

# William Wisniewski

1929 - 2007



It has been suggested that I prepare an obituary of sorts for Bill, partly because I have a number of photos of him and his activities that I can share. I do want to say things in tribute to the man, but I'm not sure anyone could write a good obituary. His inventions,

contributions, and activities are too numerous and generated over a period of nearly sixty years for anyone to have a grasp on it all.

In some ways the sum of his contributions and ideas in model aircraft engines and control line speed are about equal to those of all other fliers combined.

But this is not the measure of the man. Genius, often associated with some undesirable personality traits, was his no doubt, but the man I knew was a better human being than all but a few. Modest, always ready to help, good natured, soft spoken, ready and willing to share. Everyone gets angry, but I never saw him mad.

So in this note remember that I'm talking about his technical genius, his achievements and the hobby we share. But above all this he was a good man in a world where there are so few.

When I first met him he had returned from the first control line World Championships in 1960 at Budapest. Already a champion, a renowned engine designer, and the driving force at K&B I knew about him from reading magazines, For example he set the AMA class A record in 57 with his Pink Lady. A wizard with engines but in 1960 he went in a new direction and introduced the Europeans to fuel chemistry. The fuel he used with tetra nitromethane was so potent that the FAU banned it after he demonstrated how good it was. Two complete articles covering this first World Control Line championship plus photos are on my [microair.info](http://www.microair.info) web site

<http://www.microair.info/f2a/year60-61.htm>

His speed was the fastest at the Champs, however, on the last round an Italian flier wrapped the lines around his shoulder to reduce the line length and managed a slightly faster time. The FAI did nothing about this even after the British protested. So there Bill was - in second place - , but everyone knew who the champion was.

Back in LA we began hanging out at K&B on Saturday when Bill did most of his hobby work. Then for lunch to the Downy Hoffbrau. What I wouldn't give to have a time machine and do that even one more time. Schnurle porting was his interest for FAI and he eventually produced a fine engine, certainly the first Schnurle ported aeromodel engine of championship quality. The lumps on the side for the port were funny-looking to us and his wife asked "What is that on the side? It looks like a wart!" and that's what we called it. From there to the team trials for the 1964 World Champs and then on to the champs with the K&B 15RS that all the team members used. The complete account and results are on my site

<http://www.microair.info/f2a/year64-65.htm>

The final flight made him World Champion.

Then again back to the Hoffbrau – and the breakthrough that changed F2A and speed flying in general forever. The tuned exhaust and the TWA engine (Theobald-Wisnewski Association). Test flown at the Sepulveda Flood Control Basin with mind-boggling speeds, Bill asked me not to publish anything in MAN until after the world champs. For shots of his workshop and the first pipe look at my site:

<http://www.microair.info/SCSF/faq/faq.htm>

Then to England. Test flying at a different venue, then the first flight at the contest in England. The Russians, perhaps trying to put him off form, came over to him before his first flight and said they wanted to “Congratulate him in advance for his winning flights.” The Czechs and Russians, tops in Europe, watched the first flight snickering a bit as the airplane got in the air and was not on the pipe so pretty slow. Then it came in. The contest was over at that point. Later Bill walked over to the Russian pits and reached in his pocket. There was an assortment of English coins, some lint, and a couple blow plugs. He took one of the plugs and blew on it to clear it out and handed it to them saying “Try this, it might help you go faster”.

But true to Bill's way, at the end of the contest he held an open meeting and showed all his equipment, explained it and answered questions. Ever heard of that before?

I asked him to write an article for MAN on the tuned pipe. He was a little reticent but gave in. I looked over what he had a couple times and it was a well done thing. It made MAN and was mentioned on the cover. See the article and pictures of his workshop during the development of the pipe.

<http://www.microair.info/f2ax/speed/spdindx.htm>

In 1968 He went to the World Champs again. All three US fliers used the TWA engine and the results were Arnold Nelson First, Bill Second and Roger Third.

After this astounding string of victories an attempt was made to produce and market the TWA engine commercially but was not successful. K&B slowly went down hill over the years and finally was bought by Bil Bennett, owner of the Circus Circus. The operation was moved to Boulder City and the entire line of K&B engines was re-engineered, and are still for sale by Randy Linsalatto.

Bill has to keep on working as K&B provided no retirement at all. He attended contests and brought his aircraft and those of his son and grandson. They were flown regularly through the year 2006.

My knowledge of his early life is limited. He was born in Olympia and came to Los Angeles in the early 50's. Although I have heard people say he worked at Northrop it is my opinion that he went to the Northrop technical institute. He began doing work for local engine manufacturers and by the end of the 50's was working for K&B and

responsible for the design of the widely used K&B 15R and has set AMA records in speed.

I really regret having to say goodbye this way and I only wish I could have told more about this really good human being. But we do have an earlier bio submitted to the NASS about 10 years ago. I copy it sans the photo below.

## **Biography of BILL WISNIEWSKI**

Modeler since 1937 Birth Date: May 5, 1929 AMA Number: 6258

**Submitted by NASS (11/96) Transcribed by NR (11/96) Edited by SS (2002)**

### **Career:**

Manager in research and development for K&B Manufacturing Inc.

1950 First to use a pen bladder tank in model aircraft

1957 First man to use really hot fuel

1964 Developed Schnurle port engine design

1965 Developed the TOP-FLITE speed props

1966 Inventor of tuned exhaust pipe for model engine use

### **Honors:**

1979 AMA Hall of Fame

Recipient of the North American Speed Society (N.A.S.S.) only Life Member Award

*The following biography was submitted by the North American Speed Society's newsletter, the Speed Times.*

When it comes to Control Line speed no name is more synonymous to the sport than that of Uncle Willie, Bill Wisniewski. I'm sure we could do an entire Speed Times issue devoted to Bill's unbelievable accomplishments and innovations in the sport; however, we will try to keep it to one page.

Like many top Control Line speed men, Bill hailed from the Northwest Olympia, Washington to be exact where he attended St. Martin High School and also St. Martin College. In 1948 Bill made the trek to Southern California to attend Northrop Aeronautical Institute in 1948 and 1949 earning an A&E License. Bill then worked for Northrop Corporation for 10

years and was working part time for K&B until he went on full-time in 1959.

Bill is, of course, married to Bev and they have three fully grown children. Mike, Mindy and Rick.

Some of the innovations Bill came up with over the last 40 years include the first guy to use a pen bladder fuel tank (1949). Willie also adapted the Schnurle porting system to model engines (1964), he had design development into the TOP-FLITE speed props and, of course, adapted the Motorcycle tuned exhaust principal to model engine use around 1965.

Most all of the racing engines since the K&B 15R (1961) have been designed by Willie which includes the K&B 29R, K&B 6.5 (40), the K&B 65 among many others.

One of the all time best Control Line speed designs ever is the Pink Lady series of models designed by Bill that have a history going back to 1956. The name came about due to Bill s passion for the color pink on his models at the time and when Texan speed flier Frank Stone saw one at the 1956 Dallas Nationals (Nats) he quipped, He y Willie those ships look just like a pink

lady my wife was drinking last night. The name stuck. With these models over the years Bill has held on and off the Class A, B, D, FORM 40 FAI (15) and FAI CLASS II records. The records in many cases were outrageous for their time, for example his Torp 19 class A Pink Lady circa 1955 to 1958 held a speed mark higher than the class B (29) record in 1957, 154 for A against the 153 for B. That speed might seem tame by today s standards but 154 mph with a old plain bearing Green head Torp 19 was really something in those days.

Around 1958 Willie got the bug for World Championship activity and got involved in the new 15 size FAI stuff, he built his own motor, qualified for the 1960 World Championships and should have won hands down but lost out to Rossi who actually whipped the model during the run.

Willie went back, did his homework and became world champion in 1964 and again in 1966 and was second in 1968. Bill figures to have built over 75 speed models in all classes during his speed career and has so many National meet wins we can't list them all on this page. Bill, because of the many contributions to aeromodelling, became an AMA Hall of Fame member in 1979, one of the few deserving ones in recent years, by the way, and, of course, is our NASS president holding down NASS number 1. Bill has been such a force in speed for the past 45 years that there is no reason to

believe he still won't dominate in the future with the new 10% fuel rule. We expect to see the Wisniewski name holding down a few of the National records again soon, as guys as sharp as Willie are hard to stop.

*The following is another excerpt from Speed Times*

### **Bill Wisniewski Awarded N.A.S.S. Membership**

As you know, each of you have your own personalized name tag and number and the question arose as to who gets number one. Here's how we devised it:

We reserved the very low numbers for the builders of the sport, the guys who have obviously contributed the most and have been doing it the longest and have gained worldwide fame through their continuance in the hobby.

To no one's surprise, Bill Wisniewski was the unanimous choice for N.A.S.S. No. 1 his record stands for itself. For some of the newcomers, we thought it might be interesting to do a short profile on Bill's career.

Originally a Northwest Speed Flier from Olympia, Washington, Bill started Control Line speed flying in the 1940s, where he quickly became the class of his area. He moved to Los Angeles, California, in the early 1950s and there began an incredible string of innovative ideas, many of which we use today. Some of Bill's firsts include the following:

First to use a pen bladder tank in model aircraft (1950)

First to use really hot fuel (1957)

Developer of the Schnurle port engines (1964) design

Development into the TOP-FLITE speed props (1965)

Inventor of the tuned exhaust pipe for model engine use (1966)

Along with all of this, Bill has worked for K&B and designed all of the hot engines for them since 1961. I think you will agree, if anyone deserved No. 1, it's Bill Wisniewski!

### **Bill Wisniewski contest record at major championships**

1955 - 1st A speed - Nationals

1956 - 1st 1/2A speed, 1st A speed - Nationals

1957 - 1st A speed - Nationals

1958 - 1st A speed - Nationals

1960 - 1st A speed - Nationals; 2nd F.A.I. speed championships

1963 - 1st A speed; 1st B speed Nationals; 1st C speed  
1964 - F.A.I. speed, World Champion  
1965 - 2nd B PROTO - Nationals  
1966 - F.A.I. speed - World Champion  
1967 - 1st B speed; 1st C speed 1st Proto speed; 2nd A speed - Nationals  
1968 - 2nd F.A.I. speed - World Championships  
1971 - 2nd A speed - Nationals  
1978 - 3rd B speed, 3rd Proto speed - Nationals  
1979 - 1st B Proto speed, 2nd B speed - Nationals  
1980 - 2nd B speed - Nationals  
1981 - 1st B speed Nationals