

Pilot Profile: Mel Stein

by Russell Knetzger

Anybody visiting the Milwaukee County R/C Field on Oakwood Rd. in Franklin knows Mel Stein, 73 by sight as the grass cutter. Field work party members suspect Mel was raised on a farm, which he was, because of his respect for wildlife (his field birdhouses) and Mel rarely misses a work session, works hard, coming early and staying late. The Stein farm was at Lena, WI, 20 miles north of Green Bay.

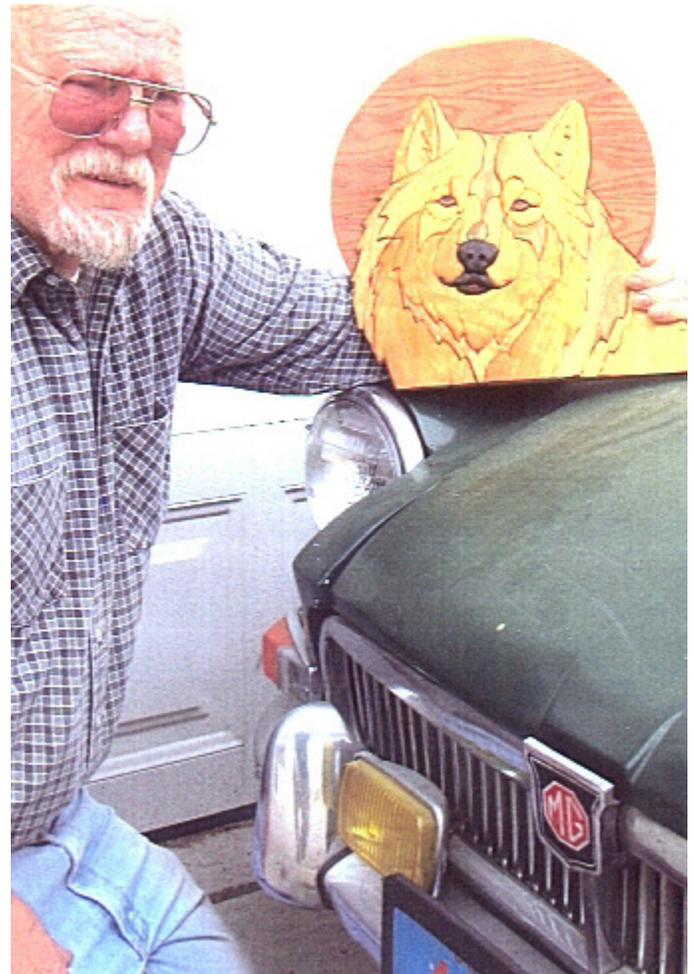
In 1945 Mel's family left farming, moving to nearby Gillette, WI where Mel's father worked the rest of his life in one of the plywood mills, making Oak and Birch ply for Midwest cabinetry shops. Upon graduation from high school, Mel worked awhile there too, launching him into a lifelong association with wood, and wood working machinery.

The picture here of Mel with a wolf's head made of different colors of wood is a type of artwork called "Intarsia," invented in the 1500s in north central Italy. Artist's draw patterns on dress making paper, a wood artisan like Mel transfers the pattern to thin backer board, and then scroll cuts the backer apart. Each backer piece becomes a pattern for different thickness and natural colors of woods, reassembled to the artist's original concept. Mel makes some upon customer demand, and makes others for sale.

Mel is kneeling next to the MG car he is restoring. He also has 3 Triumphs in his oversize garage in West Allis in various stages of restoration. This willingness to tackle cars comes from his 1953-55 training in the US Army, where he became a tank mechanic. He still remembers fondly his base at Camp Carson in Colorado Springs, CO with its mountain views. He married a California girl and settled in Oregon, where he would still be except for allergies to that climate. She stayed, he returned to Wisconsin where he ended up in Waukesha County at Nashotah Wood Mouldings, almost to retirement.



While working in Nashotah, just east of Oconomowoc, Mel revived his boyhood model airplane interest by join-



Mel Stein (lower left) with his 1976 scratch built "Beech Staggerwing" and (above) with wood wolf's head "Intarsia," and his 1965 MG sports car

ing the Lakeland RC Club, which was flying nearby on the Pabst Farms along I-94. The Club soon relocated northeast of the city to the Oconomowoc grass field airport, where they are still. Mel remembers displaying his scratch built model of the Beech Staggerwing, pictured here, at Southgate Mall in 1976-78 alongside famed AMA scale modeler Bob Wischer. Lakeland was Bob's home club. Those mall displays were organized by the Milwaukee RC Association and continue to this day at non-mall locations such as at Armed Forces Day remembrances.

In buying a home in West Allis, it became natural for Mel in 1991 to join the RAMS Club at the County field. However, he did not become active until three years ago, and now cares for the field. His farm upbringing gives him familiarity with our Allis-Chalmers diesel tractor and all its attachments, plus his respect for mobile machinery taught in the Army tank corps, makes him an ideal caretaker of the tractor. He has upgraded the spray equipment used for dandelion control, is re-riveting the sidebar cutter, and looks forward to caring for the new DR heavy duty walk behind brush cutter.

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