



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of CARL GOLDBERG

October 27, 1912 - January 28, 1985  
Started modeling in 1925      AMA #1374



Some content compiled by NR, Transcribed, written & edited by SS (11/2002), Written by ET (2002), WCB (11/1965), and MC staff (04/1941), some content by Museum staff (2017), Updated by JS (9/2008, 11/2008, 08/2009, 09/2012, 07/2017, 11/2017)

---

**Video link: One of the National Model Aviation Museum's special Fly By report, Zipper, is on YouTube [here](#).**



***“In the National Model Aviation Museum's second episode of their series "Fly By", Museum Education Specialist Claire Aldenhuisen talks about Carl Goldberg's iconic free-flight model, The Zipper.”***

***“The film footage of Carl Goldberg flying his Zipper model airplane was originally shot on 8 mm color film in February, 1941, in Bakersfield, California, by Edward Kapitanoff, then President of Comet Western Model Airplane Co. and Exclusive Distributor for Comet Model Airplane & Supply Co. of Chicago.”***

***- Published on YouTube on October 25, 2016 by the National Model Aviation Museum.***

---

## Career:

- Received an honorable mention flying a twin pusher at the 1928 Nationals (Nats)
- Won first place in indoor competition at the 1934 Nats
- Opened a hobby shop in 1935 in Chicago after selling modeling supplies through mail order while in college
- A founder of the Central Gas Model Plane Society in the summer of 1935
- Formed the Chicago Aeronuts club
- Designed and built his first gas engine-powered model, the Valkyrie, in 1936
- Was the national indoor champion around 1937
- Worked as chief designer of Comet Model Company from 1939 to 1945
- Designed the popular Clipper and the famous Zipper for Comet as well as training material for the U.S. military

- Traveled the U.S. in the early 1940s giving lectures and demonstrations at schools and for model clubs
- After Comet, started a business with Mike Schlesinger and Sid Axelrod that eventually became Top Flite Models
- In 1955, he started Carl Goldberg Models and designed numerous models including the Blazer, Ranger, Swordsman 18 and the Shoestring Stunter
- Some kits produced by Carl Goldberg Models include the Senior Falcon, Eaglet, Eagle, Sky Tiger and Junior Tiger

### **Honors:**

- 1959: AMA Fellow
- 1969: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1978: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1984: Vintage Radio Control Society Hall of Fame
- 1984: Howard McEntee Award
- 1992: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
- 1996: Kits and Plans Antiquitous Hall of Fame

---

*The following biography on Carl Goldberg came from The History of the Academy of Model Aeronautics: Including Part One and Part Two From the Beginning to the Year 1966, written by Willis C. Brown and Dick Black that was published first in 1966; the second part was published in 1967. This biography comes from Part One written by Willis C. Brown. It was completed by November 1965.*

---

## **Carl Goldberg**

“Mr. Modeling,” title given by American Modeler magazine, hailed by expert builders and beginners alike as “Expert Designer.” Carl is typical of the many designers who have come to the top from the rank of model builders and flyers and herein represents a host of individuals with similar talents.

The luster of his name has not dimmed with the years. At age 15 living in New Rochelle, New York, he flew his first “single propeller pusher” for about 65 feet. He attended the 1928 Nationals (Nats) flying a twin pusher and received an honorable mention certificate.

Carl was fascinated by the possibilities of the fragile indoor models that he saw at the Nats. Skills in designing and building developed fast; seven years later, he won a first place in this difficult event at the 1934 Nats. Frank Zaic’s Model Aeronautics Yearbook 1935-1936 gives the plans for Carl’s open class C indoor record plane – duration 23 minutes and 29.3 seconds.

He opened a hobby shop in Chicago where he was living in 1935, but he spent much of his time still building and flying model planes. He showed his ever-increasing skills by producing a most advanced and unusual gas model, the Valkyrie.

After several years in his hobby shop, Carl became chief designer of Comet Models. His success was immediate, as he had just designed what became the most popular Comet Clipper. Carl's next and most famous model was the Zipper.

He stayed with Comet Models for six years, designing several other Free Flight gas models, Control Line models and, for the armed forces, a classroom wind tunnel. Then in 1947, he worked under the name of Top-Flite producing such designs as Zing, Cumulus, Trainer, Rascal, and a dozen Jig Time beginner kits.

In 1955, he went into business for himself, designing and manufacturing Carl Goldberg Models. With the help of his wife and family, he started with a simple line of \$1 kits, scale like and made mostly of sheet balsa. Later came the Blazer, Ranger, and the Swordsman 18. C.G. Models were really on their way when he produced the Shoestring Stunter.

Competition flying is in Carl's blood. He is famous for having participated in every Nats since 1928. As an old timer, but always with fresh ideas, Carl has figured prominently in the history of model aviation and the Academy – always encouraging, always willing to help and always anxious to give others credit for his own success.

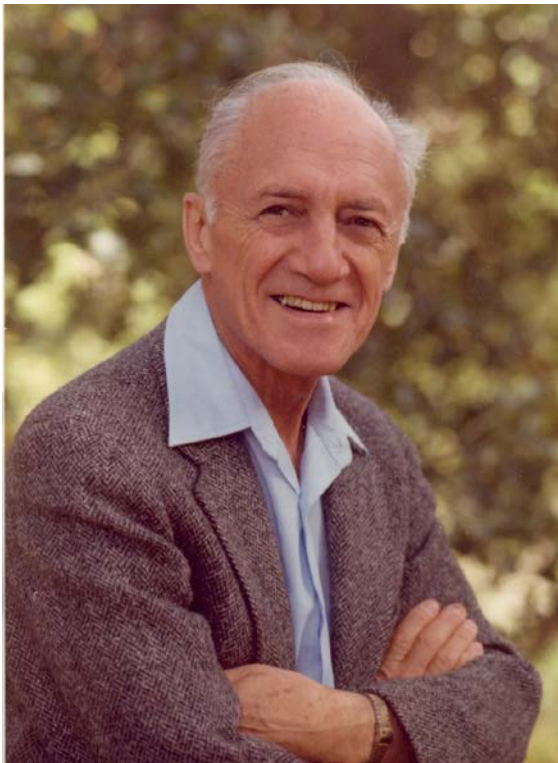
---

*The following information on Carl Goldberg was written by Evan T. Towne for the AMA History Project in 2000.*

---

## **Carl Goldberg: Mr. Model Aviation**

By Evan T. Towne



***This photo of Carl ran on the cover of Radio Control Modeler's May 1985 issue in a tribute to him after his death.***

In 1925 at the age of 13, Carl built his first model airplane. It did not fly, but it presented the type of challenge that he enjoyed, so he started making a better one. For the rest of his life this seemed to be his goal.

In 1920, the National Aeronautic Association (NAA) sponsored contests for full-sized airplanes. By 1923 the IMAC (Illinois Model Aero Club) with Bertram Pond as a prominent member, convinced the NAA that they should have a model contest at the same time, so they did. In 1975, Bert Pond and Jim Noonan convinced the AMA to make the year of 1976 the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Nationals in the nation's bicentennial year in Dayton, Ohio – the hometown of the Wright brothers. To do this, the five NAA Nationals were added, making 50. Bert Pond felt compelled to say that it was from this first AMLA National in 1928 that famous modeler Carl Goldberg had entered every

National and in no way did the change detract from Mr. Goldberg's most enviable record. Carl was a contestant and placed second in an indoor flying event in 1928.

As early as 1930, he had introduced polyhedral wings to replace the almost universal vee-dihedral in model airplanes. 1931 found him enrolled at the University of Wisconsin. For money, he started selling microfilm solution, rubber lubricant, and MRL brown rubber via mail order. He soon designed two 10-inch all-balsa models and added these to his business.

By 1934, he dropped out of college, moved to Chicago, and opened a small hobby shop. Carl's mother Celia often helped in his hobby shop. He became very adept at working with microfilm models. This type of model requires very close attention and an extra amount of manipulative expertise. Around 1937, Carl was the national indoor champion flying three-gram rubber-powered microfilm models with a propeller rpm somewhere under 60.

The summer of 1935, he became one of the founders of the Central Gas Model Plane Society. It was necessary to build a gas model within six months of joining. Also with another group of modelers, he formed the Chicago Aeronuts club. One of the foundations of the club was to advance the hobby by freely passing on "secrets of success" to any and all hobbyists, wherever they were. Some of the other clubs were very secretive about how and why. Carl was always interested in promoting all aspects of modeling. He was a teacher and was adept at finding how to do things correctly and willingly told others. Carl was a real experimenter and innovator.

In 1936, he designed and built his first gas engine-powered model, the Valkyrie, with a huge 10-foot wingspread. Instead of placing the wing directly on the fuselage, he built a tall platform and mounted it on that. Carl gave credit for the pylon design to Alvin Anderson, but Carl is the one to put it to good use. His pylon-mounted wing on a series of beautiful models almost single-handedly ended the reign of realistic cabin models like the Westerner for Free Flight. An interesting note was that even the Comet Company that kitted this series of planes didn't know what to call it. The Zipper ads said the models had an "automatic pilot wing mount." Soon there were two separate camps of thoughts about that – planes that looked like real airplanes or planes designed to fly with little appearance to real airplanes other than having wings, fuselage and tail surfaces. The battle still rages today [2000].

Dave Thornberg reports for 1938, "Carl Goldberg, after winning indoor again, came skipping onto the Wayne County field just 10 minutes before the final bell in open gas. He had under his arm a curious little plane with a Dennykite up front. It looked dangerously overpowered. According to legend, the design came about as the result of a bet that he couldn't fly "60-60" – a .60 engine in a 60-inch airplane. The Dennykite was only a .46, but the model had just 46-inches of wing. If it flew, he'd win the bet with 10 inches to spare. For reasons that soon became obvious, Goldberg dubbed the final version of the strange-looking airplane the Zipper."

Model Airplane News magazine editor, Charlie Grant, wrote, "One of the most remarkable flights was made by a little six-foot model which literally tore off the ground and spiraled itself vertically upward at an angle of about 60 to 80-degrees. Actually, it acted like a helicopter, the propeller pulling it nearly vertically. It climbed to an elevation of about 600 feet before the motor cut."

As early as 1941, Carl was pleading for the use of dethermalizers to stop “fly-aways” instead of shorter engine runs. He loved the sound of an open throated .60 screaming skyward.

The story of Comet Model Airplane and Supply Company by Walt Grigg was printed in Model Builder magazine in February 1983 and it said this about Carl’s involvement with Comet: “In 1939 Carl Goldberg came to work for Comet. The results of this association are well known to the modeling public...Without doubt the most famous gas model ever...the record-breaking Zipper! Soon followed by others – the Sailplane, Mercury, and the rubber-powered Gull.” One thing about the Goldberg planes, they were always as beautiful to look at, as they were good flyers.

Charles I. Kilvans reminisced about Carl: “My first exposure to Carl Goldberg was at the first gas contest I ever saw. It was at Westchester, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, in about 1939. There were the Buccaneers and Cavaliers and Clippers. The older builders in the Windy City Gas Model Club flew, showing little more ability to fly than my rubber-powered crates. Then I saw a strange model climbing in a vertical spiral and floating away. ‘What was that?’ [I asked]. ‘Oh, that’s Wisnewski flying his Goldberg Zipper,’ [was the reply]. What a difference! By 1941, I lost mine with an Ohlsson .19. The Zipper was so good we didn’t recognize how good it was. The first one had an instruction booklet that was so detailed you couldn’t miss. If you have one, you are lucky.

“I qualified for the Chicago Aeronuts in 1942. I went to meetings and banquets. At one of the banquets, I got to select what we would do for fun after the banquet. I suggested roller-skating at a local rink in Chicago, and soon there was dignified Carl skating to the organ music wearing a suit in a skating rink!

“While attending the Illinois Institute of Technology, John Bock and I worked part-time at Comet for Carl. We helped build the model wind tunnels that Comet sold to the government. At one weekly glider flying session at a nearby park, Carl showed up with a three-foot span all-balsa towline that ended up in the top of a Chicago elm. Carl hired a youngster to get it down, but when the kid got up there, the height frightened him and he refused to get the model. Finally, Carl went up the tree, out on a limb and retrieved it.

“I remember him most as a teacher. We would meet in the Gage Park Field House regularly before being caught in the draft [for World War II]. Either the members were too young or had exemptions, which soon ran out. Comet had government contracts for flight training aids like wind tunnels. At the time, Carl was married and probably over age. He would start the meeting with an aerodynamics lesson then we would have a low ceiling hand-launch glider contest with the winner receiving good balsa wood. You had to throw the glider so it flew in the rafters without hitting. Over 22 seconds usually won.”

During World War II, Comet was the only American company with design expertise and the machinery to develop things that the Navy wanted. Carl designed and developed a classroom wind tunnel that had indicators for lift and drag. Comet and Carl made the plans and kits for modelers to carve out as identification models of U.S. and foreign planes that the military used in training. They even made the master patterns for the black plastic-injected identification models

that were eventually produced by the hundreds of thousands and sent to every U.S. air base and squadron around the world.

Carl, with Mike Schlesinger and Sid Axelrod, started American Hobby Specialties in 1945. The main product was gas model propellers called Top Flite and Power Prop. After a while, the name was changed to Top Flite Models.

In 1948 when I owned The Towne Hobby Shop in Huntington, Indiana, I went to Chicago to the trade show and met Carl. In Air Corps Cadets, a fellow cadet said he was a friend of Carl's. I talked with Carl about an acquaintance who had died in a sailing accident. Carl was very approachable and showed concern for his friend. Several people have said that one of the wonderful things about Carl was his friendly attitude to all people.

In 1955, Carl left Top Flite Models and founded Carl Goldberg Models. One of his outstanding models was the Control Line Shoestring Stunter. Other kits followed. The Falcon was introduced in 1962, later Senior Falcon, Eaglet, Eagle, Sky Tiger and Junior Tiger.

Dave Thornburg said by 1960, Free Flight gas at the Nats held in Dallas, Texas, that Goldberg's Viking planes had cleaned house. In 1961, they did again at the Nats in Pennsylvania. One Viking was spotted coming down dethermalized at 7:10 in the evening, following a noon launch – over seven hours up there in the storm-laden Pennsylvania air. Another Viking, flown by Carl's son Bob, tied Dennis Bronco for first in class A Free Flight – each with a perfect 15 minutes. Thornburg also said, "Ray Arden's glow plugs, G.E.'s cheap transistors, and Top Flite's Monokote have been the three most important advances in postwar modeling. Everything else is pure cosmetics."

One evening early in January 1963, Ralph C. Skogh and a group of flyers met at Frank Meyer's house in Park Forest, Illinois. According to Ralph, "The purpose was to form a Radio Control (RC) model club with an AMA charter. Then the second Monday of that January, the Suburban Aeroclub of Chicago (SAC) was given birth. Today the SAC membership is over 200 and an AMA leader member club. Carl was one of the first big driving forces to get it organized. Together they drew up the by-laws, filled out the necessary papers for an AMA charter club and the club was airborne!"

Ralph continued, "Let me say that Carl was the kindest and most gentle person I ever met. He never said an unkind word to anyone and was always available to help everyone with their problems. Yes, it is fitting that AMA would select him first into the Hall of Fame."

The Model Aviation Hall of Fame is an effort to highlight outstanding leaders of the hobby. Their contributions to model aviation are many and varied. All modelers are indebted to these Hall of Famers for their dedication and devotion in whatever phases of modeling their efforts encompassed. It was no surprise that the first year they were given, in 1968, that Carl Goldberg was one of those.

In 1976, Carl moved to California in semi-retirement; however, he was frequently in contact with the company and was heavily involved in new product developments. He even designed, built and then test flew the prototypes for the Gentle Lady, a two-meter sailplane.

In 1981, he finally had time to get a full-sized glider pilot's license, but in July, Carl had open-heart surgery. During this procedure, he had transfusions of 17 units of blood. Unfortunately, the terrible disease that we now call AIDS contaminated at least one unit of blood. His health gradually failed and on January 21, 1985, he passed away. Modelers of all types lost an outstanding friend and mentor.

---

*The following article ran in The Model Craftsman in April 1941 and was submitted by Frank Anderson. Mr. Anderson was impressed by how important the model aviation community felt Carl Goldberg was even at such an early date.*

---

### **Big Banquet Given to Honor Goldberg**

The entire model industry of Southern California gathered together the evening of February 21 [1941] at a banquet in Los Angeles, California, to pay tribute to one of the most famous and popular young men in the industry, Carl Goldberg, known far and wide for his famous Zipper-type planes.

Mr. Goldberg has been traveling about the country giving lectures and demonstrations at schools and model clubs on model airplanes and has been doing a great job of missionary work for the entire model business. His itinerary for his regular scheduled lectures was completed in Southern California, and due to the tremendous interest he has created and because so many of his friends expressed a desire to extend to Carl their compliments for the grand job he had done, the testimonial banquet was arranged by Harry Balaban of the Comet Model Airplane Company. The tremendous response to the invitation was a tribute to the man's popularity since representatives of the model industry came from almost every point on the West Coast.

There were persons from San Francisco to San Diego in attendance. When it must be considered that sunny California's unusual weather was extremely unusual with torrents of rain filling every highway like rivers the night of the banquet, this large gathering of people to pay a man tribute for his very fine endeavors in the model field has added significance.

Many prominent persons attended the banquet including Freddie Bartholomew of movie fame, Earl Kenton, a movie director of note, and many others. Testimony was given by everyone as to Mr. Goldberg's ability as a model designer and a leader in the model airplane field, placed him in the category of a famous personage. He may well be proud of his achievements.

*The article continued for a paragraph stating the names of those in attendance. Contact the National Model Aviation Museum's Archivist to see a copy of the article stored in Carl Goldberg's file.*

---

*Note: Highlights of Carl Goldberg's life were published in Radio Control Modeler magazine's May 1985 issue after his death. The issue was dedicated to Carl Goldberg and included a pictorial tribute to Mr. Goldberg. A hardcopy of this magazine issue is in the National Model Aviation Museum's Lee Renaud Memorial Library.*

---

**This PDF is property of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Permission must be granted by the AMA History Project for any reprint or duplication for public use.**

**AMA History Project**  
National Model Aviation Museum  
5151 E. Memorial Dr.  
Muncie IN 47302  
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511  
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

