

Pilot Profile: Roger Olsen

by Russell Knetzger

For those members who met Roger Olsen, 65, for the first time when he joined the RAMS Club at its February 1, 2006 meeting, they may not at first have recognized what they were meeting. But as he presented his Boomerang jet turbine model, they probably guessed: a much-alive, ever-talk-ing 56 year piece of SE Wisconsin R/C aviation history. Explaining his Boomerang, a more docile, learnable jet than the Bobcat with which he is pictured here, his first-hand and extensive know-ledge flowed out like an unstoppable flood.

In several hours of interview for this article, his encyclopedic and detailed memory of the evolution of radio control model aviation since 1950 was much evident in incredible detail.

Living first around N. 35th & Lisbon, in 1952 he started frequenting Al Secklin's hobby shop on N. 28th & North Avenue. A 1950 false start with a Herkimer .049 Cub engine led to a diversion into scale model trains. Then in 1956 as his family moved to E. North Ave. on the Milwaukee River, Secklin got Roger into early radio control via an electric motor tugboat. Roger ran that on the river above the North Ave. dam. Single channel control was dicey on aircraft, but better for boats. Financing himself by odd-jobs such as truck doc-king for his father's trucking firm, Roger used a Hal DeBoldt system with a 9 ft. TX antenna, 27 MHz, one click for right, two for left.

While attending Riverside H.S. Roger haunted the Secklin shop, meeting ham radio men who were trying to adapt heavy, tube based radios to con-trol model aircraft. Roger hitched rides to the Cedarburg H.S. field where these men hung out. In 1959 Roger tried a Sterling kit Monocoupe with a Fox.25 engine, "guided" by a Citizenship 8 chan-nel "reed" set. At 2 channels per function, eight channels equals only 4 controls. Pilot skills were limited all around. Roger's plane crunched.

Roger persisted. By 1960 the men were at Aero Park in Menomonee Falls where the Electrons were born. Planes were hand launched and grass left tall to cushion "landings." Pilot skills were still rudimentary, turning bodies with the plane.



*Roger Olson/turbine Bobcat, Grafton, Nov. 2005
Astro Wings Meeting, Aaron Cochran, Jr., editor*

Inspiring breakthroughs appeared at the 1962 AMA NATS at Glenview, IL Naval Air Station. The powerful VECO.45 engine on a Taurus Top Flight kit made for impressive flying. Pilots did not rotate their bodies. In emulation, Roger consumed 17 Taurus kits the next 2 years. But ever on the forefront, Roger in 1964 with a Bonner propor-tional got a taste of true control. He took First Place at the 1965 Electrons pattern contest. Then came a huge breakthrough: the 1965 Kraft digital proportional for \$495. It instantly killed the reed market. That price in 2006 dollars (x6) is \$2400. Roger remained a formal contest competitor for the next 10 years.

In the early 1980's "contest fever" was replaced nationally with the advent of giant scale "Fly-Ins" where you went "to see and be seen", but not necessarily to fly. Ever the pioneer, Roger helped lead that trend. In 1970 Roger became a charter shareholder in SW Waukesha's Pebble Creek, the state's 1st pilot-owned RC field. Still in his 1969 Oak Creek home, Roger in 2005 sold his shares.

From 1993 Roger's focus has been on jet models powered by true turbine engines. While expen-sive, (engines cost \$3000-\$5000), and require new pilot skills, they are model aviation's leading edge. Roger would be nowhere else.

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