

Recently we got back from the photo lab a CD with a bunch of old 35 mm camera slides that we had digitized. Among the pix were a number of shots taken of model airplane activities that occurred much earlier in my hobby career.

The attached photos were shot at the first old-timer meet that I ever participated in. I was about 22 years old, had just bought my first car (1963 Pontiac Tempest, featuring a 326 cu. in. engine and a "3 on the floor" stick shift). The contest was at Waegel Field in Sacramento, which from SF was the longest drive I had made to that point.

Meeting John Pond at a restaurant was the inspiration in this venture. He told me about this new model organization he had recently started (SAM) and I told him that even before I could read, I loved ogling the old-time model airplanes in my father's war time magazine collection. Having said that, he insisted that I should come to the next contest and even drew me a map of the field (which I still have!).

With that I went home, dug up my dad's yellowing model mags and started poring over them looking for a suitable project - one that I could complete in less than a month! In those days, SAM was strictly FF and no scaling was allowed. Eventually, I found a SAM-legal model (the S-4) in a Model Airplane News article titled "How to Build a Three Foot Gas Model". It looked perfect for a hot Fox .049 I had been using in a CL model. Of course, the only plan available was a small 3-view which showed all the rib and spar locations, but not wood sizes. Undaunted, I grabbed a roll of shelf paper and began drafting what I thought the construction should be.

Long story short, I finished the model with Jap tissue, mounted the engine and headed to Waegel - with an untested airplane. Like they say, though, "it flew off the drawing board". After only one test flight it was ready for official scoring. Also, in those days, all take offs had to be ROG. Best three of six flights was the rule and I launched the model five of those six. For the last flight, I let my buddy launch. But, sadly, I forgot to remind him to trip the Tatone fuel line pinch-off timer. So, with a full 3/4 oz. of fuel it went up for into the stratosphere. I followed on foot, running till I could no longer see it, Then I continued running and tracking it by sound until the engine quit. I knew by then it was lost. Had my ID on the model but nobody ever notified me that it had been found.

That was the last time I ventured into the realm old-time model airplanes - until I joined SAM 27 in 2005. But it took another three years before I managed to build another old-timer: the Miss America. This time, however, I had R/C to make sure I got the model back safely on the ground. And we'll just not even mention that three time I've forgotten to turn on the radio receiver and had to watch the airplane fly away - again! And again! And again!!

- Tom

