

Caught in the Searchlight: Al Parshall



In this feature in Flypaper, each month, we highlight a club member on a rotating basis. While we see each other at the field or at meetings, we may not know a lot about the other members, their personal background and their history in RC flying. Searchlight should help us get to know one another better.

This month's Searchlight falls on another former LCRCC President, Al Parshall.



When I met Al for the interview in the parking lot of a restaurant, he asked with a chuckle whether I knew what his license plate meant. Al explained that it meant Danger Unexploded Bomb, taken from a British show of that name about the Brit soldiers who defused unexploded bombs during the blitz. The plane he is holding in the photo above was victim of a UXB, he explained. He had rigged a bomb drop for the plane when he released the bomb, he watched the bomb falling instead of keeping his attention on the plane which ended up crashing. The plane is a Spickler Quickie and was Al's 5th of his 6 full builds.



TV
a
but

Though born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1935, Al has lived in Waukegan since his last year of grammar school and has not a trace of a southern accent. Al began working at Johnson Outboard the day after his graduation from high school in 1953, and his work there with motors stood him in good stead when he began flying RC models. At Johnson he worked first testing motors from the assembly line but later his specialty was “tuning for speed,” a phrase he adopted from a book of the same name.

Al was not only able to speak about the various planes he has built, but was able to bring photos of them to the interview for Flypaper. In 1967, he built his first plane, a TopFlite Schoolboy with a 22” wingspan and a Cox 010 motor, shown at right. The plane was flown with a single channel transmitter. The Schoolboy only lasted until 1968 when Al brought it to Daytona Beach and flew it in conditions that were a little too windy for the small plane. It was blown backwards by the wind and went out of sight. Though Al searched for it for a day and a half, he was never able to find it.



When asked how a plane could be flown on a single channel, Al explained that with that single channel, one could control throttle, rudder and elevator. The pilot would push once on a button to make the rudder turn right, push again quickly for left rudder, and push once more quickly for up elevator. Live a day, learn a fact. Al even explained how to do loops using a single channel transmitter.



His next build was a Midwest Whiz Kid shown in the photo at left, and yes, that is a young AL Parshall proudly displaying his Whiz Kid. The photo was taken at the field which was used by the SkyKnights Aeromodelling Team. Al joined the SkyKnights club in 1969 and is still a member, having the longest continuous tenure of any member of that club.

Al’s other builds included an Andrews S-Ray kit which he modified, pictured at right. Al took out the dihedral and put on ailerons. Although designed as a one channel plane, Al modified it to four channels. The Orbit radio shown in the photo was state of the art and was an expensive purchase



which caused some dissension on the home front. Al paid \$168 for the radio in 1968, the equivalent of \$1,163 in today's dollars.

Though perhaps known to many Flypaper readers, Al furthered this writer's RC education with a recounting of the origins of the Das Ugly Stik. The plane was designed by Phil Kraft of Kraft Radios, in Kraft's words: "*The original concept of the Ugly Stik was to design a radio controlled aircraft which could be built in an absolute minimum of time. Its purpose was towards a flying test bed for new radio proportional control developments and an all-around shop airplane which could be used as a loaner for visiting flyers, testing repaired equipment, and any use which required an airplane which could be considered as expendable.*" Little did the writer know that his favorite plane was designed to be expendable.

Al's association with the Lake County Radio Control Club began in 1973, the year the club was founded although Al was not a founding member. Al came to be a member through **Stan James**, one of the LCRCC founders who was also a member of the SkyKnights. According to Al, he was recruited to be an LCRCC instructor due to Stan's habit of maintaining control of the TX during training, merely explaining to his students what he was doing. Those were the days before the advent of buddy boxes. Al became one of the club's primary instructors by default and was much more hands-on for the student pilots. He has helped many pilots over the years and most recently has helped **Rich Hentschell** get his chops back after a long absence from RC flying.

Al laughed as he recalled an incident where someone else was flying a plane at Steffie's Field on Kilbourne and lost control. The plane went out of sight behind a building. The anxious pilot handed the TX to Al who guessed as to how much throttle and elevator he needed to bring it back up. After a few seconds delay, the plane reappeared and Al landed it to profuse thanks from the pilot.

Another of Al's interests was tuning and racing motorcycles. He told of entering the Tri-State Hill Climb for motorcycles in far southern Danville, Illinois. Al says that he won the event, but laughed and quickly added that he won because he had been the only entrant who had been able to finish and make it to the top of the hill. Al says he was losing control and barely hanging on to the hand grips as he crossed the finish.

Al is active in the club and is part of the Field Crew, helping with the Thursday mowing. He mostly flies a FunCub these days, or a mini-quad indoors during the winter. When asked about the number of planes he has, he says that the last time he took inventory, he had 220 kits, some partially built, but added that since he took the inventory, he has gotten a few more kits to build. That's the spirit Al!