les prepares the 660 for its first flight in World Championships competition. Can you imagine what a feeling that is for a rookie team member? Photo: Claus Maikis collection.



Les prepares to launch Billy's HP .40-powered Perroquet in the second round. Photo: McDonald collection.



The new Champion enjoys a few glorious moments on the podium. Flowers, Champaign, the World Cup, and a trophy girl ... Ya' gotta' feel, at least, a little successful, Les! Photo: McDonald collection.

luckily in better air and he puts himself in third place, right behind Bob and Billy. We still feel like ugly Americans.

My first round flight was nervous, so I was happy to be in fourth place. With everything that Bob had been through he still had things going and was leading the first round; he really is a tough old Bear.

In the second round I flew early and moved into third place with a score very close to both Bob and Billy.

My first finals flight moved me into the lead but I was totally convinced someone would get a giant score in the second finals round. I was resigned to be second or third and okay with it. I saw very few of the official flights. We were only at the field for our flights since both Bob and Billy advised me that there were way too many distractions on the site. Everybody wants your time, advice, a picture, or something, and it becomes hard to concentrate. Just fly and wait for the scores.

Gene had some problems early on and we all tried to get him back on track for team points. Doc must have said something magical, because Gene sucked it up and flew a good second flight to keep the team trophy in America.

After my second finals flight I got a beer and went back to the truck. I was spent. I was happy to make a good showing on

my first time out and hoped that when the big score came it would be Bob or Billy. I went back for another beer. Waiting for the scores was unnerving .

While rustling through the back of the Ugly Orange Van Billy came by, stuck out his hand and said, "Congratulations, you're the new World Champion." I was stunned. This was way beyond comprehension. Within seconds I was surrounded by well wishers and hurried off to the podium. To say I was caught up in the moment would be an understatement. Now I not only looked like Mario Andretti, I was a Champion like Mario Andretti.

I knew at that instant no matter what happened during the rest of my life I would always have this. The euphoria was palatable. Up on the top step of that podium, waving around the flowers and the World Cup filled with champagne, the moment only lasted four or five minutes; the pride would last me forever.

For the next 15 or 20 minutes I was hustled around the scoreboard area for photos and official chit chat, then it was time to go and get ready for the banquet. I wanted to get back on the podium and do it again. but that would have to wait a few years and take place in some other country.

In between leaving the contest site and arriving at the banquet I spent several minutes alone, in a hotel office, calling home. "Nancy I won, can you believe it?" Silence. Then she asked "Are you crying?" After a very short conversation I said "goodbye." Found another beer and called my Mom. I said, "Hi Mom," and right away told me she had already heard that I had won and then she asked "Are you crying?"

At the banquet I lived my "15 minutes of fame" to the max. After food service and the awards ceremony the banquet turned into a huge, loud, rowdy party. As told to me the next day, I was one of the instigators.

Back then it was a tradition for each team to provide its nation's popular form of beverage at the team table, and I traveled the room. I was somewhat experienced at this sort of behavior but never before on such a grand scale. Back then, at the banquets, World Champions were treated like movie stars on "Oscar" night.

The award banquets now are almost solemn affairs; very polite and politically correct, which is probably a good thing. Personally I prefer the old time banquets, especially if you're the winner!

Billy and Les

The next day Doc, JoAnn, Billy, and I take off South to spend the next four or five days sightseeing in Switzerland. We end up staying in Lucerne, a fairy tale city nestled in the shadows of The Alps.

Billy shared in the joy of my victory and I shared in the agony of his second place. Before this contest, second place, to me, would seem to be a glorious position. But now, after winning, I understood the pain. Billy flew to win and from this



Above: Back in Miami, Les displays his FAI awards from the '76 World Champs. Left to right are the Steve Wooley Cup, the FAI Gold Medal, and the UHU World Trophy. Photo: McDonald collection.



Right: Orange Blossom Hobbies presented Les with this very special, hand-crafted award upon his return from Europe. Photo: McDonald collection.

moment on I did also. In fact I became confident I would win every contest I would enter from this point on. Of course the reality is much different, and I was going to experience reality in a few short weeks, at the Nats.

Billy and I were already good friends and we spent one afternoon hiking, well, maybe more like walking. Eventually we sat down on the side of a mountain, with the Swiss Alps in full view and started talking. I became aware of his absolute love and respect for Steve Wooley and Bob Gieseke and he understood some of my bad habits and frailties. Billy was "The Searcher," each day spent trying to find perfection in his program. Every detail created a question he would try to answer for his own gratification. I, on the other hand, tried to master every facet of my program in the most simple and basic way possible. I reasoned that if kept simple I could master

more facets. Billy would solve problems, I would work around them; same quest, different method. Billy was a "lifer," I was just passing through.

I need to get home

One night, in an upscale Lucerne bar, a lovely lady made a modest advance toward me and a short discussion terminated her visit very quickly. The theme of the conversation was overheard by Doc, and from that moment on I became a hero of sorts to him and would forever be known as "The Jelly Man."

It was time to go home and prepare for the Nats. I had less than three weeks to produce a new engine and fuel program.

After the long flight back to New York, we were welcomed home by being treated very shabbily by The US Customs Service. The agents were rude and arrogant, but the big

problem came when we tried to leave with our model boxes. It seems as though they had some sort of deal with the Skycaps. Doc, Billy, and I actually got into a shouting and pushing match with two or three of these bullies. We prevailed after several minutes of this nonsense but the bad taste is still in my mouth.

Later that night, upon returning to the Simons' house, a victory party was being held in my honor. I was flattered that all these New Jersey guys were truly happy for me, and we partied into the wee hours. Thank you so very much Bill Simons for all your help, encouragement, and friendship.

The next morning we picked up my trusty Datsun—with a very well done rebuilt engine and I headed for Remel Cooper's house in Jacksonville.

I was exhausted. We had driven from Switzerland to Holland and then sat through a nine-hour flight to New York. Driven from JFK to the Simons' house in North Jersey—with a late night party thrown in—I picked up my car at the dealer and then had to get back to Florida—the bottom part. This was the trip where—as I mentioned in part I of this saga—I had become so disoriented, thankfully discovering I was on I95 in South Carolina.

I made a quick stop at Remel's house, showed him my shiny new trophies, and thanked him once again.

I was anxious to get home, not because I missed my pregnant wife or my friends at work. Not because my mother always worried too much when I was away. Not even to bask in my new found celebrity. I was anxious to arrange some castor-based fuel and try to build a good running SuperTigre. It seemed I only cared about my placement in the world of Bob, Billy, Gene, Al, Ted, Wynn, Keith, Robin, and a few others. I had become totally unbalanced. Like all whackos, I was in denial. I thought I was okay. The hobby part of flying Stunt departed my mind back in 1972. By 1976 it was a quest. After winning the World Championships I considered it a noble cause, but in reality flying Stunt for me had become a selfish, egotistical mission.

For years Nancy slept on a sofa, lived with paint fumes and balsa dust, ran every errand and took care of everything so I could build and compete with my model planes.

Something I regret

A week or so, after returning from Europe, a co-worker suggested we have a beer after work. "Are you nuts, I have to go check this new engine," I exclaimed. He admitted he had been assigned the task of getting me home that night where Nancy had arranged a big surprise party to celebrate my victory. She had been working for days getting everyone together and had even baked a "Stiletto" cake. My co-worker begged, "Please act surprised."

When I hit the door I was furious that Nancy would interrupt my quest with something as trivial as this and I pointed it out to her. Some things in life you say or do can never be righted and this was one of those times. For years Nancy slept on a sofa, lived with paint fumes and balsa dust, ran every errand and took care of everything so I could build and compete with my model planes.

The party was wonderful, and even though I apologized and thanked her for everything, I know the hurt was still there. I justified this insanity by telling myself I would make it up to her after the Nats, not even thinking about how everything will change after the arrival of the baby.

Fresh from my big win in Holland, this was my Nats to lose.

The 1976 Nats

The '76 Nats was in Dayton, Ohio. This was the third time PAMPA ran the Stunt event and this year Bart Klapinski was the Event Director. Bart is without doubt the best "natural" Stunt flier on planet Earth and was, thankfully, not competing at this Nats. Normally one or two top guys will miss a Nats now or then, probably to do some normal, balanced life thing. Not this one; everybody was there. Like all PAMPA contests it was extremely well organized and ran hiccup free.

We still had the usual extended pilots' meeting, because someone always starts some debate about hand signals or where the landing descent starts, but the actual competition ran smoothly.

Fresh from my big win in Holland, this was my Nats to lose. The new engine and fuel combination was working okay and I knew the 660 well. I had worked hard to be in this exact situation and now was the time to shine.

I sparkled in qualifying and chrome plated my position during a rain storm in the first round of the finals. The scores went up just a few points in the second round and the air was much better. I was in the catbird seat with my flight next to last in the final round. Only Bob Hunt was scheduled to fly after me. After having an overrun, Hunt fell to 19th place in the first round of the 20-man finals. He had also just driven over the nose of his Genesis with his station wagon. Like I said before, this Nats was mine to lose, and I did just that.

I still may have not won, but the attempt would have been the proper move.

In virtually dead calm air, and a tad rich on the needle, off I went. "Whoa, the old 660 is kinda slow," I remember thinking, but there was no way I was waving off. Nice slow Gieseke type wingover, a few steps backwards to avoid the turbulence for all the other stuff, and it was looking good.



Bad luck turned good: Bob Hunt backed his car over his Genesis, then fixed it and then won the 1976 Nats with it! Kind of spoiled Les' first WC year ... Photo: Wynn Paul collection.

In the overhead eights I knew I was in trouble, and sure enough the new SuperTigre had only enough fuel for the first loop in the cloverleaf. Silence. Land. Nothing else to do.

Bob Hunt goes up for the last flight of the contest and, at that moment, I could care less. Good air, nice flight, Hunt wins, with Schaffer in second once again. Gene was an incredible flier and always right there. It is almost sad he never won a Nats. I wound up in seventh. I simply should have called an attempt and flown after Bobby. I still may have not won, but the attempt would have been the proper move. I was happy for Bobby as was everyone else. It was a clean win and Hunt was very popular with a large following of friends.

I had survived my nightmare and deep down inside no one really cared. This was not life altering. All the scary dreams about showing up late for a flight, losing my model box and running out of fuel were just

that—bad dreams. I will admit though for many years after I stopped flying I still looked out the bedroom window each morning to check the trees for wind. I no longer watch the trees. However, from time to time, I still have the dreams.

Twenty five years later I'm still not over it. *SN*

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The Stiletto

By Les McDonald

Chronicles

Diane

On August 26th 1976 Nancy blessed me with a beautiful seven-pound baby girl. Now this was scary since I had not prepared myself to be a father. I didn't even really like kids, except the Cooper girls, but Diane was special. It was time to catch my breath, get Diane started and reconnect with Nancy, and take a year off from the contests and try to be normal, for a little while.

Stiletto Business

Carl Wheeley called from *Model Aviation* magazine and really, really wanted for me to do a feature article on the 660. "Aw Carl I really, really am not interested." I told him what a chore the text and plans were for me, how I wanted to get my life back on track. Let me think about it.

Dick Mathis called and wanted to redo the Stiletto kit. Redesign the whole thing so it looks like a little 660, this time with die-cut Chipmunk ribs from Sig and redrawn plans. He realized most kit builders were not Nats fliers and just wanted something easy to build that looked the part. He asked for my help and I tried to explain that I was trying to get my life back on track.

"Okay," I said, "Send me some stuff and I'll see what I can do."

I did some drawings and sent them to Mathis. He sent some parts to me; sort of a prototype kit and I had one of my Park Ranger buddies build it. The thing flew really well so I signed off on the final design and wished Mr. Mathis well. I went back to the business of getting my life back on track.

Speaking of Stiletto kits and plans let us take a brief trip into the future from here. First, no Stiletto is "Classic eligible." However all the ones I produced up to #11 would be "Nostalgia 30" eligible. Second, I have personally been involved with four kits; two were from M&P discussed in this story, the third is the ARC that Walter Umland is attempting to produce, and the fourth is the 660 kit to be released soon, also from Walter Umland.

I have had two magazine articles published that offered plans: The Stiletto in the June '74 issue of *Model Airplane News* and the Stiletto 660 in the July, '77 issue of *Model Aviation*. Other kits and plans have shown up around the world that I had nothing to do with. There are plans circulating called the "Stiletto XL," a plane that I have never seen. A horrible kit from someone in Central Florida that I've only heard about and a kit that was produced in Argentina that I wish I could show you. This kit comes packed in a long poly bag and was derived from the MAN plans with instructions in Spanish. It features excellent wood that is precisely cut by hand. It was gorgeous, but I had nothing to do with that one either. There have probably been others but these are the ones I know about. I see conversations about these kits

Stunt News 54



For 1978 Les went the I-Beam route and produced the magnificent Stiletto #11 with which to defend his world title from 1976.

The whole Stunt thing was still there, just dormant, sort of in hibernation.

and plans on the Internet. I hope this answers a few questions. Now back to my story.

Normal ... almost

Actually my life was pretty good. I did a few newspaper interviews and filled an entire half hour TV show on the local PBS station talking about flying Stunt. At work, in the hobby shop, I was in constant demand from our Latin American customers (lots of pictures and autographs). Sometimes I would need to break away from my adoring public to help some Cub Scout Den Mother gather supplies to build twelve authentic Cherokee Indian villages or explain to a third grade teacher that a radio controlled helicopter probably would be a bad choice for a class project but all told I enjoyed my new found celebrity.

Non modeling friends started coming around to see the new baby so Nancy and I renewed some old ties. Ted and Shareen Fancher came for a visit and I was sure Shareen had serious doubts as to my ability to raise spawn. The Rutherfords also spent a day or so with us, probably for the same reason. They knew at least that Nancy was competent with the baby. At least little Diane didn't smell like Sig Dope and castor oil because my

workroom, the showcase at work, my car, and everything else I was around had the odors so familiar to us all.

The whole Stunt thing was still there, just dormant, sort of in hibernation. By now Vince and I had become really tight buddies and his Stiletto 660 was a work of art. He had built it from my brown paper drawings with very little assistance from me, so when Carl Wheeley called again and made a very generous offer, I accepted. Inking a full set of plans is a lot more tedious than pencil scratches on brown paper, but from my prior experience with the *MAN* article I hoped to do better, not only the plans but the text as well. *Model Aviation* enjoyed a huge circulation, the 660 was both simple and successful, so we all agreed the plans would sell quite well.

Shortly after submitting the Stiletto 660 article to *Model Aviation* I started thinking about a new plane with an I-Beam wing, but first I had family business to take care of. With all this new found wealth from the World Championship, the 660 article, and sponsorship money rolling in it was time to buy a house. Actually it wasn't quite like that but I still find myself trying to justify all the time, money, and dedication it took to get where I was in 1976. By April of 1977 Nancy and I had become homeowners and like many young people back then wondered how we could possibly afford the \$240 a month mortgage payment.

Within a week of moving into our "new" house I purchased a Ping Pong table and declared the 400 square foot Florida room my recreation area. In Miami we don't have basements (water issues ...) and we don't have attics (hurricane issues) so you must make do for Stunt plane building space. We did play five or six games of Ping Pong before the building boards covered the table.

I could build and I could fly but I just wasn't much of a writer.

Vince was a carpenter by trade; a very good carpenter. At that time he was doing finish work for a "high end" contractor in some super luxury condominiums. Can you believe some people have their baseboards, chair rail, and crown moulding made from teak or walnut or other even more exotic wood? Back at my house—trimmed in pine and spruce—we had it fixed up in no time. A big plus for me was that our "new" house was located in North Miami, close to my friends, my Mom, and my flying field. Nancy was happy, Diane had her own room, and now Vince and I could get started on a couple of new I-Beam Stiletos.

The Stiletto 660 article appeared in the July 1977 issue of *Model Aviation* and once again, as with my previous magazine work, I was thrilled and still a bit bummed. I tried so hard to put down some helpful, even prophetic, information but it all seemed a bit corny. The reality sunk in. I simply did not have the talent of the truly gifted "Stunt Masters." I could build and I could



Al Rabe stands guard over Les McDonald's Stiletto and Bob Hunt's Genesis at the Burtonwood RAF base practice site. Al's Snaggletooth Mustang was sitting just out of the frame of this photo.

fly but I just wasn't much of a writer. Make no mistake, I did cash the check.

The '78 FAI Team Selection

The 1978 team selection would be held at Ft. Gillem, Georgia, an Army post that was situated near Atlanta.

Thankfully when Bob Gieseke went to Holland as a

defending World Champion it set a precedent so fully embraced by me. I too would attend the 1978 World Championships as a defender. Very

honorable and noble but the big plus was the fact I didn't have to compete in the always brutal team selection contest. I went simply to fly the judges' training and warm up flights. I brought along Stiletto #10, the 710, for these tasks and that in itself

Stiletto #11 is captured here in flight at the 1978 World Championships.

was regrettable. I had flown very little in the past year and, as you remember, #10 was a dog, so my performance was substandard. In real life that didn't matter but for a Stunt fighter like me I always wanted to present, at least, a moderately good performance. I had to let several people fly #10 just to save face since they also agreed it wasn't a very good flying plane.

Rabe, with that particular Mustang could be a real problem, and Hunt, lacking the help and support of his "Up North" buddies, would fold like a cheap tent.

Bob Gieseke placed first at that Team Trials but Al Rabe got my attention with a very, very good Mustang. Bob Hunt also made the team so my next overseas adventure would have two new guys. All of a sudden I was no longer a rookie.

I wanted more than anything to keep my championship, so I did a quick review of the situation. Gieseke is always a threat. Rabe, with that particular Mustang could be a real problem, and Hunt, lacking the help and support of his "Up North" buddies, would fold like a cheap tent.

Simple no more

The days of the simple Stiletto were over; it just happened that way. For years I had admired Billy's I-Beam creations and now I wanted one for myself. The construction would be different than the conventional method for an I-Beam, so Vince and I figured it out as we went. Stiletto #11 would have a thinner high aspect ratio wing with small flaps incorporated into the airfoil. The horizontal tail would have an even longer span and be airfoiled as well. The fuselage would be traditional Stiletto with a bit fancier cowl. All along I had hoped to be able to use a SuperTigre .40 which would allow me to fly on .015 stranded lines.

Ribs were stacked and shaped between aluminum templates and the prepared ribs slipped into place onto the I-Beam. There were no half ribs, just full ones spaced at one inch.

Designing and building the I-Beam spar itself was fun. Vince and I would build a test I-Beam using various sizes of balsa and spruce and then put it in a vise and hang weights on the outer ends of it until it broke. We were surprised by the different results but finally settled on a $\frac{1}{4}$ balsa core faced with $\frac{1}{16}$ balsa and ply in the center. The real strength came from the .040 spruce caps on the top and bottom. There was no carbon fiber available to us back then.

The wing tips were built from a gazillion pieces of $\frac{1}{16}$ inch balsa and $\frac{1}{32}$ inch plywood. The stab used a 1 inch by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch balsa trailing edge with a $\frac{1}{16}$ inch balsa horizontal center core. The ribs were glued to the center core, top and bottom. A small cap of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch balsa became the leading edge and the whole thing got sanded into an airfoil. The elevators were constructed the same way. There were one hundred forty separate pieces in the stab and elevators alone. It was overkill but it was light and looked very cool. The flaps were blended into the wing and quite small. Only eighteen and a half inches

in span (eighteen even for the outboard) by two and a half inches at the root and one and a quarter inch on the ends. They were too small and would eventually keep #11 from being a good plane. I did this in an effort to make it a low drag operation. I knew the .40 would give away power so I tried to make this thing easy on the engine. Somehow I felt I could tame down the ST 40 and handle the rest with props.

I also wanted more dark color on the wing, to show off the bubbly luster of the ribs. (*Ah, yes, Billy's Juno had an effect on all of us. —Ed.*) Like the top block back on Stiletto #6, some things didn't present well. The swayed top block on #6 took away the directional profile in the air and the wider wing trim on #11 took away the pivot visuals in the corners. I had explained it all in the 660 article and then turned around and shot myself in the foot. The fact that the first I-Beam Stiletto didn't turn very well compounded the situation. It looked good though, sitting on the ground.

This program was in trouble from the beginning.

This program was in trouble from the beginning. The SuperTigre .40s I put together were horrible and by May I had a SuperTigre .46 in #11. In FAI the flying line regulations were simple. If they could pass the scary pull test you were good to go,

so that's what I did. Once again I found myself in denial but I kept at it because #11 looked so good. Even a blind pig finds a truffle once in awhile so I continued the search. I now had a beautiful I-Beam Stiletto, flying on .015 lines, powered by some pretty decent ST .46s. No truffle yet since all the blue on the wing only exaggerated the fact it didn't turn very well. Another bad mushroom: since it was so low in drag it would wind up everywhere and it still had only modest line tension. The I-Beam Stiletto Vince built was exactly the same plane as mine with different problems. He was using .018 lines for the AMA contests which created grief in other ways. These planes were like beautiful movie-star women. We put up with the heartbreak and aggravation because they're beautiful movie stars. In my now mature vision we all



Vince Schnetzer with his I-Beam Stiletto.



Here's Vince's wing prior to being installed in the fuselage.



Les's Stiletto sits in echelon with Stan Powell's Dove (center) and Dave Hemstrought's Classic at the 1979 Lincoln Nats.

from Miami to London so I was able to have airline friends handle my "special needs" and they did both to and from the UK.

Working at Orange Blossom Hobbies had allowed me to cultivate many friends that worked or had access to people in "high places." In fact working there allowed me to meet not only airline executives but also famous rock stars, race car drivers, NFL and NBA players. There was also the constant flow of TV personalities, politicians, and drug smugglers.

The 1978 World Championships

Transportation for the '78 Champs was so much easier than my '76 experience. I took a direct flight from Miami to London, picked up my rental "estate wagon" at London's Heathrow airport, and then it was on to Glen Alison's house in nearby Rickmansworth.

I spent several days with Glen and his wife Penney and

know a good woman ... let's stop here before I get us all in trouble.

I soon had the same problems as Vince. We planned to attend the Winston-Salem contest, so I began flying on the heavier lines.

By early June we had worked out most of the really glaring faults and the I-Beamers didn't look too bad in the air. Vince's ship was a real beauty. All his planes were basic white with different shades of brown and tan trim, truly exquisite.

We both did well at Winston-Salem, Vince winning Advanced and receiving "The Most Beautiful Model" award. I outscored Norm Whittle for first place and although I may have won I didn't beat Norm. He was annoyed, I was a bit embarrassed, and we all went home. Mr. Whittle was—and still is—a very worthy competitor.

Back to Miami and time to get ready for the 1978 World Championships, to be held at an airfield near Liverpool England. The weather is always a concern in that part of the world any time of the year.

I constructed a better, lighter transport box and started making all the arrangements. This time it would be possible to fly directly

Al had won the '77 Nats with this same Mustang, so I knew he had a proven package and "The Bear" had so much experience at these things you could never count him out even after watching him struggle in practice.



Les fuels the Stiletto for a flight at Winston-Salem in 1978.

enjoyed every moment with them. I spent a day on my own exploring downtown London, with a visit to Henry Nichols' hobby shop thrown in and then spent some time with the Alison family sightseeing at Windsor Castle and the Royal Air Force Museum at Hendon. After several relaxing days and a short three hour drive to the contest site at Woodvale it was back to business.

World Championships are no different than any other Stunt contest in one respect. Everyone does "Show and Tell" with their new Stunt models. Just like in Mrs. Russo's third grade classroom we beam and point at all the special attributes of these gorgeous creations trying to gain some sort of leverage over our rivals. I showed off the glossy finish of my new I-Beam Stiletto and Hunt showed me his little handmade three blade wood prop on his Genesis. "Check out these neat air scoops," I said as I held my Stiletto high. Hunt showed me his O.S. .40 FSR nestled in the front of his bronze, red, and white machine. I was still convinced that, without the help of his entourage, he would fold. We hadn't even started our engines yet and I kept thinking about Al's

Mustang and Gieseke's magic. Al had won the '77 Nats with this same Mustang, so I knew he had a proven package and "The Bear" had so much experience at these things you could never count him out even after watching him struggle in practice.

Fliers from other countries had improved quite a bit also. All the Japanese fliers, Billion from France, Compostella from Italy, and several others looked really good. A political boycott had eliminated all the fliers from the communist countries and that was okay by me. I did feel a bit sorry for them though since they had worked hard to prepare and then couldn't compete. They're Stunt guys just like we are.



Bob Hunt leans into the "significant" pull test that was administered at the 1978 World Championships. Bob went on to win Gold in his first WC outing.



Les signals for a maneuver during a qualification flight at the World Championships.

This time we had a place to practice; an entire unused runway on old Burtonwood RAF base. Keith Trostle had come along as a Stunt coach, so Bobby and I took advantage of his expertise. My Stiletto was suffering a serious case of "Wind Up" in all the consecutive maneuvers. It was windy and I was on .015 lines. As you know by now I swore by the lighter lines but in the wind they would stretch. That was the bed I made and would sleep in. Bobby and I were practicing together; Keith coached Bobby and tried to help me select a prop. I would fly and Keith would carve and sand. Bobby would fly and Keith would critique while I carved and sanded. Hunt simply had a combination that worked



Here Les concentrates on a maneuver during the finals at Woodvale in 1978. Photo by Doc Jackson from Bob Hunt's collection.

in the very cold, wet, dense wind. My shiny Stiletto with the cute air scoops was in trouble. Al was flying on a circle next to us and I don't remember Keith helping him much. Rabe didn't need help. Just as I had figured, the "The Mustang Man" was working very well.

Bob Gieseke was in trouble also. The little red Nobler with the Fox motor was fighting the wind, but I soon remembered past contests when his "magic" would appear during the "Official Flights." His son Joe was his helper/coach and more than a few



The Stiletto glides in gracefully for a perfect landing.



Bob Hunt holds the Stiletto while Les contemplates a needle valve adjustment before a flight.



Les signals to start his pattern during a very windy and cold round at the World Championships.

I couldn't see the plane, my lines were sticking, and I almost crashed trying to do the cloverleaf.

times I saw both of them shaking their heads at the same time. Bob and I had both brought "knives" to a gunfight.

We did this flying/coaching/prop making thing for two or three days and then Keith was gone. The Czech judge, Mr. Liska, was a no show because of the political "poop" so Keith was asked to be a judge. The organizers were very lucky to have someone of his caliber do this on short notice, since they would never have come up with anyone else that could fill Mr. Liska's position fairly.

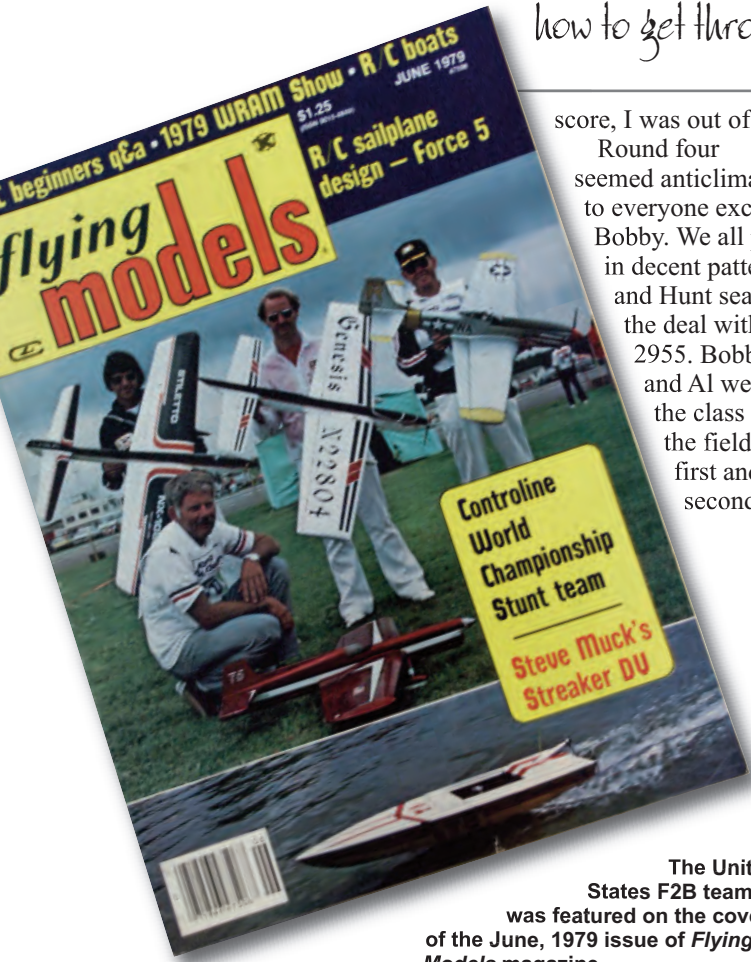
The first round confirmed what I had anticipated long before. Rabe flew well and they loved his presentation. Gieseke flew his best only a couple of flights after Al and came up forty seven points behind the "Mustang." Hunt did a "nervous" flight and was in sixth and I did my best for third was but still thirty seven points short of Rabe.

In the second round, things changed dramatically. The weather turned nasty and the scores fluctuated. Rabe went up thirty points and Gieseke went down forty four. I needed something in the middle 2900s to stay in the running. Not impossible since Al was already there but difficult, considering the weather which seemed to be getting worse. Hunt was concerned. Bobby certainly didn't like sitting in sixth but the O.S. powered Genesis was working well; he just needed to settle down. Settle he did. His round two flight, a good one, scored a 2963 and put him in first place and moved Al into second. Compostella was in third and I was sitting fourth. When the time came for my flight it was really windy with downpouring, cold rain. It was a disaster. I couldn't see the plane, my lines were sticking, and I almost crashed trying to do the cloverleaf. No matter what I scored in the finals this World Championship belonged to Al or Bobby.

Bobby and Al were the class of the field in first and second.

In round three Rabe, Gieseke, and Compostella all scored in the high 2800s and then Bobby put up a 2921. I flew the highest scoring flight of the contest at 2966 but, added to my mediocre qualifying

There are no "Do-Overs" so I just sucked it up and enjoyed the celebration. The "Old Bear" and I licked our wounds and shared our concern on how to get through the cut throat team trials in 1979.



The United States F2B team was featured on the cover of the June, 1979 issue of *Flying Models* magazine.

score, I was out of it. Round four seemed anticlimactic to everyone except Bobby. We all put in decent patterns and Hunt sealed the deal with a 2955. Bobby and Al were the class of the field in first and second.

Vince and I spent the entire winter experimenting with different engines, mufflers, and "aero nonsense." We taped all sorts of balsa sheet and foam blocks to my 710 just to see what would happen. Giant elevators, wing fences, and big fuselage side area were all things that we tried along with stupid amounts of tail weight and goofy spoilers on the flaps. The result: either no difference or results that made the models un-flyable. Bob Baron had probably tried all this before, so even if something improved the way a Stunter flew it would have to be a dramatic plus to be incorporated in a new ship. We simply validated what everyone already knew. A good basic Stunt model design, built light and straight, was as good as it gets. Everything else was in the front end.

I wanted to keep my Stiletto 660 intact so we pulled out the old 700 and started working with .40 size engines. SuperTigre .40: Been there done that. In went an O.S. Max .40 FSR. Different head shapes, move the ports, shim the sleeve: still nothing. Next goes in a Webra—and then out right away. We tried some HPs and got pretty close with them but couldn't get close enough. The ST .46 was still way better. My stuff couldn't come close to the HP Billy had used at the '76 Champs or the O.S. Max FSR .40 Bobby was using in the Genesis. In those days you couldn't buy custom engines and there weren't many choices. I needed to find something. After months of trying everything within my means I was back to "square one."

For some reason totally unexplainable I had decided to fly Stiletto #11, the I-Beamer, in the '79 Nats. I just didn't want to go back to the 660 even though it was a better flying airplane.

From the beginning of this story I have exulted that I'm a lucky guy. Rays of luck were about to drop right in my lap.

For some reason totally unexplainable I had decided to fly Stiletto #11, the I-Beamer, in the '79 Nats.

Compostella, a really neat old guy, placed third with myself and Gieseke in fourth and fifth.

Bob Hunt never did fold, never panicked after his first round flight, and was now the new World Champion with a high-powered, low-pitch Genesis that flew better than anything else in the lousy weather. Al Rabe, with his Mustang, was a class act and Bobby was very appreciative that Al bounced one of his landings or things might have been different.

There are no "Do-Overs" so I just sucked it up and enjoyed the celebration. The "Old Bear" and I licked our wounds and shared our concern on how to get through the cut throat team trials in 1979.

What now?

Once again back to Miami so I could get my act together for the '79 season. No longer World Champion, I did notice I still had a job, a wife, and a beautiful two year old daughter that I didn't spend near enough time with.

There was a void, a certain emptiness that only I could feel. Certainly not depression or sadness just a feeling that something was missing and there was no secret as to what I needed. A Nats win and a first, second, or third place at the '79 team selection would do the trick. I would be "whole" once again.

I had decided not to build a new Stiletto until I could come up with a better engine program. I just could not put anything together without using an I-Beam wing and felt the time would be better spent fixing the short comings in the Stiletto's front end.

Enter Stan Powell

At that point Dave Hemstrought, Remel Cooper, Vince Schnetzer, and I, over the past few years, had become travel companions. Not all of us all the time but various combinations of us went to different events around the country sharing expenses and "windshield time."

The '79 Nats were to be contested in Lincoln, Nebraska, and since Remel was going to be a judge and Vince had to do normal married guy things, Dave and I agreed to go together. Through our prior phone conversations Dave was aware of my problematic engine program and started telling me about the K&B .40 engines that Stan Powell was building. As the weeks passed, and my engine situation lacked any form of improvement, a new plan took shape.

Dave, Stan and I would go to the Nats together in Stan's new "Le Baron" station wagon with one of Stan's K&B .40s bolted into Stiletto #11.

Since the company I worked for was a K&B distributor I gathered some bits and modified my Stiletto to accommodate one



Les' I-Beam Stiletto was voted as the Concours winner at the 1979 Nats, and for that he received the Arlie Prezzler hand-carved prop that was the traditional trophy for many years. This photo was taken years later...

of Stan's engines and then drove from Miami to Dave's home in Moncks Corner, South Carolina. From his house we drove to Stan's place near Spartanburg, South Carolina. In Stan's workshop we mounted one of his spare engines in the Stiletto, ran another in his driveway on a test stand, loaded up the "Le Baron," and headed for Lincoln. I was already tired of traveling and still had another 1100 miles of road time. I had just driven 600 miles to Dave's home and another 175 miles to Stan's and was, needless to say, anxious to try the K&B. This sounds wimpy to you Northeast guys who routinely drive to VSC, but this was on an incomplete Interstate system with "engine stuff" in between. Dave and I were cigarette smokers, so by the time we got to Tennessee the "new car smell" was gone from the "LeBaron" and by the time we hit Kansas City I was sure Stan hated his new flying buddies. I was able to sleep a bit during the long ride so we hit the practice circles almost immediately after arriving in Lincoln.

The 1979 Nats

Totally unconvinced this was my engine package for the future, and completely out of options, I fired up the K&B for the first of many, many test flights. As the practice days went by, Dave and Stan dedicated their personal practice time to help me. For example, late one night we found a shipping pallet behind a supermarket and turned it into a test stand. By two in the morning I was using it to break in engines behind some warehouses while Stan stayed in the motel room to assemble yet another engine. Thanks Stan, thanks Dave.

I was impressed at Stan's ability to change the run/power characteristics to suit my demands. He understood it all: Different head shapes, different crankshaft styles, not to mention all the venturi changes, deck height changes, and timing variations. Stan's engine was, by far, the best power plant I had used. The fact that it was a .40 allowed me to use my beloved .015 lines and its short stroke, four cycling at almost 10,000 rpm, gave me the opportunity to use low pitch props; I just had no idea which one yet.

Stan and I tied for top appearance points with eighteen apiece. My points came from the bubbly luster on #11's I-Beam wing. Stan's points came from the first rate construction quality of his Dove. No flashy colors or graphics, not even a clear canopy with interior detail, his plane was a Mercedes among Fiats.

By qualification day my Stiletto was flying better than it ever had in the past. Not all was well though since I was not even close in the prop department. I had brought along two SuperTigre .46s and a set of .018 lines "just in case." Even without a clue as to which prop to use I was better off with Stan's engine. On the morning of qualifications I installed a Grish nylon three blade 10 x 6 and explained to Bob Hunt it was the only prop I had in my box that was sharp enough to slit my wrists. The nylon prop produced only modest line tension and I still didn't have good corners. The heavy wind that persisted all week was not going to make these two issues any better. I never was a good "wind flier" so this was going to be a real challenge.

Stan was using all K&B parts in these engines and I was depleting the inventory of spares at a rapid pace. After forty or fifty runs the "Dykes" ring seal would deteriorate and a new piston ring was needed.

Stan was aware I had access to the K&B factory and wasn't too concerned about the voracious parts consumption. I was impressed because he just kept feeding me engines that, after twenty minutes or so on a "test pallet," would run just like the one before. I never had a "Motor Guy" before.

Qualification rounds weren't too bad since we were on a runway, but the wind during the five-man finals was a study in survival.

Dave Fitzgerald, the Senior winner, crashed on flight one round one. In round one I was blown out entering the Cloverleaf and had to do some fancy footwork to avoid crashing into the judges' area.

Bob Hunt missed the finals due to a faulty plug and a very bad decision on his part to try and fly an official with it at about a 6.1 second lap time. So it would come down to Rabe, Fancher, Werwage, Gieseke, and me, plus the Junior and Senior winners.

Dave Fitzgerald, the Senior winner, crashed on flight one round one. In round one I was blown out entering the Cloverleaf and had to do some fancy footwork to avoid crashing into the judges' area. Everyone had speed up and line tension problems.

In round two Werwage was slammed by wind in the Hourglass, Andy Harassiadis, the Junior winner, crashed during the Vertical Eights, I forgot the Triangles and once again lost it entering the Cloverleaf; again the Stiletto headed for the judges. Ted, Al, and "The Bear" had reasonably good flights.

In round three Ted chipped a prop during his takeoff and used an attempt. Just before my last try to perform some sort of decent Cloverleaf I shouted, "Heads up" to the judges. That received a good laugh from everyone.

In the end "I fought the wind and The Bear won." Once again Bob Gieseke, with that little red Nobler, won the Nats. Billy, flying the dark blue Juno, placed second, I came in third, Al placed fourth, and Ted ended up in fifth.

I have always found it difficult to talk about the death of Bob Gieseke's lovely wife Anna Mae. Bob is as fierce a competitor as anyone but his family always came first which made her death an even greater tragedy. He dedicated this "Walker Trophy" victory to her memory and I can't think of a more deserving name on that trophy.

What makes the Concours award so special is the fact that the selection is decided by votes from the contestants. This was a really big deal for me.

Lanny Shorts, assisted by Bill Howe had directed an excellent Nats despite the unrelenting wind.

Normally I would find it impossible to accept third place a "satisfactory result" but in my mind, considering the wind, the last minute engine program, and the high level of competition it was a victory of sorts.

At the PAMPA banquet I was awarded the "Concours de Elegance" for "The Most Beautiful Plane At The Nationals." I was dumbfounded but very honored and proud.

What makes the Concours award so special is the fact that the selection is decided by votes from the contestants. This was a really big deal for me. It validated my skill as a builder/finisher beyond the verbal compliments and positive comments in the various publications. Stiletto #11 had finally paid me back. Thanks Buddy.

All three of Stan's K&B powered entries did quite well. Besides my third place both Stan and Dave finished in the "Top Twenty." During the long drive home we made plans to refine these engines as partners, each with a defined responsibility. I was "giddy" anticipating how much easier my life could be with the help of Stan Powell and his engines.

New power, old plane

Within a day of returning to Miami I mounted the K&B in my Stiletto 660 and started sending parts to Stan. Not to replenish the depleted inventory but to keep our stuff running.

The '79 Team Trials were less than a month away and yet another program was in order. I needed two engines right away. Stan had the setup for my engines which happened to be somewhat different than his or Dave's. They also were going to compete at the Team Trials so it looked like Stan would be busy, big time, for the next month. We still had the dilemma of fast wearing piston rings. We could solve that problem in the coming months but right now I needed engines. Prior to the team selection contest Stan would "rotate" an engine to me every six or seven days and, due to his expertise, each one ran exactly the same. I never dreamed a "Motor Guy" would be such a blessing.

I removed the lightweight RC wheels and gear fairings from the 660 and installed thin, ugly racing wheels, then a set of wheel pants to hide them. The K&B engine with an Adamisin muffler

was almost two ounces lighter than the ST unit allowing me to remove the small amount of tail weight that was installed three years earlier.

On .015 lines the Stiletto 660 became a different animal. I now started to understand the "short stroke/fast four cycle" concept so prop selection became my top priority.

In no more than a week after returning from Lincoln I had my "new program" and I liked it. The 660, on .015 lines, now about three ounces lighter, with Stan's K&B turning a very stock RevUp 11 x 5 prop flew well, very well. Good line tension, nice corners, stable in the round stuff I was a happy camper. In fact it was working so well I decided to change ... "Me."

I had always thought we all were flying "big." Not so much over the 45° line but it seemed, to me at least, maneuvers like the Round and Square Eights were using over a full third of the circle. Remel and I had discussed this during our "classroom" meetings and now I would start working on "maneuver compression." Nothing dramatic, just a little bit.

Two weeks before the team selection I started practicing my "new presentation" that would surely put me on the team. In actuality this was not as risky as it sounds. Bob Hunt was the defending World Champion and would be at the trials to train and warm up the judges. I knew he would be around while I was practicing since we had become such good friends and if I heard him, after watching some of my practice flights, say something like, "Dude, what are you doing?" I would return to my prior style.

Remel and I had discussed this during our "classroom" meetings and now I would start working on "maneuver compression."

The 1979 Team Trials

With a Hurricane lurking in the Atlantic Ocean, Vince and I made the trip to Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio, for the team selection contest.

During two days of practice, prior to "official flights" Hunt only said stuff like, "Let's share a room in Poland" and, "Do you think we will all leave from New York together this time?" He even commented on who might place second or third on that Labor Day weekend. Bob Hunt was not a "Head Game Player" so I was pumped but also aware how things can go bad quickly, remembering the '76 Nats.

At the Lincoln Nats, a few weeks before, Wynn Paul witnessed me getting physically ill from nervousness just prior to one of my final flights. I always stayed near my plane in the pit box waiting to fly. I would try to mentally prepare for an upcoming flight but the distractions from curious or well meaning people would get me upset. At times I remember being somewhat less than cordial to these spectators and that would upset me even further.

I remembered that in Holland, Gene, Bear, Billy, and I stayed isolated for this exact reason. Wynn was a professional coach and explained I should leave the pits and be on my own during these few minutes so I could concentrate on what I wanted to do. This was one more piece of the puzzle I was starting to master. Thanks Wynn.

Keith Trostle was the event director with an impressive panel of judges. The only two top seeded US fliers not competing were

Keith Trostle was the event director with an impressive panel of judges.

Jim Casale and Gene Schaffer. Gene was not flying at this contest; he was judging, along with Lou Wolgast, Remel Cooper, Mike Ditrich and other very qualified people. Up to this point I had not been “officially judged” by a current top Stunt flier.

Following Wynn Paul’s advice, seeking solitude just before flying, my fear of failure was reduced considerably. This state of mind was certainly enhanced by a good flying airplane with a fine running engine. Had a problem arisen I am sure a well disguised “mental meltdown” would have occurred.

The qualification rounds started in really nice weather for a change and I placed first on Circle One besting “The Bear” by 33 points. On the other circle Fancher ended up 48 points above Bob Baron in second. Ted just killed everyone on Circle Two. Back on Circle One Wynn Paul was right behind Gieseke for third and Billy third on Circle Two.

As the finals started, Al Rabe withdrew. His engine was done and so was he. This was “Good news, Bad news” for me. It was good news because he was one less person I had to fly against. It was bad news because Al had always been one of the truly great Stunt competitors. His dedication and work ethic were unrivaled and his technical contributions would live on, way into the future. Molded balsa, adjustable controls, coupled rudder, super custom engines. Al didn’t just “dabble” with these innovations, he was successful with them.

The three round finals began and I soon found solitude behind a pickup truck. I was in the lead after Round One by 23 points. The air had been slightly turbulent and I felt good, confident almost. Gieseke finished round one in second place with Ted in third, Billy in fourth.



The winners in the 1979 Team Trials were first-place Les McDonald (kneeling), second place Wynn Paul (L), and third-place Bob Gieseke.

As Round Two moved along I rested, once again, behind the pickup truck until it was my turn to fly. I showed up for my flight and won that round also. It looked as if Bob Hunt’s comments earlier in the week were prophetic. Not only was I on the 1980 team it was probable I would win the contest.

It seemed as though Ted Fancher and Wynn Paul would be my teammates in Poland. I was happy for them both and once again felt Billy’s pain. Deep inside I wanted Billy and “The Bear” as teammates, familiarity is comfort.

This contest wasn’t over.

As the third round started, Fancher broke a flying line during the “pull test” and his bellcrank “rotated over center.” Frantically cutting into the “WhicheverTation” and borrowing a set of lines, with no test flight and a misadjusted handle, he too was done.

I was thrilled for Wynn Paul. He had been lurking in the top ten for several years so it was great to see him do so well.

After “The Bear’s” third round flight, which put him in third place, it was up to Wynn Paul to do at least an average flight. He came through with a very good flight putting him in second place and on the team. I felt bad for Billy and Ted. We all know there are no “Do Overs” only “What Ifs.” That’s what gets us over the disappointment of not placing higher.

I was thrilled for Wynn Paul. He had been lurking in the top ten for several years so it was great to see him do so well. He had worked so hard, not only on his flying program, but with all the stuff involved with PAMPA. I remember so well listening to him “talk to his Pampawagon” during every flight, urging it through the maneuvers, weird. Thinking back now I remember cussing at my plane sometimes.

So the 1980 FAI F2B Stunt Team had been selected. Bob Hunt would go as the defending World Champion along with Wynn Paul, Bob Gieseke, and myself.

Vince and I took off for home. The Hurricane lurking in the Atlantic when we left for Dayton was bearing down on Florida and although not forecasted to hit Miami it could come close. Like many Hurricanes, this one was forecasted to turn North into the Atlantic Ocean before reaching Florida.

Like many Hurricanes, this one was forecasted to turn North into the Atlantic Ocean before reaching Florida.

As we headed South the storm did turn North but not into the Atlantic. We had no way of knowing that it had turned towards the Northwest and came across Central Florida just as Vince and I, you guessed it, were driving into Central Florida.

Trees, powerlines, and debris covered the Interstate. We even saw an overturned

eighteen wheeler. There was rain and wind like we've never seen before. We inched along in Vince's Ford pickup for hours.

We finally made it home and found that Nancy and Lisa had boarded up both houses helping each other, one house at a time, just in case the storm did not turn. This is no easy task. At the time Lisa was pregnant and Nancy had three year old Diane to deal with. "Hey Ladies, I killed 'em in Dayton, wanna see my medal?" They were not impressed at all, so Vince and I started opening up the shutters and taking down the plywood.

"Hey Ladies, I killed 'em in Dayton, wanna see my medal?"

Analyze and Review

Nineteen seventy nine turned out to be a good year for me. The new version of the Stiletto kit had been available since the beginning of the year. A much better value than the first kit, it was selling very well. Third place at the Nats was commendable considering the wind and the desperate engine situation I had been in. The "Concours" award was, no doubt, a special event for me. First place at the Team Trials would be a major win for anybody and to this day I still think of it as one of my most gratifying victories. However, these were now past events—history in my world.

The two things that really made my contest season a good one were two things I could carry forward into 1980. The most obvious was the connection I had made with Stan Powell.

Together he and I, along with Dave Hemstrought, would turn these sweet running engines into powerful long lasting world beaters. Thanks Stan.

The other notable item I could carry forward would seem virtually insignificant.

After following the advice of Wynn Paul to isolate myself just prior to a flight I discovered a new found calmness that allowed me to focus my concentration on the upcoming flight; wind, sun, clouds, needle setting, reference points, stuff like that.

After following the advice of Wynn Paul to isolate myself just prior to a flight I discovered a new found calmness that allowed me to focus my concentration on the upcoming flight; wind, sun, clouds, needle setting, reference points, stuff like that. By avoiding the distractions of someone asking what to use for fillets or what size tip did I use in my Rapidograph for the rivets it is amazing what you can accomplish. This is not Zen or some magical zone. It is simply evaluating the dynamics of what your assigned task is and that would be to fly better than everyone else that day. If you do this your chances are good that you will win. And that, my friends, was the only thing important to me. *SN*

the big assortment of engines, mufflers, spinner, props, spare parts

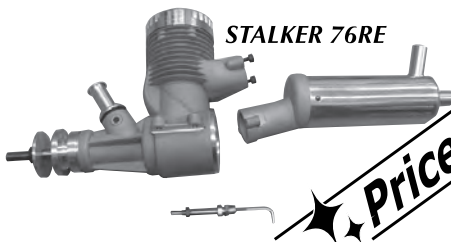
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Kaz Minato

3-12-6 Higashi Niiza-shi Saitama
352-0002 Japan
fax: +81-48-474-8079
e-mail: bluemax.minato@nifty.com

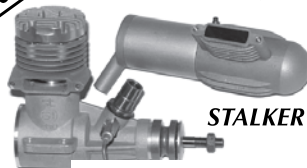


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STALKER 76RE

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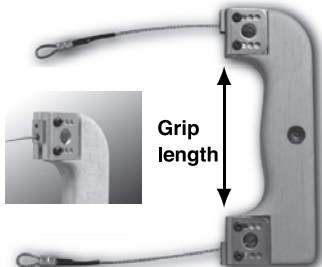
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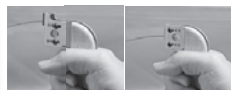
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MNT HANDLES



Grip length

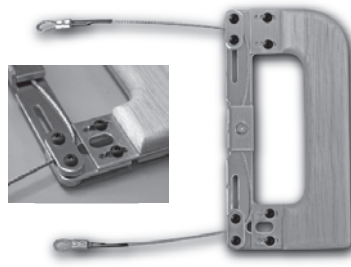


Extension bracket for type A (Option)



Long

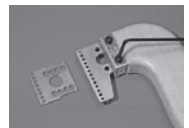
Short



MNT Handle Type B
Grip length 85 mm
For Compact Stunt model.
Adjustable Control-Line Handle
Up & Down Space, Reach, Neutral adjust



!NEW!



MNT Handle Type C
Grip length 85(C-85) or 90(C-90) mm
Adjustable Control-Line Handle
Up & Down Space, Reach, Neutral adjust,
with Extension Bracket (Long & Short)

MNT Handle Type A
Grip length 80(A-80),85(A-85),
90(A-90),100(C-100) mm
Adjustable Control-Line Handle
Up & Down Space, Reach, Neutral adjust



Spare wire (Option)

The Stiletto

By Les McDonald

Chronicles

The Little Engine That Could

After returning home from the 1979 FAI Team Selection the first order of business would be to organize our “motor program.” My good friends at the K&B factory were helpful with this, but not near as excited as I felt they should be.

I gathered a good selection of standard K&B parts that were currently available, but in addition to those we needed crankcases and front housings from the earlier series 40s. In a short time I “sourced” a good supply of the “small bearing” front housings, but crankcases were elusive. Stan Powell would need to continue with the JB Weld solution, at least for a while.

Stan was able to solve the ring wear problem right away. Vic Garner, in Northern California, not only supplied us with piston rings made from a harder iron, but now they were perfectly round. Good parts fit was a major key to winning the battle, so we moved on into other details.

Bill Wisniewski, of K&B, sent a large batch of connecting rods and sleeves for me to select from. I would inspect these batches with a caliper, a micrometer, and my eyeballs, then send the “good stuff” to Stan and return the “rejects” to K&B. At one time I remember receiving more than fifty connecting rods and after inspection only sending Stan five or six. After that we started buying con rods from RPM. Round cylinder sleeves were also hard to come by but we made do.

We were test flying the new engines and, as you all know, when you fix one problem it creates another. The new, harder piston rings were wearing out the top portion of the sleeves. Mr. Wisniewski was the only one there who had a clue of what we

were trying to achieve and, thankfully, was sympathetic.

Once we had a good quantity of sleeves Stan researched around and found Henry Nelson to be the solution to the sleeve problem. Henry came up with a recipe that perfectly blended Vic Garner’s piston ring material to the chrome coating on our now perfectly round sleeves.



This photo was taken in early 1981. It shows Les with some of the more significant hardware that he collected flying the Stiletto 660. From left to right are the UHU World Cup (emblematic of the 1976 World Champion), the Al Lewis Perpetual Trophy from the 1980 King Orange contest, a crystal vase presented to Les when he won the 1980 World Championships, the Steve Wooley Memorial Cup which is presented to the individual World Champion, and the Walker Trophy for his win at the 1980 Nats.

We were test flying engines and, as you all know, when you fix one problem it creates another.

When we did see someone they would stare at our colorful vehicles and then look back down at the ground.

By early in 1980 I had good running engines that would last and a variety of props that suited the K&B. The old style Top Flite props now seemed to work best for me and I've often wondered if I had some of these props with me at the Lincoln Nats what could have been. Now there's a big "What If."

I retired Stiletto #11 but knew someday I would build another I-Beamer using different "numbers." It took up residence on a wall at my Mom's house, right next to the "Concours de Elegance" award. Thanks Arlie Preszler.

A little break

I had decided not to build a new Stiletto for 1980. With my new engine situation, recent success at the team trials, the acceptance of my "maneuver compression," and the tips from Wynn Paul, the 660 and I were "good to go."

Life is so easy when your program is working well. I even spent time around the house doing normal married guy things. I couldn't believe how fast Diane was growing up and it was obvious I hadn't done much "parenting." Nancy was a great Mom and I did pretend to be a father, but the Stunt thing was always there no matter what I was doing.

It was very apparent that, for me, competing at this level had become a job.

It was very apparent that, for me, competing at this level had become a job. Not a career, not an avocation, just a full time second job with no pay and lousy benefits. But in this short time, just before starting to practice for the 1980 season, I was on a vacation of sorts. I still worked at Orange Blossom Hobbies forty-four or forty-five hours a week, but without doing "Stunt stuff" I had extra time and even tinkered with my Yamaha "cafe racer" motorcycle a little bit.

The competition, and the effort it took, was not relaxing and certainly not fun but I kept at it. I got along well with my peers simply because we were not year round neighbors. We were "Stunt Fighters" on a common mission trying to beat each other during some sort of an adventure.

Ted Fancher, Bill Simons, Bob Whitely, Gene Schaffer, Bob Hunt, Al Rabe, and Bob Gieseke (and a few years down the road David Fitzgerald, Paul Walker, and others) were all great "Stunt Fighters," but they managed to maintain what appeared to be a balanced life. They all worked hard flying Stunt and were very accomplished but were able to separate themselves when necessary to function within the normal parameters of marriage and society.

Bill Werwage, Jim Casale, and I were a different breed. We only lived to win contests. Everything else rode in the backseat. I swear, alone, out on some practice field, if one of us got chest pains the only question would have been "How many more flights can I get in before I have to drive myself to the Emergency Room?" I have no regrets and I'm certainly not bitter. I'm proud of my success flying Stunt but I must make you aware of how difficult it was for me.

Back to work

After a few months of playing with my daughter, enjoying the company of my wife, getting a few things done around the house, and tinkering with my motorcycle, my vacation was over.

Bob Gieseke had withdrawn from the team. I didn't know why and it was none of my business. I suspected, since the death of Anna Mae, he had his hands full with the kids and was going to do the right thing by staying home and keep things under control. A perfect example of what I tried to explain in the paragraphs above. "The Bear" would put his family first, above all else. This is only a guess on my part and there may have been something else but I can't imagine what. Bob Gieseke is a good man!

Bob's withdrawal would move Werwage onto the team. For me that was a wash since either one of them was capable of winning. Besides I had learned my lesson, as with Hunt in England, that my predictions had no basis in reality. Anyone on a US Stunt Team could win one of these things just like Hunt and I had demonstrated at the two previous Championships.

I planned on attending three contests in 1980. The World Championships at Czestochowa, Poland, in mid July, the Nats at Wilmington, Ohio, a few weeks after that, and the King Orange International, near Jacksonville, at the end of the year.

As I had done in the past, Daylight Savings started and I began practicing. No panic this time. The engines were good for hundreds of runs lasting almost as long as a conventional "flat ring" motor.

Vince now had the experience to help with my flying and, although he wasn't my "official coach," we spent time trying to perfect the "tighter" pattern. We worked primarily on making the round loops and triangles fit "inside" the perimeter of the square maneuvers. Properly performed triangles and round loops would seem, to the judges, a bit small at first, but I wanted something distinctive in my patterns.

Travel to the contest site in Poland seemed simple enough.

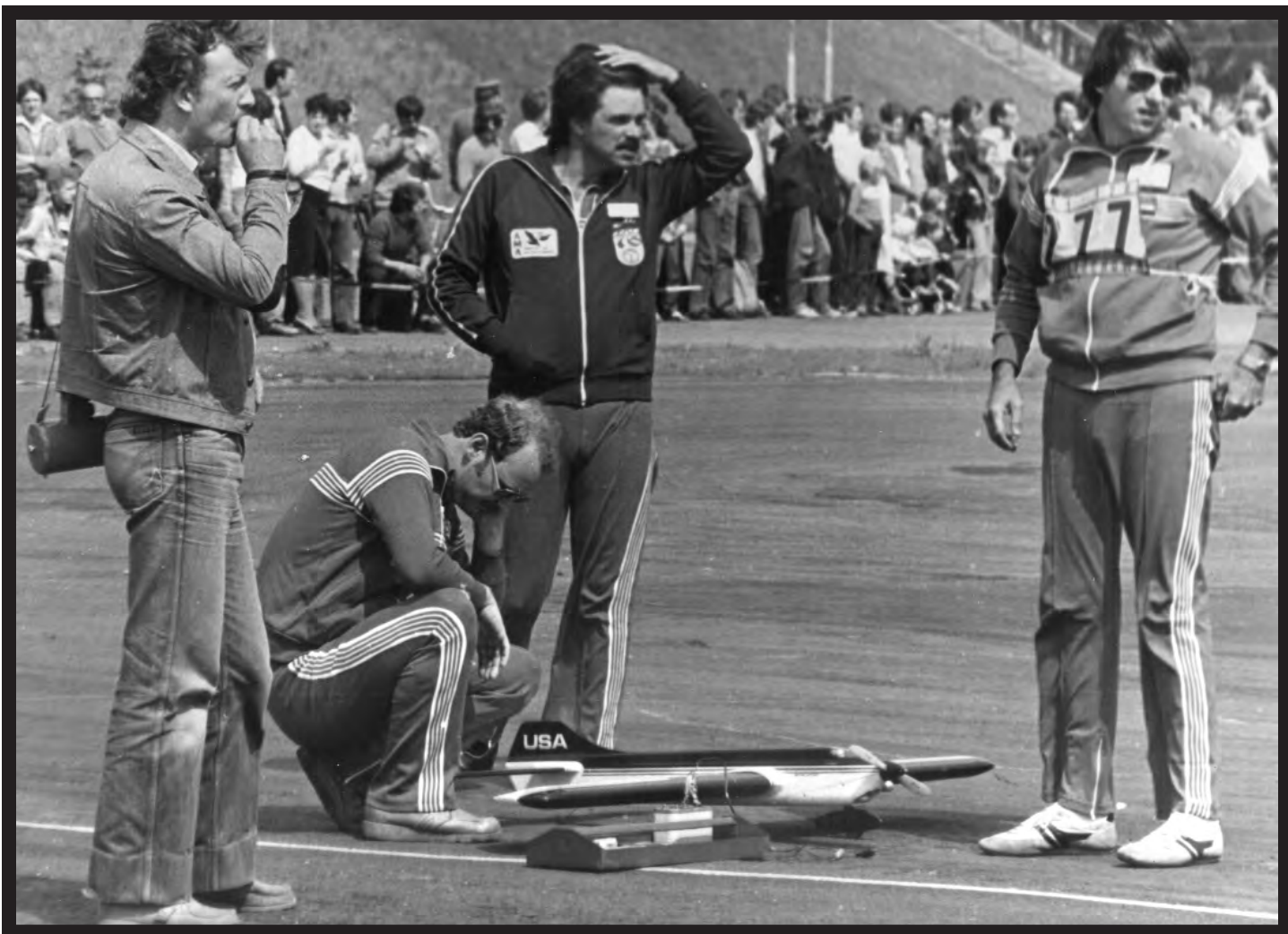
Since 1972 I had been trying to fly the same size maneuvers as everyone else and hoping to win with better intersections, bottoms, and shapes. All the good guys consistently fly good intersections, bottoms, and shapes, so I was just trying to achieve a pattern that looked a little bit different, closer to the rulebook in size.

1980 World Championships

Travel to the contest site in Poland seemed simple enough.

For both my flights between Miami and Frankfurt I had made prior arrangements with a well known German airline to handle my airplane box—or so I thought. I had no "inside connections" with this airline and that, my friends, makes a world of difference. Finally, after twenty or thirty minutes of whining, complaining, and paying way too much for "excess baggage" I was on my way.

Upon arriving in Frankfurt I hooked up with Don Jehlik, the Team Manager, his Assistant, Bill Lee, and the rest of the team. We gathered our fuel, picked up our rental vans, and headed east.



Left to right are the official time keeper, Bob Hunt, Bill Werwage, and Les McDonald, apparently waiting for the judges to take their positions to score one of Les's qualification flights at the 1980 World Championships.

The West German countryside is beautiful and our five Volkswagen Vanagans, all in bright shades of various colors, must have looked like some sort of circus caravan speeding down the Autobahn. (*How prophetic ... —Ed.*)

As we approached the “buffer zone” leading into East Germany we slowed down and watched the landscape gradually turn dreary. As we got closer to the actual border and the customs checkpoint it got downright depressing. Razor wire, gun towers, and machine gun-toting guards made for a quiet, somber two hours of waiting for clearance to cross into the land of light gray, dark gray, and black.

Our “transit visas” specified a direct route to Erfurt, our first overnight stop, and then to the Polish border. No deviation would be tolerated and we had twenty four hours to do it.

The trip was downright eerie. Driving through cities at five in the afternoon we saw very few people and even fewer cars on the streets. When we did see someone they would stare at our colorful vehicles and then look back down at the ground. No smiles, no waves, they just wanted to go on unnoticed. In contrast



With the judges finally in position, Les fires up Stan's K&B 40 as Bob Hunt holds.

to the black cars and gray buildings, huge signs painted red and white with the figures, in black, of a gloved hand holding a lightning bolt with wording, no doubt, extolling the virtues of Communism.

I was driving the bright green “Stunt Van” and pulled up in front of the hotel in Erfurt to unload our models. In an instant a very large soldier with an equally large machine gun appeared and motioned for me to move the van. I suggested that he should allow me just a moment to unload our precious models; not good judgment on my part. He started waving the large gun around and called for reinforcements. An even larger soldier with an even bigger gun showed up and demanded our passports. In just a few short minutes I knew this had gone beyond a “parking ticket.” We were now being detained; a precursor of things to come.

In just a few short minutes I knew this had gone beyond a “parking ticket.” We were now being detained; a precursor of things to come.

Eventually we were in our rooms, with our models and the passports back in our possession. Some lady “Handler” that had sorted it all out explained “things are a bit different here than in America.” Duh.

Later that same evening we saw, from the hotel windows, the same large soldiers that had confronted us earlier. They were still in uniform, but now obviously drunk and very rowdy on the street below. Needless to say, Werwage and I didn’t step out to find a drink.

Early the next day we loaded up and headed for Poland with Bill Lee leading the way. After driving around Erfurt aimlessly for a while one of the supporters, Dave Elias, explained to Bill that Poland is to the east so we should be driving into the Sun not away from it. Stunt people are simple people and we were so impressed by Dave’s leadership skills we promoted him from “supporter” to the semi-unofficial post of “Stunt Team Manager.”

Now on the road we were told to be on, heading east, we finally arrived at the border crossing into Poland. Our five little circus wagons and a rented Ford Fiesta lined up at the gate and waited. We all jumped out and started milling around our mini wagon train waiting for some official to stamp our passports and open the gate. No one was there, only us. No officials, no soldiers, no one to get us through. We were on the route provided by the East Germans and still within our timeline but this border crossing was closed and, we soon found out, had been for months.

We were on the route provided by the East Germans and still within our timeline but this border crossing was closed and, we soon found out, had been for months.

New plan: Screw the Commies, and their orders. We take off to the North, on back roads, trying to reach a city called Gorlitz, hopefully to cross into Poland there. Our colorful little caravan

passed missile sites, an airbase, tank and armor storage areas, and many other things forbidden to American eyes.

We could have blown these places to bits with the mighty USA-1, a deadly Stiletto, the well armed Genesis, or the always lethal Pampawagon.

We begged Bob Hunt to not take pictures and secretly conspired to misplace his camera. Billy and I just wanted to get out of East Germany and Wynn Paul started to realize that fried chicken was not in his immediate future.

It’s raining, it’s cold, and I’m a little annoyed and somewhat nervous that we never will be able to leave East Germany. We just drive and drive, looking for a way out. Have you ever had a similar dream?

Late in the afternoon we arrived at the border crossing in Gorlitz and found it to be functioning like the well-oiled Socialist machine it is suppose to be. We were close on time, but our main concern was the fact that we were 150 miles from where we were directed by the same well-oiled people in charge. It must have been near closing time since we were able to pass through the gate with little fanfare and on our way to Wroclaw, Poland, our second overnight stop. Some of the Team Race guys had rented a Ford Fiesta and within an hour were miles ahead of the rest of the caravan.

I blasted our little bright green Vanagan down the road into the cold, rainy night. I was leading our group of five brightly colored VWs across the Polish frontier when we came across a small car overturned in a ditch next to the road. Through the rain and darkness we saw team racers Walt Perkins, Tom Knoppe, and J.E. Albritton fumbling around the wrecked car and it soon became obvious that FAI team racers ain’t exactly Formula One drivers.

“Solidarity” was just taking roots with big changes on the way. Had we been aware the old guard was crumbling we would have cheered the people on because the old system really sucked.

I, and some of the other team members, had some experience with this sort of thing so we had the team racers and their Ford Fiesta up and running in less than 45 minutes. The car’s body was bent over to one side, most of the windows were broken, and the sheet metal was totally rearranged. Ever return a rental car with a scratch? I give them credit though, by noon the following day they had a new car.

At 4:00 a.m. we pull into the parking lot of the hotel in Wroclaw. All of us were exhausted and I only remember the scariest and rattiest elevator I’ve ever been on.

The next morning we took off towards the Sun once again and on to our final destination, the city of Czestochowa in South Central Poland.

Poland actually was pretty nice; austere, but nice. The people were friendly; not paranoid like the East Germans, and the citizens of Czestochowa seemed to enjoy hosting the Championships. Things were changing in their lives at the time, but we were oblivious to the food shortage, labor strikes, and major shifts in the political system about to take place in their country and beyond. “Solidarity” was just taking roots with big changes on the way. Had we been aware the old guard was crumbling we would have cheered the people on because the old system really sucked.

After traveling for almost five days, the agenda called for two things: get some sleep and find some place to practice. Sleep was easy, a place to practice turned out to be impossible.

The contest site was off limits and parking lots did not exist. Harold Pokorny, a member of the Austrian F2B Team, explained to us this was the first generation of Polish people to own personal cars, so not only did they lack parking areas they seemed not to have very many “rules of the road.” On top of this was a complete lack of skill and experience operating these little Fiat derivatives. Within an hour of arriving in Czestochowa we found the phrase “crossing the street” to be a frantic, daring challenge. Harold nicknamed these brightly hued, under-powered (thankfully) cars as “Kneecappers.” At least they weren’t all black like the cars of their East German neighbors.

We did find several places to “fly.” Actual practice was not feasible. *Flying* is rolling out a set of lines, launching the model, doing a few sky tricks, and plopping back down safely. *Practicing* is rolling out a set of lines, launching the model, and making a gradual, smooth, one lap ascent to five feet. Fly at five feet for about five laps and then, upwind, make a sharp vertical climb, perpendicular to the ground, passing directly, precisely at the top dead center of the sphere in which ... well you all know the other parts.

The muddy field was named “The Berea Tar Pits.” The pad with the kids, dogs, and bicycles became known as “The Torture Chamber.” And our “rented” sports field was lovingly called “The Penalty Box.”

We flew in places so confined and turbulent that attempting a complete pattern would be “risky” at best. One place was so muddy by the time you reached the triangles you could no longer move your feet.

Another place we tried to practice was an asphalt pad located near an apartment building. Kids, dogs, bicycles, and drunks ruled that spot. We could only get about two thirds of a circle over the asphalt portion. We had to fly out over two-foot high scrub grass for the other third. It was a very high-stress proposition to fly there ...

The “Militia” chased us off a soccer field we had paid money to use.

We actually gave descriptive names to these places. The muddy field was named “The Berea Tar Pits.” The pad with the kids, dogs, and bicycles became known as “The Torture



Here's the triumphant 1980 United States F2B contingent. Clockwise from left are Bill Werwage and his USA-1 who finished in third, the retiring 1978 World Champion, Bob Hunt, with his Genesis 40 who placed second, Wynn Paul with his tenth-place Pampawagon, and the newly crowned World Champion, Les McDonald, and his two-time WC winning Stiletto 660.

Chamber.” And our “rented” sports field was lovingly called “The Penalty Box.”

The total absence of a practice site in Poland soon became a major issue and, over the years, has morphed into a legendary, maybe even infamous, story in the world of FAI Stunt. What was an annoyance to Bill, Wynn, Dave Elias, and me turned into a very real and serious problem for Bob Hunt and that story is for he alone to tell. (*I'll give that some serious thought, Les. The State Department prohibited me from writing about it back then. I think they've probably forgotten the episode by now. —Ed.*)

The official flight circles at all these championships are only used for the competition flights and one official practice flight per contestant is allowed. Everyone seems to be okay with that. In Poland we faced other problems with their “practice agenda.”

At a typical World Championship each team is allotted thirty minutes on the circle with three team members. If you happen to bring along a defending World Champion, no time is to be added to compensate for the additional flight, so advance planning and coordination is required. We are Stunt guys, cunning and resourceful, so we handle it, but the organizers in Poland decided to be clever by splitting the Stunt entries into three practice groups. One group was assigned the actual Stunt circle, another group was put in the Speed cage, and the third bunch—which included us—was put on the Team Race circle.

We were not allowed to be anywhere near the official circle until our first round contest flights. The day before the competition started I spent a lot of time hanging around the outside of the “non active” official circle trying to study the surrounding terrain, background, and various wind scenarios. This didn't affect just the Americans; it affected two thirds of the Stunt entries. The contest site itself was first class all the way with a clubhouse, workshop, paddock, and pit areas. Bleachers for the Speed and Team Race circles, it looked like a “mini Daytona.”

Like all dedicated Control Line sites, the Stunt circle was



Les's win at the 1980 World Championships did not come easy. The conditions in Poland were very windy, rainy, and turbulent. In the end Les prevailed and established himself as one of the all-time greats in World Stunt competition.

surrounded by buildings, tents, and on one side, a six foot high wall lined with a row of large trees.

For two thirds of the contestants, Round One was our first flight on the "official" Stunt circle and Bob Hunt was leading at the end of it. Billy was in second, Compostella of Italy third, Hara in fourth, and me in fifth. I was hit several times with turbulence and my score showed it. Wynn Paul couldn't get out of the 2500s for the entire contest, except for a high-scoring Round Two flight, and was never a factor in the top group. He flew well but struggled with the bumpy air and couldn't separate himself from the large group of fliers between the ninth and thirteenth spots.

In the time between Round One and Round Two Billy made a casual comment about the wind coming between two trees next to the six foot high wall in one particular place. To this day I believe that simple utterance fed me the information I needed to win that contest. I was scheduled to fly in the middle of Round Two and began paying close attention to the place Billy pointed out as I watched other flights. During my Round Two flight I was now aware of this trouble spot, worked around it, and received the highest score for the entire contest. I was the only flier to venture into the 2900s. I went from fifth to first and would have felt pretty good had the weather been a bit more predictable.

Going into the final two rounds I was

of miracle flight to move me out of first. Hunt did fly a great pattern but, lucky for me, no miracles.

44 points ahead of Bob Hunt in second. Billy was only 4 points behind Hunt in third with Compostella and Hara farther back.

Round Three, the first finals round, was a bit unnerving for me. Windy, along with a cold drizzle, I could only manage a 2792.

Remember, I'm a lucky guy. Neither Bob nor Billy could make any gains and only Compostella got close, but I was still in first place. Fortunately for me all the Round Three scores languished in the middle 2700s.

By Round Four the final places were pretty well set and even though Bobby had the coveted last flight I knew he would have to get something over 2932 to win. Billy was entrenched in third after my 2871 flight and it was up to Bobby to fly some sort



The victorious United States Stunt fliers fill the podium as the Star Spangled Banner plays.



Les, Billy, Bob, and the infamous "Circus Stunt Vanagon." This photo was taken on the trip to Poland. That trip had some amazing twist and turns that could have landed the entire team in an East German prison ...

The final scores were 5802 for first, 5767 for second, and 5657 for third. Actually this was a big spread, not that I'm complaining, and it was the second time an American Stunt team filled the top three positions.

With my first place, Billy's third, and Wynn Paul in tenth, we also were able to keep the Team Trophy in America for another two years. This is important, especially to the AMA, since it somewhat justifies the funding for the whole affair. Thank You AMA and thanks also to the PAMPA members for the financial support.

Once again, up on the top step of the podium, with Bob Hunt on my right and Bill Werwage on my left, we waved, congratulated each other, and listened to our National Anthem in front of more than a thousand cheering people. It's an amazing feeling and I just wished we were in some other country.

During the banquet I was requested to attend some little ceremony in a stairwell so I could witness the Secret Police return a camera, some lenses, and a number of rolls of destroyed film to Bob Hunt.

I had no plans to "let it all hang out" at this banquet. "Just cause you're paranoid doesn't mean their not out to get you!" We still had a serious problem and would only be happy when we were on the West side of this rusting Iron Curtain.

During the banquet I was requested to attend some little ceremony in a stairwell so I could witness the Secret Police return a camera, some lenses, and a number of rolls of destroyed film to Bob Hunt. I did let my "temporary celebrity status" tell some sleazy little trench-coated Polish I-Spy creep what I thought about their "System." By the look on his face I was sure the translator was not repeating my tirade word for word in Polish

and was probably telling this little creepy guy how great I thought the meal was.

A special thanks to both Don Jelhik and Bill Lee for managing the whole team through many difficult situations. (*I'll second that thought.* —Ed.)

No sightseeing, no tourist stuff. We pack up early the next morning and head west, back through the enchanting land of light gray, dark gray, and black. The plan was to caravan, in the VW circus vans, from Czestochowa to Dresden, East Germany. Spend the night in Dresden and then hightail it back to Frankfurt, West Germany.

After a two or three hour wait at the Polish border we finally crossed into East Germany and set off for Dresden. Billy and I did what we always did after a contest: Drink.

We bought a case of beer and reviewed our most recent competition. Drinking beer in the back of a van would be considered very bad judgment, but in 1980 East Germany we observed it to be normal.

Over the years I had learned quite a bit from Billy during these traditional discussions, and now Bob Hunt and Wynn

Paul were able to participate in this deep, philosophical conversation. The difference here was that neither Wynn nor Bob was drinking, so after two or three hours the party only had two guys talking: Billy and me. We seemed to be the only ones that made any sense. One case of Wroclaw beer and three loaves of bread later we arrived in Dresden.

Within five miles the trees were green, the sky was blue, and the air smelled fresh for the first time in over a week.

Dresden had been leveled during World War II, so the primary mission of the ruling party was to rebuild it into a magnificent, modern city. A showcase to the world as to what the Great Communist Society was capable of achieving.

We were scheduled to stay that evening at the swank Interhotel Plaza. The circular driveway of our hotel was beautifully landscaped with terraced, lighted waterfalls, and there were many meticulously arranged gardens as well. There were a number of elegantly dressed people walking up to the entrance along this driveway. Into this very sophisticated scene rolled the U.S. Stunt Team with a case or two of Wroclaw beer empties.

Upon arrival at the main entrance of our hotel, Billy rolled out of the circus van's side door. He was sporting a Mickey Mouse tee shirt that exclaimed "Have You Kicked Your Model Airplane Today." His eyes were two red slits and he was looking a bit green. (*Billy always did have a good sense for color schemes.* —Ed.) He made a few strange noises and then up chucked on the glorious stairs leading up to this glass and marble example of Socialist architecture. This was not a rare occurrence in this part of the world since alcohol seemed to be a good place for these oppressed citizens to hide. The local patrons, dressed in gowns and evening garb, didn't seem to notice or even care. They knew some "less equal worker" would clean up Billy's mess. I simply

asked “You about done there Bill?” as we prepared to unload the van.

In the morning we cleaned up Billy and headed for Frankfurt. We still had one more border crossing to negotiate and it was uneventful until one of the “guards,” while searching through my stuff, impaled his finger on a “souvenir aero club pin.” He looked at me like I had just stabbed him with a knife. Surely I would be “detained.” Through watery eyes he reluctantly let me pass through the gate and in an hour or two we were free. Within five miles the trees were green, the sky was blue, and the air smelled fresh for the first time in over a week. Bob Hunt literally got out of the van and kissed the ground. Welcome back to West Germany and after that, the “Good Old USA.”

Finally back home I started preparing for the Nats. Stan provided me with fresh engines and, would you believe, Nancy organized another “Victory Party.” With all our friends in attendance and another “Stiletto cake,” the all-weekend-long occasion was a rousing success.

The 1980 Nats

Nancy had not gone with me to a contest since 1974 and I was sure she would like to see Shareen and her other “Stunt” friends, not to mention show off the “baby” who by now was four years old. I knew Diane would have fun simply because she was four years old.

One of my customers at Orange Blossom Hobbies owned a rental car company and loaned me a Ford station wagon so I could take the family to the Ohio Nats. By now we had a new Mercury sedan but we needed more space for the kid and, hopefully, the Jim Walker Trophy.

Ever since I started working with Stan Powell on the K&B program, things had gone my way. It hadn’t been easy, but the lack of aggravation with my engines made life so much easier. The Stiletto, powered with Stan’s K&B engines, had been tested in battle over a broad spectrum of situations and prevailed every time except once. The one shortfall up to this point would be my third place at the ’79 Lincoln Nats. I considered third place to be a loss!

This would be my golden opportunity for a Nats win. In 1971

I was learning. In 1972 I was gaining experience. In 1973 I was psyched out by the wind. In 1974 I had been distracted with the new job and RC car racing. In 1975 I misplaced my inside round loops and lost by a single point. In 1976 I beat myself with a bad needle setting and a wrong decision. I had taken the year off in 1977 to try and put some stability in my family life and in 1978 I was in England during Nats week. In 1979 I didn’t have the proper propeller. I used all these excuses as reasons.

I now had the experience, the plane, the power package, the trick blue shirt with stars, and the confidence to win. I just had to fly better than everyone else and that’s what makes all this so difficult.

These Ohio contests and the early King Orange Internats in Miami were the roots of my fascination with Stunt models.

Ohio has always been a good place for me and not just because of my competition successes there. My mother grew up in Lakewood, a suburb of Cleveland, and later, after marrying my father, they lived in nearby Bay Village. They moved to South Florida in 1944 and I came along in 1945.

My folks still had family up there and I fondly remember our summer vacations, with my mom’s brother, in Olmstead Falls. During these summer vacations around 1953 and 1954, I remember so well my parents taking me to watch model airplane contests in the parks around Cleveland. The Stunt planes were magic to my eyes and their beauty burned into my little brain.

Could this be the reason I always preferred dedicated Control Line fields over the parking lots or expansive runway venues? Is it possible I saw Milton Boos, John Havel, or Emil Cipra fly? Perhaps even Bill Werwage? Many years later Billy told me I probably didn’t watch him fly or see his planes but I really wanted to believe I did.

These Ohio contests and the early King Orange Internats in Miami were the roots of my fascination with Stunt models. This exposure had nothing to do with competition or who placed first that day. It was all about magnificent models making wonderful figures, breathtaking pullouts, and graceful landings under the blue summer skies, surrounded by the smell of fresh cut grass and castor oil lingering in the gentle breeze.

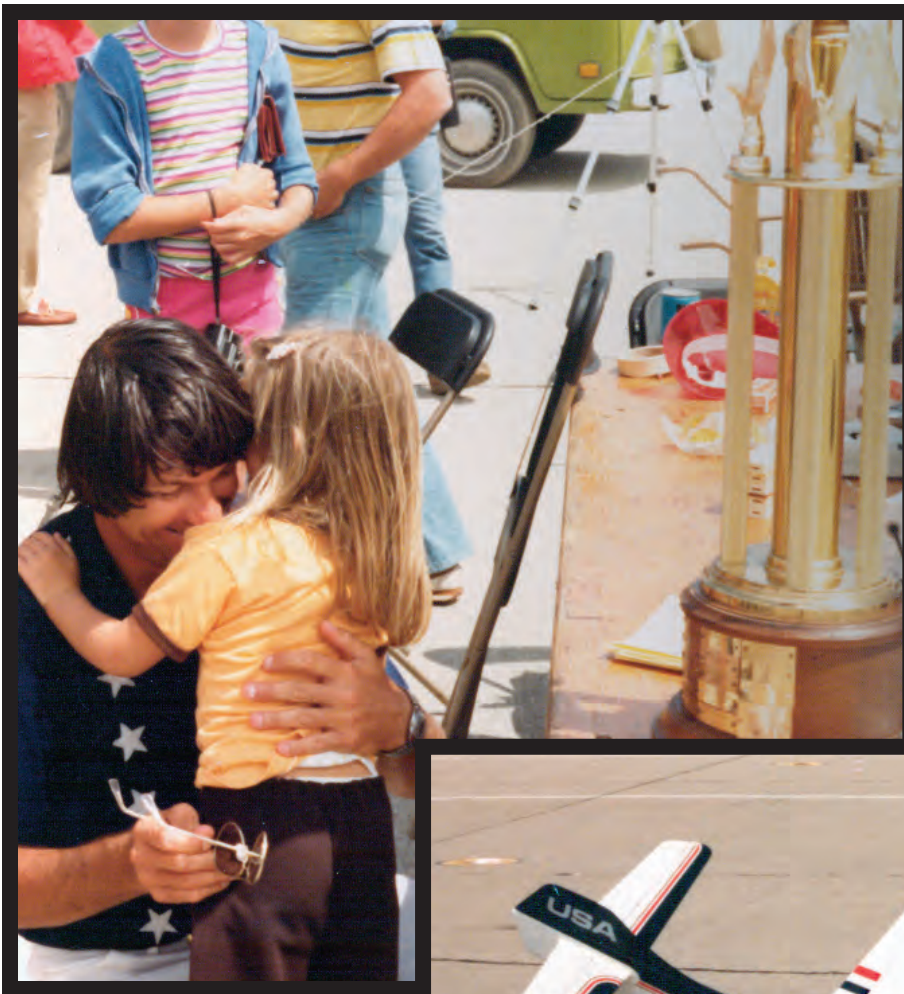
Well those days were over. I came to Ohio for one purpose, to win the Nats and have my name forever etched on the Jim Walker Trophy. I was not a “trophy collector” but my name on this one would solidify my place in the history of our event. I had done all the “Good Stunt Guy” stuff.

I had won two World Championships and some other “big time contests.” I had two construction articles published and traveled to many foreign lands to fly my models. I was without a doubt the most “subsidized” person competing in Stunt and my Stiletto had been kitted. The Stiletto and I were fixtures in the various magazines and I would be lying to say that meant nothing, but I would never be satisfied until my name was on the Nats winners list and on that Trophy.

Since 1975 I had only been concerned about the perception of my flying accuracy compared with Werwage, Hunt, Gieseke, Schaffer, Simons,



Phil Granderson and Les watch Bob Hunt’s last finals flight at the 1980 Nats. Bob was the last one with a shot to beat Les, but in the end the Stiletto-man won his first Nats.



Above: It just doesn't get any better than this: Les's four-year-old daughter, Diane, gives her dad a congratulatory hug after his 1980 Nats win.

Right: After coming close several times, Les finally won the Jim Walker trophy in 1980. At this point in time, Les had completed the Grand Slam in Stunt by winning the 1979 Team Trials, the 1980 World Championships, and the 1980 United States Nationals.



flown by Bob Baron during "Top Twenty" day at the 1996 Nats. I was a judge that year and still remember that flight. He won that Nats and deserved it.

At the 1996 Nats PAMPA banquet, after his win, knowing he was fighting a terminal illness, I pulled him into a hallway and tried to convey to him several of my personal thoughts. These were private words and will always remain that way, but I would like to think I made some small impression on his view of the Stunt world and the personalities that live in it.

Back to Wilmington, Ohio and the '80 Nats ...

It was a typical Ohio contest with plenty of wind and cold rain. Once again Lanny Shorts had put together a very distinguished panel of judges: Zimmer, Laws, Lorio, Adamisin, McClellan, Fitzgerald, Delano, Reinhard, and Gieseke.

Qualifications went well for me and at the end of "Top Twenty" day I was in second place thirteen points behind Bob Hunt. Ted

and Fancher. Bob Baron was also in the top group but I never thought too much about his opinions. Baron was convinced I was winning because of "The Shirt and my shiny paint jobs" and made no effort to hide his feelings. I had no problem with his thoughts simply because I had been placing well at the contests and I respected his skill, if not his attitude. I have seen Baron absolutely dominate a contest and I have also watched him struggle with flights. He seemed to have difficulty recognizing the flights that weren't his best. To him they were all good or, at least, better than the scores he received.

The best single flight, of anyone, I have ever witnessed was

Fancher, Bill Werwage, and Bob Baron were all very close behind and we headed into the finals on Saturday. Those scores don't carry over but they do let you know if it's time to panic. I felt pretty good about my chances until the flight order was drawn.

It was time to panic. This is the reason why I don't play the "Lottery." I was assigned 1-1-2 flight order for the three rounds. That's a tough nut to crack, and to make matters worse, Hunt's flight order was 3-7-7 which gave him the coveted last flight in the final round.

During morning practice Ted had, once again, a control failure and totally killed another Tation. He quickly returned to the fray with a profile Tationette, but it was apparent, barring something freaky, he would end up in fifth. I still think Ted sacrificed some of his planes back then so everyone could enjoy the reliable adjustable control systems you now have. Thanks Ted?

Remember the part about me being a lucky guy. At the end of the first two rounds, even after flying first in each one, I was leading the field. Hunt and Baron were tied for second, Werwage was five points behind them in third, and Fancher was solidly in fifth.

*Remember the part about me being
a lucky guy.*

In the third and final round my flight went down by nine points and all I could do was wait and watch Billy and then Bobby. I was positive the scoring would balloon at some point, either with Billy in the middle of the order or with Bobby at the end.

Lucky me, lucky me. The scores stayed low and I had finally won a Nats. Once again the Stiletto 660, with Stan's K&B engine, had done the job for me. Thanks again Stan.

Nancy and Diane being there was icing on the cake. I even had the station wagon with which to haul the glorious "Walker Trophy" back to Miami.

Billy was still "The Man." I had developed a profound respect for the abilities of Bob Hunt, the determination of Ted Fancher, and nothing much changed my opinion of Bob Baron. He had the flying skills but something was missing. But right then, at that moment, I had it all and didn't care about anyone else or what they thought. That night Hunt and Werwage went on a "bender" and whined all night. *(Les, that was a deep philosophical discussion, just like the one you and Bill had on the trip out of Poland. —Ed.)*

This was not a clean win for me and the normal grumbling would start sometime during the banquet and last until the '81 Nats. Sometimes there is a "down side" to winning. The crying and complaining are just another phase of the event. Smelling like castor oil and biting fingernails are other phases; it's a long list!

Any one of the three of us could have won that contest, it just happened to be "my turn" and that was fine with me.

Success has rewards

The Walker Trophy, now with my name added to it, was quite handsome sitting in our living room next to the Steve Wooley Cup. At this moment I had hit a "homer" and tagged all the bases by winning the Team Selection, The World Championships, and the Nats. For a "Stunt Fighter" it gets no better than that!

By Fall I had the interest of the people at K&B. We discussed the feasibility of producing a K&B 40 Stunt engine based on Stan Powell's work. This seemed to be a good time period for this project since they had recently acquired machinery from Cox, the undisputed "master of close tolerances." Bill Wisniewski was given the go ahead to supply us with whatever was needed for our program. This arrangement made it possible to have nine

crankcases cast with the transfer ports just the way Stan wanted them. No more J.B. Weld.

Most of the other parts were being made by various "vendors," so the only "donated stuff" was from K&B and it was very much appreciated. All things aside, this arrangement seemed to simply be one group of "hobby guys" helping another. Thank You and Rest In Peace Mr. Wisniewski.

I had one more contest in 1980. The King Orange in Jacksonville. The KOI always has two unknowns, the weather and who may show up. Jacksonville is way North of the Tropics, so late December in North Florida can experience some very uncomfortable weather.

This time it was a very much improved Frank McMillan and a bunch of really cold rain. I did have an advantage though over the other guys. I lived in the Tropics so I was able to get in a bit of practice before heading to Jacksonville.

This time I made the trip to Jacksonville in my Mercedes 280L sedan. I never bought it for contest traveling but it made the one day, ten hour round trip a bit more enjoyable. Placing first in the contest made the day totally enjoyable and now I had the Al Lewis Perpetual Trophy to place along side the others in our living room. At the end of 1980 I found my "Stunt life" to be quite good.

Early in 1981 I took another mini vacation from Stunt. Nancy, Diane, and I actually went on a family vacation. We took in Disney World, Silver Springs, stuff like that. It really wasn't my thing but they enjoyed it and I was on my best behavior. My relaxation came from tinkering with the Mercedes and my motorcycles.

*At the beginning of 1981 it never occurred to
me that #12 would be the last of my Stilettos
or a model of any other kind from me.*

I had no desire to build a new Stunt ship for 1981. I was confident that with a bit more refinement the 660/K&B package could be competitive for at least one more year. I did start thinking about how the next Stiletto would be built and what it would look like. At the beginning of 1981 it never occurred to me that #12 would be the last of my Stilettos or a model of any other kind from me.

As Spring approached I started to plan my agenda for the flying season. At least I wasn't faced with competing at the team selection since I had already opted to attend the '82 Worlds as a defending Champion.

I decided to compete only at the Nats in Texas and then be a judge at the team selection contest in Dayton Ohio.

Modelsport

You may have noticed the word "Modelsport" lettered on some of my Stilettos built after 1974. Since I worked in the model plane industry I felt it was important to separate the "assets and liabilities" of my Stiletto program from the other finances in my household.

Modelsport was not a company, corporation, or a tax shelter. I merely used it to keep track of the funds that came and went so if

*Any one of the three of us could have won that contest, it just happened to be "my turn"
and that was fine with me.*



Here are the Top Five fliers at the 1981 Sequin, Texas, Nats. From left to right: Ted Fancher (2nd place), Kirk Mullinnix (5th place), Bill Werwage (1st place, National Champion), Wynn Paul (4th place), and Les McDonald (3rd place). This would be Les's last appearance at a Nats...

something did come up there would be some sort of "paper trail." As you all know it takes real money to compete in Stunt. I did get a lot of free stuff and several companies helped me cover many travel expenses. I had generous help from Satellite City, K&B, and many well known individuals in the hobby industry.

Back then the AMA covered the major costs for the team members and the FAI fund donations from PAMPA really helped. I needed financial assistance, not only with the foreign travel, but with my team trials and Nats efforts as well. I cannot begin to thank these people enough. I did some things on my own also. I did some custom building for a few RC people and back in the early 1970s manufactured a line of aluminum servo horns for the RC car racers. I even sold a few Stiletto Tee shirts to tourists who visited Orange Blossom Hobbies. I also had some modest profits from the *Model Aviation* and *Model Airplane News* articles. Those were the "assets."

The "liabilities" were many and you all are familiar with the costs associated with entering, lodging, and traveling to and from the contests. The contests I attended were not mere two-hundred mile drives, nor short two-night-stays at a Red Roof Inn. Most of the time I shared these traveling costs with Dave, Vince, Stan, Remel, and/or others. I always picked up my fair share of these costs. Modelsport made it possible for a "hobby shop guy" to miss a lot of work and do all this building, flying, and traveling. The books and figures from "Modelsport" are long gone but in the end, after I quit in 1984, I remember the final number on the balance sheet was around negative \$3500.00. Actually that's not bad considering the places I had been able to travel and what I had achieved.

Stiletto?

During the construction of the first Stiletto, back in 1970, I

had no idea of what name I would use for my new ship. At some point I came across an article in *American Aircraft Modeler* that featured a little 1/2A racer and it was called the "Stiletto." Very neat and sleek the plane and the name caught my eye. Richard LaConte, the designer and author of the Stiletto 1/2A racer had also made the letter "T" in the name Stiletto into a menacing dagger, but that was beyond my graphics skills, so I simply checked my inventory of Letraset "Microgamma Bold Extended" transfer lettering and rubbed the word Stiletto on the left wing. By adding some sort of prefix like NX or NC plus a dash to my five digit AMA number symmetry was assured.

I do need to take a moment and say I'm sorry to Mr. LaConte for stealing the Stiletto name. In 1970 I honestly never thought it would be carried on any further. In fact I will now offer to share all Stiletto profits with him equally. If any of you folks reading this know where to reach Mr. Richard LaConte, please advise him he owes me \$1750.

Not really, but I would like to apologize for the plagiarism. (*How do you think I feel about stealing the name Genesis from Moses, Les? —Ed.*)

The 1981 Nats

Dave Hemstrought and I headed for Seguin, Texas, in Nancy's little "Butterscotch" colored Datsun 510. I have no idea why I selected this vehicle from my growing "motorpool" to make that trip, but I do recall it being good on mpg and bad on oil consumption; two quarts of oil per tank of gas if I remember correctly. This was the sister to "His," the one with the bad valves. Obviously "Hers" had bad rings.

After the endless drive we headed out to make our first practice flights. Things went horribly wrong from the beginning. On his very first practice flight Dave had a line break on his

classically shaped black and white beauty. Black and white splinters covered the runway so it was immediately obvious Mr. Hemstrought was not going to participate in "Appearance Judging."

Dave placed what was left of his Nats effort in the trunk of "Hers" and spent the rest of the week helping me.

A few new faces near the top group made this Nats a bit more of a challenge for me. David Fitzgerald was now in with the "grownups." Jim Casale had improved by a wide margin and Paul Walker seemed to have a much better airplane program. Kirk Mullinnix came out of nowhere and Dennis Adamisin had the skill to be there. With the usual bunch of Fancher, Gieseke, Werwage, and Wynn to deal with the talent was deeper than ever. Bob Hunt had gone into semi-retirement and opted to judge at this Nats. Gene Schaffer and Al Rabe seemed to be gone from the Stunt scene.

Right from the outset it was obvious my success with the smaller figures was being adopted by some other fliers, primarily Billy and Ted. They even seemed to improve on what I had been doing. Remember my comment about "faster rats?" Now we're back to shapes, bottoms, and intersections.

Qualifications had no surprises other than the fact the "top group" had added four or five very competent fliers. Kirk Mullinnix prevailed from this bunch and made the Finals.

The Finals had me leading Round One with Wynn in second place, Kirk in third, Billy in fourth, and Ted in fifth. Kirk and I dropped substantially in Round Two and Billy went into the lead with Ted right behind, and Wynn only a few points short. Billy did a "Burner" in round three and Fancher came close. In the end Billy had won, Ted placed second, less than seven points behind.

I, Wynn, and Kirk completed the top five in that order. After Round One Werwage and Fancher simply had the rest of us covered.

Just behind Kirk the new order was forming. Jim Casale, David Fitzgerald, and Paul Walker were all in the top ten. Along with Ted Fancher, this bunch, with Orestes Hernandez, would start dominating the Stunt event in America right up into 2009. Brett Buck and Bob Baron were the only guys able to put a ripple into their very remarkable results.

At the time this meant nothing to me. I simply needed a new Stiletto that I could fly more accurately. I had a World Championship to defend and the old 660 had passed its expiration date. In fact by the Spring of 1981 I knew exactly what Stiletto #12 would look like and how it would be built. The drawings were done and I had even cut out some of the parts. Now I needed to get home and start building.

Dave and I headed back East with me never realizing this was to be my last "Nationals."

Speeding along in a smoking "Hers," somewhere on the Interstate in Louisiana, we whizzed by a county Sheriff with a brand new radar gun. Busted again! But, maybe not ... Dave shouted "Pull over, stop on the shoulder, pop open the hood, and look at the engine, *now!*"

I did as he commanded and within 15 seconds the Sheriff went speeding by. We sat there for about five minutes and then proceeded on our way. Within two miles we spotted our Sheriff and saw he had pulled over some poor soul in a "Butterscotch" colored Toyota and was writing the guy a ticket. Dave may be a good, Christian family man but he was also very adept at eluding the police. *SN*

the big assortment of engines, mufflers, spinner, props, spare parts

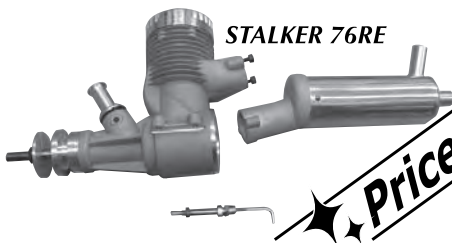
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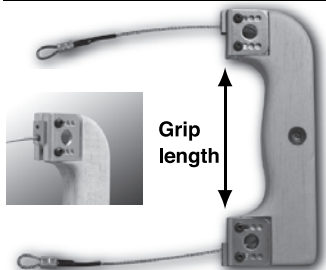
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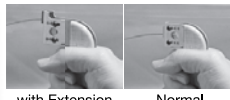
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MNT HANDLES



Grip length

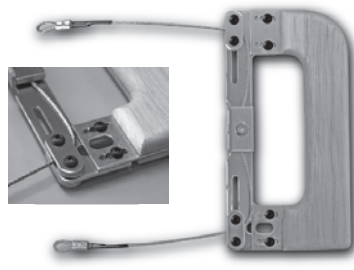


with Extension Normal
Extension bracket for type A (Option)



Long

Short



MNT Handle Type B

Grip length 85 mm
For Compact Stunt model.
Adjustable Control-Line Handle
Up & Down Space, Reach, Neutral adjust



MNT Handle Type C

Grip length 85(C-85) or 90(C-90) mm
Adjustable Control-Line Handle
Up & Down Space, Reach, Neutral adjust,
with Extension Bracket (Long & Short)

!NEW!

MNT Handle Type A

Grip length 80(A-80),85(A-85),
90(A-90),100(C-100) mm
Adjustable Control-Line Handle
Up & Down Space, Reach, Neutral adjust



Spare wire (Option)

The Stiletto

By Les McDonald

Chronicles

And now, the rest of the story ...

The 1981 Team Trials: The Labor Day weekend FAI F2B Team Trials, held at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton Ohio, turned out to be “Bob Baron’s Excellent Adventure.” I judged at that contest and witnessed one of Mr. Baron’s greatest performances. Well coached, with a very good flying plane, Baron simply smoked everyone and won by over 150 points. Fancher and Werwage juggled positions with

Ted ending up in second and Billy in third. Bob Gieseke placed fourth but at a team selection anything that’s not in the top three is irrelevant.

On my way home from Dayton it was very apparent to me that the top group of Stunt fliers had grown in the past four years. Guys capable of being team members and winning championships had now expanded to include Jim Casale, Ted



Les contemplates how to negotiate the severely uneven circle at the 1982 World Championships in Sweden. He flew his newest—and last—Stiletto (#12), which featured an I-Beam wing and the latest version of the Stan Powell-tuned K&B .40 engine.



Left: Here's a close-up view of the top of the nose section on the last Stiletto. Note the strakes that protrude forward of the leading edge of the wing. These were added purely for style; they served no other purpose! They looked good, though, don't you think? Note also the way the nose pinches down to the 1½-inch-diameter needle nose spinner. It was the small touches like these that made Les' models stand out from all the rest.

Below: The lettering on the wing is self explanatory. Actually, Les has a great sense of humor and added such touches here and there strictly for fun.

Fancher, Bob Baron, and several others. Werwage, Hunt, and Gieseke were still at or near the top so I needed to get busy.

I was aware that Stunt competition was not "hand to hand" combat. I had no control over how someone else performed or the scoring process that determines the results. I did realize I could control my own situation by building, trimming, and practicing. I relied heavily on Stan Powell for my engines and took advantage of the times when coaching was available.

In the past year or so prior to that Team Trials I had gained weight and had been abusing my body in a variety of ways, so I started a regimen of jumping rope every day. Some physical conditioning would certainly help, at least with the body part.

The 1982 Championships were to be held in Sweden and I remembered suffering in the cold weather of both England and Poland. I felt my South Florida roots were a disadvantage when I had to function in lousy, cool conditions. I surmised a hot day in Sweden would be like a winter day in Miami and I wanted to be prepared.

The Last Stiletto

When I started building Stiletto #12 I was on a continuing



mission to win Championships. I had never built a specific plane for a single contest and this one was no different. I had many years of service planned for each Stunt plane I constructed. The 1982 World Championships would simply be the first contest my new I-beamer would attend.

In the latter part of 1981 I had not planned to reduce my aspirations or efforts but somehow I knew, in the back of my head, this Stiletto could quite possibly be the last one I would build. I wanted it to be special, something from my "Stunt roots." A Stiletto that might have been built by Dave Gierke or Jim Kostecky; I wanted "performance and pizzazz."

This one was drawn around the K&B engine, so it was going to be a bit smaller than the Stiletto's in the recent past. The K&B was lighter than the SuperTigres and had a goofy prop drive



All of these detail photos of Les' last Stiletto were taken 27 years after the model had been built and you can see some results of age here and there, but the overall effect is still intact. There was lots of small detail and all of it was very well executed. Note the intricate detail on the pilot's helmet (above). Here's an interesting fact: All of the pilot figures in Les' models were smoking a cigar! Look close and you can just see the top of the cigar in this photo. Here's a very interesting treatment of the area where the rudder is offset from the fin. Note the unique fairing.

The wing differed considerably from #11. Full span tapered sheet flaps almost three inches wide at the root, a higher aspect ratio planform, slightly thicker airfoil, and the trailing edge swept forward $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch at the tips. It would span right around 59 inches, the final number becoming official after the wing tips were sanded. Total area would be about 630 square inches. I built both my I-beam planes by stack carving full ribs between templates and then sliding them onto the beam itself.

On this one I added a small box spar made from $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch balsa sheet two inches in front of the trailing edge to help with alignment.

The $\frac{5}{32}$ -inch diameter gear wire had some elaborate bends to accommodate very spiffy wheel pants. The wheel pants were turned on a wood lathe, split down the middle and the separation "face" sanded. This gave them a pleasing ridge along the center joint and I was quite proud of them. Jim Kosticky would have approved.

At some point, about half way through the construction of the airframe one of Diane's kittens climbed onto my work table and chewed up about three inches of inboard trailing edge.

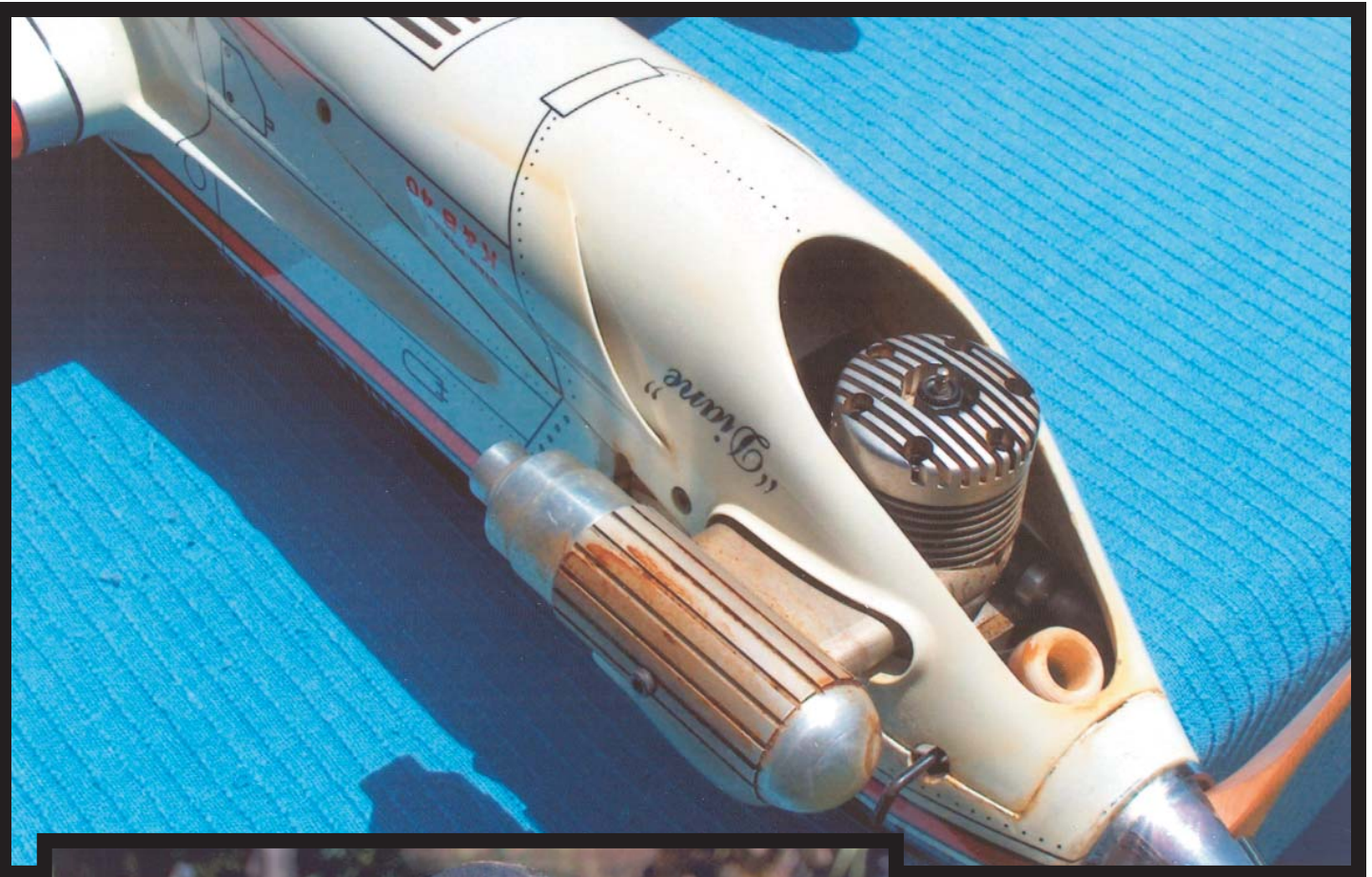
Being a mellow, level-headed father and husband I left home for a week or so, only returning after I ran out of money. Nancy put up with a lot of this nonsense. Stiletto #12 sat there, untouched, for weeks.

adaptor that made the front end longer so the nose moment would be almost eleven inches. The set up for my K&B 40 never would spin anything larger than eleven inch props, so I used a $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch diameter spinner.

The fuselage was pretty much off the 660 plans with ten degrees more angle in the tailpost/rudder profile to add length and I installed two little "radar blisters" behind the canopy just like Dave Gierke might have.

The stab/elevator was built exactly the same as on #11. Using a gazillion parts but three inches shorter in span. At 29 inches it still looked long.

When I think back to the times I was building the I-beam Stiletto's I could never imagine putting these things together with "tube glue." Had it not been for "Hot Stuff" CA glue I never would have considered these projects with all the little pieces and parts they required.



Above: In this photo of the business end of the 1982 Stiletto, you can see the cowl treatment and specifically the very cleanly-done exit hole for the muffler manifold. The very subtle intakes on the rear of the cowl were functional.



Left: Les used very soft and light foam wheels. To prevent premature wear he put a strip of Scuff Guard around each tire.

scallops here and there really brought the graphics to life. I also spent some extra time with the Rapidograph pen. Nice wide black ink outlines around the red and silver trim colors with many cartoon panel lines, we were looking sharp.

Two or three sessions of clear Sig Litecoat on top and it's time for a couple of weeks off while the paint dries. Polishing the clear is as tedious as sanding fillercoat but inspiration comes from knowing I'm almost done.

Eventually I reentered the real world, fixed the trailing edge, got back on the jump rope and put my program back on track.

I installed some strakes to the leading edge/fuselage juncture and extended the flap fillets along the fuselage sides just as Gierke or Kostecky might have.

In general I-beamers are tedious to finish and I worked extra hard on this one. Sanding fillercoat between all those ribs with worn out 400 grit paper is what I remember most; it seemed to take forever.

By late January the new Stiletto was covered and getting its paint. Some wide silver trim on the wing and little metallic blue

"I hear Shareen is going with Ted"

Normally wives don't travel to the World Championships and Nancy understood why. They can be a distraction, it's expensive, and the food can be odd. The accommodations are usually sparse and transportation around the contest town is difficult. Add in the fact that the fliers are focused, dedicated, and just not much fun to be around.

This all went out the window when Nancy found out Shareen Fancher was to accompany Ted on our Swedish adventure. Nancy and Shareen were buddies from years past and I was not going to

talk my way out of this one. How could I say anything but yes after all the years Nancy put up with my selfish and childlike behavior?

I rationalized that by skipping the Nats funds would be available to make it happen.

Keith Trostle had been selected to be a judge at the Championships and his wife Barbara was going as well. Nancy, Shareen and Barbara ... Three attractive, street smart, American women, experienced around Stunt fliers and able to fend for themselves any place on Earth.

As I slowly rubbed and polished the topcoat on #12 I started thinking about the upcoming Championships. I always tried to have things in place early so I could concentrate on trimming and practice. With Nancy going even more preparations were called for. Nancy's sister would look after Diane. Nearby friends would feed our menagerie of cats, dogs, hamsters, a rabbit, a guinea pig, and several reptiles.

Back to the Future

The first flights with my new Stiletto indicated I would be quite busy in the coming months. It wasn't bad but it certainly didn't fly "right off the board" and it appeared, quite soon, that some modifications would be needed.

For some unexplainable reason I built the wing with equal span panels. Bob Hunt had a Genesis 46 with equal panels and it seemed to fly very well so I blamed him. I stuck about one and a half ounces in the tip weight tube and prayed Bob Gialdini would never learn how I translated his "Barbell Theory." Even the big Stiletto 700 had less than one ounce of tip weight. As I had done in the past, so many times before, I just kept working on the trim. Within a month things were looking good. Flying my standard 5.2 seconds per lap, #12 had good line tension, didn't "hinge," didn't "yaw," grooved reasonably well, and probably looked good in the air. This was 1982, the era of the "limited adjustment Stunter" and it soon became apparent that the elevators needed to be a "tad" bigger. After I added some small, hard, clear plastic tabs to the elevators this thing cornered quite well also. A few other little cuts and tweaks over the next couple of months, we were ready for Sweden.

1982 World Championships

Oxelosund, Sweden, was a great location for the Championships. Our very comfortable hotel was in the town square near shops, restaurants, and less than a mile from the contest site. In no more than two hours Ted and Shareen found a wonderful Italian restaurant that served excellent pizza. Soon after that Nancy was having doubts about all my stories of how rough and uncomfortable it was during my other team trips. I tried to explain that this was an exception just as the electricity went off.

We were in our hotel rooms only a short time when we heard the sound of a large screaming wounded bird for about six seconds and then it's dark. Bob Baron had managed to knock the



Les receives his third Gold Medal at the on-field trophy ceremony at the 1982 World Championships. He is flanked by Silver Medalist Wu DaZong from China (L) and Bronze Medalist Ove Andersson from Sweden.

power off on our second floor lodging. His Dremel Tool really spun on 220 volts for about six seconds. A few minutes later we were introduced to the hotel manager during a search for any other American 110-volt electrical devices.

So here we were, Billy and I, once again in a foreign land with rookie teammates. I had met Bob Baron back in the early seventies and Ted a year or so after that. The World Championships can either solidify or estrange a friendship. These contests will push your emotions and anxieties to the very edge and on this trip both Werwage and Baron would reach their limit. We will get there shortly.

When we unpacked our models in the hotel basement, Billy looked at my new Stiletto with approval and simply stated "So this is where you've been trying to get with these things." He went over it closely with obvious admiration and then picked it up, felt the heavy outboard wing, looked at me with some trepidation. I blamed Bob Hunt for the awkward moment. I was sure, in that instant, he thought he had me beat. I was also sure, in the back of his mind he knew that I could probably fly it pretty well.

Billy didn't like to drive so we convinced Fancher and Baron it was a tradition for the current "Champ" to be in charge of the Stunt van. My suburban upbringing required that I be able to go when and where I needed at any time, without the ignition keys to something I would suffocate.

The flying situation was "good news, bad news." The flying site was located in a huge sports complex with all the comforts and amenities for which one could ask. Beautifully laid out and

very well organized, even the weather was cooperating. The cold wet weather I anticipated was a “no show” and I certainly didn’t regret my efforts from exercising. That was the “good news.”

The “bad news” was twofold. The “official” Stunt circle was not flat—nowhere near it. One side was at least two feet lower than the other and the huge pine trees next to it were going to create “giant air boulders.” The second “bad news” item was the spacious practice area. It was closely cut grass. Stilettos don’t do grass. Not this one or all the others before it. This was no problem for the other guys but my tiny wheels mounted on short landing gear made it out of the question.

I spent the first day of practice sitting under the humongous pine trees watching Ted, Bob, and Billy fly. I also spent the second, third, and fourth day watching them burn up the sky. I must have looked like the most confident competitor in the history of the event.

During the summer in Sweden it never gets very dark at night and since I had the keys to the Stunt van I formulated my own practice agenda on day one. I would drive the guys to the grass practice area each morning, stay with them all day, have supper, and go to bed around 9 p.m. As I write this, to this day in August 2009, no one knew that I, with either Nancy or my trusty “stooge,” would be on the parking lot of a nearby K-Mart-type store at 3 a.m. so I could practice for two hours. Then it was back to the hotel, meet the guys for a day of practice on the grass circles with me relaxing, even napping, under the giant pines. At 3:00 a.m. in Sweden, in July, it’s just like flying in Dayton, Ohio, at seven in the evening. No one ever saw me make one practice flight, when in fact I had probably flown more practice flights than any of my teammates.

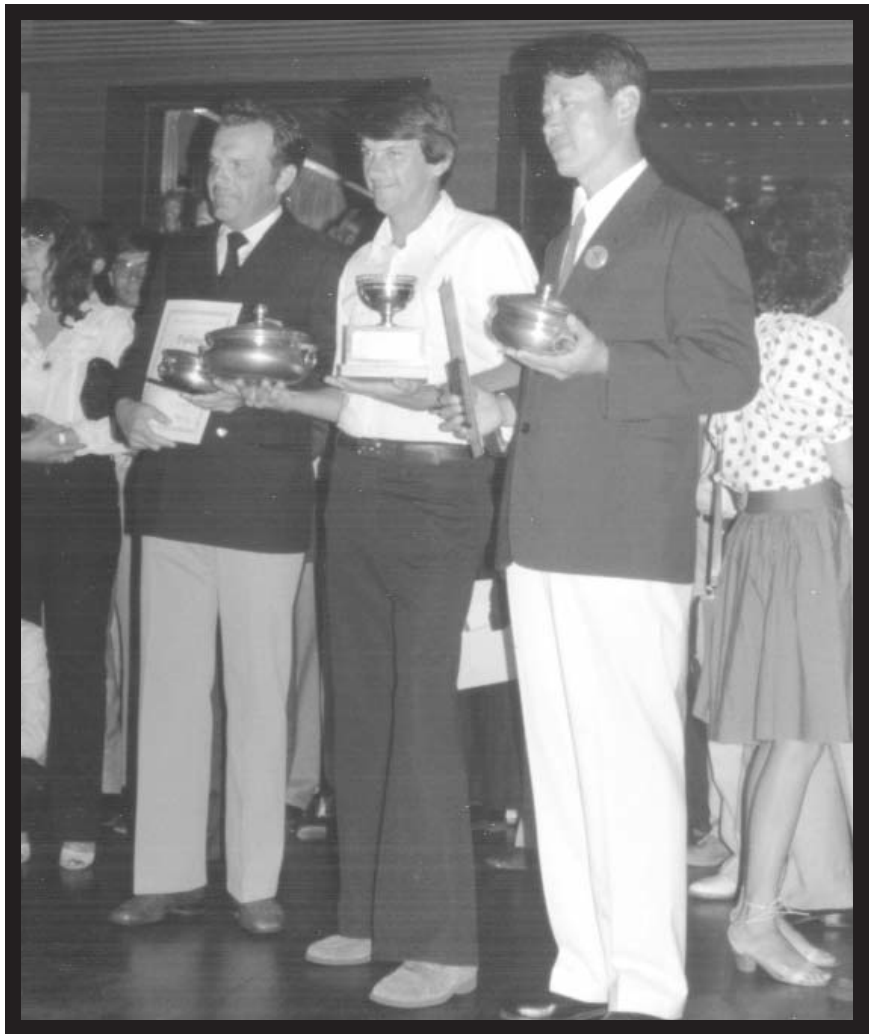
On the evening prior to our allocated “one practice flight on the official circle” we were informed that “level flight” would be based on the uneven grade of the circle. Simply put it meant we had to fly uphill and downhill, putting the bottoms of the maneuvers either knee high, top of your head high, or somewhere in between. I was astounded this was even an issue since the Swedes seem to build everything to the highest level of craftsmanship and quality. The paved surface of the lopsided circle was billiard table smooth but any form of excavation and leveling was nonexistent.

After making about forty practice flights on a perfectly level parking lot I tried my best to follow the ascending then descending terrain during my “official practice flight.” Everyone else that tried this looked horrible also.

The competition started. As I did my “Takeoff” in Round One habit prevailed and I flew shoulder level the entire flight. I softened up the entire flight trying to be smooth and because of the sloping surface I am sure that pattern did not appear “locked in.”

At the end of Round One I was in first place by a whopping 107 points over Baron in second. Ted and Billy were third and fourth.

Billy’s USA-1 had run short of fuel and even though he completed all the maneuvers his flight suffered, so he still held out hope. Ted flew well despite an angry prop/engine combination. Early in the week, during practice, Bill and I gave his Intimidation the nickname “Wolverine” since it was a bit of a



At the awards banquet in Sweden Les received the Steve Wooley cup, emblematic of the individual F2B World Champion, and the first-place trophy.

snarly beast. I don’t remember what engine Ted was using that week but it certainly wasn’t a very happy motor. I was somewhat impressed by Ted’s ability to manage a plane that seemed to lurch from corner to corner. Bob Baron had to deal with some big burps of turbulence so he also held out hope for some better air in the next round.

In Round Two my 2923 put me way out in front. When Sweden’s Ove Andersson and China’s Wu DaZong moved into second and third things started to turn ugly. Fancher slipped to fourth and he was okay with that but Billy and Bob were inconsolable.

Trying to be a good guy I sympathized with my teammates and shortly after the end of Round Two I watched Billy march over to the judge’s area and launch into a tirade. Billy’s anger was caused by the scores, so that’s exactly where he purged his fury. It was wrong but at least Billy approached the cause of his problem face to face.

Mr. Baron tried to take his frustrations out on me and I soon put a stop to that! Ted and Bill explained to Bob I was not the cause of his problem but he continued to “badmouth” the contest in general and me in particular.

The deal was pretty much sealed with my 2868 in Round Three. It was apparent, as Werwage stated, if I didn’t crash I would win. I continued to get pretty good air compared to the rest of our team and the points kept coming. Ted, like always, was trying hard to improve. Billy was mad but continued to seek



Here is the United States F2B Team and the defending World Champion at the 1984 World Championships in Chicopee, Massachusetts. (L-R) Jimmy Casale, Bob Baron, Les McDonald (kneeling), and Bill Werwage. This was to be Les' final competition appearance.

points from somewhere he couldn't find. Bob just became more agitated and by Round Four his flying suffered.

In Round Four I finally had to deal with some turbulence and, guess what, my score went up. My 2890 was 127 points above DaZong in second and now I'm starting to question my own success. Ted had some problems in the last round but he ended up fourth, the result of good Round Two and Round Three scores.

The final results, a 5813, gave me my third World Championship. Wu DaZong finished in second with 5622. Ove Andersson finished third with 5609. Then came Fancher, Baron, and Werwage, which kept the Team Trophy in America. The other Chinese fliers, Xiandong and Anlin, placed seventh and eighth.

Between the last round of Stunt and the field ceremonies we all went over to the Combat circle and watched the final matches.

We cheered on Tommy Fluker in the final as he became America's first World Champion in F2D Combat. Watching this was truly a fun and exciting experience for me.

Once more up onto the top step of a podium with "The Star-Spangled Banner" playing. I was relieved more than happy.

Stiletto #12 was certainly well received and Stan's K&B performed flawlessly, but somehow I felt "out of place." Nancy was proud, everyone else polite and gracious. I felt as though I had completed some big chore or fulfilled some responsibility. To who or what, I don't recall.

Back at the hotel, dressing for the awards banquet, Bob Baron knocks on my door. "Hey Bob, what's up?" I assumed he came to apologize or congratulate me. He starts right up with "We are going to protest the lousy judging by boycotting the banquet." And, he alone, did just that.

We all enjoyed a very nice banquet and awards presentation

held in a large meeting hall near our hotel, although I was a bit embarrassed for Don Jehlik, our Team Manager, who tried to explain Bob's absence.

I will always be respectful of Bob's skill, determination, and passion for the event, but he and I always pursued our goals following different paths.

During the party after the banquet Doc Jackson presented me with the keys to his rental VW Jetta. Nancy and I had planned to spend nine or ten days touring Sweden and Denmark after the contest and Doc, aware of this, provided our transportation. Thanks, Doc.

What's next?

By the time Nancy and I returned from Europe I was burned out. The 1982 Nats came and went without me. I couldn't have gone even if I wanted to. Ted Fancher won that Nats, no doubt with a different power arrangement than what he had used in Sweden. He finally was starting to reap the benefits that he had worked so hard for and I applauded his win.

While we were in Sweden my father became gravely ill and passed away shortly after we got back to Miami. My mother told me that when my Dad first went into the hospital she asked him if he knew where I was and he responded by saying, "Sweden." Then she asked him if he knew why I was in Sweden and he said, "To compete." After fifty years of marriage those were the last words she ever heard from him. He and I were never very close but he did take some pride in my accomplishments with the planes.

I had no interest getting anywhere near a Stunt plane. After my third World Championship my co-workers, non-modeling friends,

and others just assumed I could win any contest I entered. No one, except Nancy, had any idea how hard I worked at this. There was so much more than staying up late to modify something or getting up early each day to go flying. The constant thoughts of not performing well created a pressure and tension deep into my being.

During one alcohol fueled conversation between Billy and I years before, we both agreed that it was essential to have, at all times, a plane ready to go. You never knew when someone was going to knock on your door and challenge you to some sort of "fly-off," like some kind of "Old West" gunfight.

I had just won my third Championship, leading all four rounds by at least forty points, and I was still "insecure." Success didn't bring any form of self confidence to my little world. At the contests I may have appeared to be cool, calm and collected, but the reality was far different. A famous rich guy once said "Never let them see you sweat" and that made sense to me even though I could be burning up on the inside!

There was an upside to all this. First of all I was the World Champion with a relatively new plane and a very competent "motor program." By now Stan's K&B engines used only a few standard parts. The prop drive adaptor, back plate, front housing, cylinder head, and crankshaft were the only parts he used from K&B. Everything else was sourced from vendors or specially made by the K&B factory.

Each and every engine Stan provided me ran exactly as I requested. They were powerful (for 1982), consistent, and reasonably long lasting before needing a rebuild. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind had I not been fortunate enough to team up with Stan Powell my "Gold Medal" collection would be much smaller.

*I had no interest getting
anywhere near a Stunt
plane.*

It was around that time the K&B Company headed into a new direction and the 40 Stunt motor project "died on the vine." However, we had our crankses, a good inventory of parts, and I still had my fuel deal, so all was not lost.

The second big plus was that I could attend the 1984 Championships as a defender and not deal with the pressure of a Team Trials.

The third positive was that the 1984 World Championships were to be held in the United States. The idea of not having to worry about shipping fuel or having to transport my huge "airplane box" was a very big relief.

Thanksgiving in Venezuela

In late October I was contacted by the Aeroclub in Venezuela to fly a demonstration flight with my Stiletto during their National Championships. I accepted right away even though it would be during the Thanksgiving weekend. I enjoyed these things for purely selfish reasons. No competition, no pressure,

and you were treated like a movie star. I'm a lucky guy and I fed on this sort of thing.

Dave Brown was also invited to represent the RC side of the sport. Dave and I had known each other for quite some time from our hobby industry connections and deep down inside Dave had a soft spot for the Stunt event. Since I had a pretty extensive understanding of RC Pattern we enjoyed each other's insight into our chosen endeavors.

I hadn't flown my Stiletto since Sweden so I had to deal with a gummy fuel tank which I sorted out the day before my "official demonstration flight." The casual spectators enjoyed my flight but the "main local Stunt guy" told me of his disappointment with the "inaccuracies" he spotted during my pattern. I had not flown



This photo says it all: With a content smile, Les leaves the field of battle for the last time. No competitor ever did it with more style and dignity. His place in CL Stunt history is assured and we are all richer for having known him.



Twenty-two years after his retirement from Stunt, Les poses with #11 and #12, the last two Stiletto's. What was he thinking? "I can't believe that Hunt and Werwage are still flying these things..."

my Stiletto for almost four months but I was still crushed by his honesty. This is how frail I had become ...

"No way"

At the banquet in Sweden, I had been approached by a small committee of Chinese team people and was asked to help their fliers. They proposed I travel to Beijing and show them some of the finer details of presenting a Stunt flight. I liked their models, their pilots, and their enthusiasm so they received an answer on the spot: "Ain't no way that's gonna happen."

Next I received a phone call from Bob Baron and he asked me to help with the paint scheme on a new Avanti he was working on for the 1984 World Championships. I tried to point him toward some more artistic people than I, but he insisted on my help and mailed some planform and side view drawings to me. I very carefully, with colored markers, duplicated the scheme of an early Stiletto onto his Avanti outlines and returned them to him. We will see later if he recognized the parody or actually considered using it. No way was I going to help any group or individual beat me.

The party has started

Miami in 1983 was no place for an emotionally frail person to live. My neighborhood had gone crazy and I was right at the center of this ongoing party. Drinking way too much and abusing a variety of drugs I didn't give my "Stiletto Program" a second thought until the summer of '84. This had nothing to do with model planes, precision aerobatics, practice flying, or winning Championships. I thought I was having a great time, totally oblivious to the problems I was creating for myself, my family, and my marriage.

The mean season

The Stunt Team had been selected on Labor Day weekend 1983. I never made it to that contest but I'm sure it was as nerve wracking as all the others. The 1984 Team would consist of Jimmy Casale, Bill Werwage, and Bob Baron.

By early summer 1984 I had that feeling you get on the last few days of a nice vacation: The drudgery of returning to work.

It had been a long time since I got excited about the preparation and practice. I dreaded the long trips and wished I could quit this competition madness. Somehow winning made it all worthwhile.

Swedish Team Member Johan

Rasmussen came to live with Nancy and me for a month or so before the contest and would accompany me everywhere except to work. His airplane was stored "Up North" but he still followed me to practice everyday. A nice looking blonde, blue eyed, young Swedish man, he was quite the hit with some of the girls in my neighborhood. I only hope we didn't scar him for life.

In August, just as I started my traditional practice regimen I had the good fortune of having Jack Cohn from Mike Mas Video Productions tape one of my practice sessions. This was a rarity back then since video recording equipment was only owned and operated by professionals. Up until then I had only watched myself fly on short sections of grainy Super 8mm film so it was fun to see the Stiletto fly for a full pattern. The coaching potential was immediately obvious.

I practiced and tinkered until late August and around that time Johan left to stay with someone else, hopefully, a normal family.

I had always been a lucky guy when it came to practice weather. August/September in South Florida is called "The Mean Season." Rainy season usually starts the third weekend in May with daily afternoon thunderstorms, but by late summer it can get brutal and stay that way for weeks. My luck finally ran out. Two weeks before heading to the Championships the wind and rain kept me from being able to fly.

After missing a week of practice because of the weather I packed my stuff into the Mercury sedan and headed for Werwage's house in Ohio.

Full circle

Arriving in the late afternoon I headed directly to Billy's flying site near the airport. He was in the middle of a flight with a plane I didn't recognize. It looked like a big pale blue Olympic to

I had enjoyed my "Fifteen Minutes of Fame" several times over, made my little mark in the Stunt event, and had become a small part of its history.

me. After he landed I noticed it was called the Blue Max and definitely not one of Mr. Gialdini's designs.

Considering the upcoming "venue," I instantly voiced my opinion to Billy that it didn't have "The Look." He simply stated he was in the latter stages of his traditional "Fly-off" and would probably use a USA-1 for the contest. His program was certainly different than mine.

Within a day or so we were flying from morning till dark and watched each other's flights commenting on the details of each flight or engine run. We slept at the homes of Billy's various ex-wives and girlfriends and had meals that were light and cheap. We kept our planes at his Mom's house and I was even fortunate enough to tour the attic: the famous "Museum." I enjoyed every minute. Moments like this were the only times I felt warm and fuzzy about all this. For the past ten years Stunt had been cold and hard, so this time with Billy, on his turf, I had the feeling that I finally was part of "The Special Group" but still not knowing if there was such a thing.

A day or so before leaving for the contest we went searching for a car top carrier and wound up in nearby Olmsted Falls, my summer playground from years past. I saw my Uncle's old house, the bridge from which we threw firecrackers, the apple orchard where my older cousins convinced me that "eating green apples makes you stronger" with the obvious consequences, and other places from my childhood vacations. Thinking back on watching Stunt planes fly in the parks around here and being with Billy I had the feeling that my life had come full circle. I felt like Peter Pan and had Déjà vu all at once.

The 1984 World Championships

The 1984 World Champs were held at Westover AFB in Massachusetts. I loaded up the Stiletto, USA-1, and Billy into the Mercury sedan and we all headed for Chicopee.

This was more like a Nats than a World Championships. No transport boxes, plenty of fuel in the trunk, lots of familiar faces, and each Team Member did his own thing. Everyone had their own car keys.

Jim Casale had won the previous Nats on this very site but to no advantage because it was a runway just like all the others. For once we finally had enough practice space, even if we had to sacrifice the color and intimate atmosphere of the dedicated European sites.

Like so many times before, Billy and I started getting accustomed to the flying site, New England air, and the settings of our models. The air was cool and quite breezy. There was power but the afternoon wind used it up. We soon noticed that when the wind changed direction from "down the runway" to "over the hangars" things got scary. I removed the sealing tape from the flaps of my Stiletto hoping to kill some speed up in the maneuvers. I also extended the "down arm" on my handle to have enough turn at the bottom left corner in the square eight during the heavy winds that were predicted.

Baron and Casale both had new models. This was not unusual

for Jimmy since he seemed to produce about one plane a month. His Spectrum with an ST60 looked good in the air and on the ground as well.

Bob's new Avanti was very well done. White with simple red and black "Stilettoish" graphics it almost appeared familiar to me; actually quite familiar. He used an abbreviated version of what I had sent him jokingly the year before. Best looking plane he ever had!

We did the Opening Ceremonies in an early morning fog and the official flying started shortly afterwards. The fog didn't last long ... The wind took care of that.

The wind was only moving at about 10 mph as Round One started. Billy and Zhu Younan, from China, were the only top fliers fortunate enough to fly in this moderate breeze. By 11:00 a.m. the wind started to howl over 20mph and it was my turn to fly. I did what I could and ended Round One in third not too far back. Jimmy was 11 points behind me in fourth and Baron, the victim of a bad glow plug, was way back, 180 points from the leader. In Round One several models lost their lives because of the brutal wind.

Round Two started the same way, doable in the morning, white knuckles after 11:00 a.m. Tents were blowing away and folded lawn chairs sped down the runways.

Remember the old saying "What goes around comes around?" Two years before, in Sweden, I only had to deal with rough air for one flight. Now it was my turn to "Pay the Piper."

Billy and I both got murdered in this round. The wind velocity far exceeded our capabilities. Younan lead this round also but now Baron had moved into fourth right behind Compostella and Anlin. They all flew early and well putting Billy and me pretty much out of it.

Bob Baron always seemed to function better when Mike Rogers was helping him as a coach, consultant, and friend. Mike's help really showed at this contest since he was able to keep Bob mellow and focused. Bob was an amazing competitor but he really needed Mike's input to round out his presentation.

I finally was able to get some decent air in Round Three and flew pretty well but not as well as Younan. He led this round also. Do we see a pattern developing with this Chinese guy? His little buddy Anlin was moving up also. Thankfully Bob Baron was able to split this pair up with a "burner" in Round Four. Bob won this round with the highest score of the contest.

I didn't realize it at the time but in Round Four, the Stiletto, my "Trick Blue Shirt with Stars" and I headed to the circle for our last flight ever. You have no idea how great it would be for me to be able to say I put in a breathtaking, hair-raising flight to win this contest. Sorry to say it but I could never fly that good and the points were not going to magically appear as they had in Sweden.

Obviously first place went to Younan; he won three of the four rounds. Bob Baron's sufficient Round Two score added to his excellent Round Four flight put him in second place or shall we say Silver Medalist position.

Nu Anlin won the Bronze cookie, Jimmy Casale in fourth (no cookie) and me in fifth. Werwage ended up in seventh.

As Billy and I began our traditional debriefing, while having a drink, it was agreed by both of us that “We fought the wind and the wind won.” I congratulated Bob Baron on his second place and then suggested to him had he not gone to China the year prior to coach their team his medal possibly may have had more yellow in it.

“Big Art Adamisin” was the “Event Director” so the whole affair ran firmly and fairly. Team Manager Dave Elias, assisted by Bob Hunt, performed those duties effectively and professionally. In fact the entire F2B event was given a big thumbs up by not only our team but everyone else’s as well.

The banquet was very nice with good food, lots of awards, plenty of appreciative applause, pretty girls, many “see you next time” promises, and a few “I’ll be back” declarations. At the end of the evening I simply said “Goodbye” to my friends and fellow competitors not even realizing myself that I would never be back.

The long drive home

In the solitude of the Mercury sedan heading South, back to Miami, I analyzed my situation. In years past I would use this quiet time thinking about how to improve my program. Not this time. The realization sunk in on several valid points. Let’s review.

The frustration of practicing and preparing for a contest that turns into a “windfest” was fresh in my mind and it’s happened more than a few times. This is certainly no one’s fault but trying to fly some sort of decent pattern in turbulent 25mph winds, with the power systems we had back then, was survival not competition.

Sit back for a moment and think of a tiny Butterfly leaving his cocoon after months of anticipation and finding out the weather is going to be crap for the next week or so! The fact he was sleeping and not practicing reduces some of the sympathy but you know he’s going to be a bit disappointed.

Another thing I thought about was the fact that I was the only competitor from the top group that had a regular day job. We all believed the Chinese fliers were full-time professionals and here at home I was competing against musicians and airline pilots. Not only did these people have more talent than I did they had more time to advance their skills.

I also felt the airplanes and engines were about to change. I was almost correct on this since we didn’t know about the pipe systems yet or the specialized engines just down the road. In any case I was sure I would need to build something different with more power. The thought of building another Stiletto, learning a new engine and setup was daunting. I did not have the enthusiasm to take the next step.

The thing that really sealed the deal for my retirement from Stunt was my visit with Bill Werwage in Ohio. It was simple.

Hanging out and flying with Billy in Ohio somehow seemed

to tie everything together. My life in Stunt had run full circle, returning me to my youth. Remembering the cool summer days, the air filled with the scent of castor oil, fresh-cut grass, and beautifully crafted model planes. The excitement of a young boy was gone, replaced by a quest that required work and dedication by a middle-aged man that had run out of energy and enthusiasm.

In retrospect I had done it all. The Nationals, World Championships, a Concours trophy, Air Shows, magazine articles, product endorsements, Stiletto kits, the whole enchilada.

More importantly I had made friends. All of you would easily recognize the names of the people I consider to be life long friends. I shared many unique and adventurous times with these guys. It was not always blue skies and fun but we never lost respect for each other regardless of our personal agendas. We whined, argued, and complained but through it all we maintained respect.

I had enjoyed my “Fifteen Minutes of Fame” several times over, made my little mark in the Stunt event, and had become a small part of its history.

I must be “A Lucky Guy” because that is exactly what I had set out to do fourteen years earlier. Mission accomplished!

Twenty-five years later

I enjoy having nice fingernails now and have for the past twenty years or so. I had not flown a Stunt ship since my last finals flight at the 1984 World Championships until August 23rd 2009.

On that Sunday morning I was visiting the local flying field and after watching Pete Schlessler go through a pattern with his profile Cardinal I asked him if it would be okay if I could fly it. I had noticed the outboard wing a bit high while flying inverted so we tweaked the flaps and off I went. With a grabby prop and a bit lean on the needle it was too fast. I wanted so much to fly it well but any sort of down input made it hinge and lose line tension so I did some inside squares, triangles, and all the round stuff. During the flight all I could think of was landing and trying to cure this little airplane’s illness. I did not fly it again. I made a few suggestions to Pete and went home thinking all day how to make it fly better. There was no fun, no nostalgia, no “look at me,” just some trim problems that needed attention. I gave up a few fingernails that evening. It just happens when I think about Stunt stuff.

My daughter, Diane, has three kids of her own and Nancy is now my ex-wife and long gone. I see her at birthday parties for the grandkids and we get along quite well, but I had finally worn her down with the drugs, alcohol, and infidelities many years before. The airplanes were not the problem, I was.

In the past twenty years I have carved out a wonderful life but Stunt is just a small part of it now.

My wife, Roberta, is always saying I should build something and start flying again, just for fun, and I keep telling her, “Be

The excitement of a young boy was gone,
replaced by a quest that required work and
dedication by a middle-aged man that had run out
of energy and enthusiasm.

I've had my run and now I just want to be remembered as "A Lucky Guy."

careful what you wish for." It would be impossible for me to fly a Stunt plane for "fun." She never met the "other Les" and I am not about to introduce her to that guy.

Roberta has enlightened me to how to understand things and my eyes have opened to the fact that some people could quite possibly build and fly Stunt models just for the pure joy of it.

In 1994 I had the distinction of being inducted into the PAMPA "Hall of Fame." With all the ups and downs I had lived through in the ten years since my last contest flight this was an honor that is still impossible for me to describe.

That visit to the 1994 Lubbock, Texas Nats allowed me to hang out with my fellow "Stunt Fighters" and with no mission or agenda I was looking at these people from a different perspective. I felt, just a little, like an "Outsider looking in."

After the induction ceremony I presented my "Trick Blue Shirt with Stars" to Robby Hunt. Believe it or not there was only one shirt and I used it from 1973 until my last flight in 1984. Bob Hunt has raised a fine young man and I hope Robby is looking after my precious apparel. (*He certainly is ... —Ed.*)

In 1996 I was fortunate enough to experience one more very high point in my "Stunt life." I had volunteered to be a judge that year and like all the other judges I spent the entire week watching flight after flight in the hot sun. No complaints here since the flying was truly impressive and there is a certain satisfaction in scoring each maneuver.

The realization that my very best flights from the Seventies and Eighties may have put me in the top twelve here was a little sobering but it validated the fact that refinement is a good thing and managed horsepower is everything!

The high point came when I was asked to help Dave Gierke and Jim Kosticky judge appearance points. Dave and I had met many years before but I had never been in the presence of Mr. Kosticky until this Nats. If you remember, these two were my "main guys" in the beginning and the hour or so we spent in that room, by ourselves, with all those Stunt planes was not only fun it was an honor.

I was the "new kid" so they beat me up pretty bad and I only wished that moment could have lasted longer, but, as grownups, we all know they can't. When Jim passed away not long afterwards I felt a true emptiness; the same emptiness you feel after losing a life-long buddy. I had been around Jim Kosticky maybe three hours total but in my mind we had been close friends for over twenty-eight years.

In late 2001, facing insurmountable debt, Orange Blossom Hobbies closed. The creditors auctioned off the inventory, put a For Sale sign on the building and then sent us all home. After working there for twenty-seven years I couldn't get away from that place fast enough but the realization of unemployment loomed over my head.

Not old enough for Social Security and not smart enough to do anything other than sell model airplanes I needed a job for a few more years. And one more time, I'm a Lucky Guy.

In September 2002 I received a phone call from a sales rep at a major hobby distributor. She advised me that Wally Warrick of "The Hobby Superstore" in Fort Lauderdale had been trying to find me with an "employment opportunity" and that I should arrange a meeting with him. We met, we talked, and then shook hands. I had a job.

The Warrick family had been in the hobby business since 1972 but until 2002 it had been somewhat of a satellite operation from their much larger printing business.

Wally explained to me that play time was over, he was now personally overseeing the day to day operations and wanted "The Hobby Superstore" to be the finest in the land. Young, confident, and optimistic Wally had the business acumen and financial resources to do exactly that.

In the five years that I worked there I watched Wally grow that store into the largest volume, free-standing retail hobby shop in the United States. I did a good job of managing his airplane department and he watched out for my well being until I retired in November 2007. We will always remain the best of friends.

For an employee, there is no greater feeling than being respected and appreciated. Thanks, Wally.

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In conclusion

No matter what your hopes, goals, or aspirations may be there is one constant that we all share: The airplanes. There is nothing more exciting than being in the presence of a well built, nicely finished Stunt ship and if that airplane has some history all the better.

Participating in the Stunt event can be a wonderful hobby; to simply enjoy building and flying these magnificent planes as a diversion from life's daily challenges. It can go beyond that. It can become your only challenge and everything else around you becomes secondary. Competing in Stunt does create a certain lifestyle but for me, to be a Champion, required so much more.

I kept pressing on until winning became an obsession and in the long run I'm glad I did. Success with my Stiletto defined my life and I will always look upon those years with a great deal of pride.

In writing this story I have tried very hard to convey my perception of what was going on around me during the Stiletto years and I hope, in some small way, "The Stiletto Chronicles" have enlightened and entertained you.

I often think about how a perfectly trimmed modern Stiletto powered by a piped PA65 might perform. If this ever happens it will not be from me. I've had my run and now I just want to be remembered as "A Lucky Guy." *SN*