

## Pilot Profile: Nick Johnson

by Russell Knetzger

Hurley, Wisconsin, and nearby Ironwood, Michigan, may be a kid's great place to grow up, with the small town safeness and the outdoor opportunities of that area. But then his father was killed in a mine accident when Nick was 15 years old. It was by a cave-in in the world's deepest shaft mine for iron ore (a mile deep, with 38 levels). That, and 300 inches of snow a year, can make a small town appear very limiting to a new high school graduate.

That's how Nick saw it, so right out of high school in 1959 he joined the US Navy. Through the Navy he received extensive medical training as a corpsman, and was stationed in different parts of our country, including Cherry Point, NC, and Memphis, TN.

In Tennessee he met and married his wife, Jennie, herself a Wisconsin girl of age 18, living at that time in Memphis because her Air Force Captain father was stationed there. Before her untimely death 4 years ago due to illness, they were able to move back to Wisconsin and rear their three children, Carrie, Steven and Mark, That was mostly in the same Greenfield house in which Nick still lives after 36 years, on S. 35<sup>th</sup> near Layton Avenue. Carrie is the mother of 3 grand children, which Nick misses, because they live in Scottsdale, Arizona.



**Nick Johnson with one of his three .40 sized trainers, this one a 63 inch span ARF from Tower Hobbies, powered by a .51 Supertigre. The cycle is a 1997 Harley Davidson Road King.**



Milwaukee was full of good job openings in the early 1960's when he and Jennie came here. Nick was hired by Caterpillar Tractor on Chase & Holt Avenues, and worked there 22 years before they began to downsize in Milwaukee. With Caterpillar he held a variety of shop floor jobs, from forklift operator to parts-crib man.

As Nick saw the shrinking underway at Caterpillar, he took a buyout and headed down to Racine to work for A.W. Oakes & Son, an excavation and grading company that used a lot of Caterpillar type equipment. For them Nick was their partsman for two years.

Then he did a major career switch and went to work in the wholesale paper business, first with Butler Paper in Menomonee Falls, retiring 18 years later from Unisource in New Berlin, the successor firm to

Butler Paper after six intervening buyouts by other owners. Such companies receive their paper stock directly from the paper mills in pallet sized loads of large sheets. Workers such as Nick have to then cut it down to the familiar sizes of office and home use, such as 8-1/2x11 inches, package and carton it, and then move it out to printers and retailers.

Except for some U-Control model flying back in Hurley, WI, model aircraft were not present in Nick's life until after his retirement two years ago. Until then motor cycles and some horseshoe throwing were his main diversions. Nick, now 66, has owned 6 different motor cycles. Through these interests he met RAMS Club pilot Bob Kabella, who lives only 4 blocks farther south on the same street. Both Nick and Bob faithfully compete in horseshoes each summer week, often riding to meets on their cycles, and elsewhere around the metro area. Bob is teaching Nick to fly R/C model aircraft.

Nick hopes to solo during 2007, and is using a simulator to speed the process.

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