



TOP GUN

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by RICH URAVITCH

IT WAS JUST ABOUT a year ago this time when the letter arrived. Emblazoned with a flashy insignia, it would not be ignored. It raised my interest enough to save it from the "circular file," which is the usual repository for all correspondence whose source I don't readily recognize.

"Dear Rich: A great deal of rumor about a new Scale R/C Championship for the upper-level fliers has been circulating. Well, it's absolutely true, and we're pleased to inform you that you're one of the 40 modelers to receive an invitation to this Championship ..."

After checking out the validity of the invitation and finding it legitimate, I wondered why anyone would have to be notified about a competition a year in advance. Surely, anyone who



The mechanical portion of the "Top Gun" winning team, Bob Fiorenze's twin Dynamax-powered F/A-18.

was already active enough in R/C scale modeling to be recognized and invited would never need that kind of time to prepare! Well, *nearly* anyone. My Robart radial-powered Zirola T-6 remained home, not quite finished, while I attended the first-ever Top Gun Invitational Tournament—as a spectator rather than as a participant! Here's the way it went:

The Top Gun Tournament was conceived and, for the most part, executed by Frank Tiano, a name familiar to regular readers of our "Sporty Scale" column. Frank is also the owner of FTE, which is the source for every bottle of ZAP and related Pacer product on the East Coast. All this involvement with modelers (and the industry in general) convinced Frank that the scale world was more than ready for an event like Top Gun, so he embarked on a course to make it happen.

The goal was relatively simple: Invite some of the best scale builders and fliers in the country to a high-stakes "shootout" in Florida to determine who would be the "Top Gun." To accomplish this objective, it was necessary to establish a committee that would select the participants and judges based on some clearly defined guidelines; develop a set of rules that were stringent, yet as fair as possible; give them to the contestants in sufficient time to eliminate most of the questions; get the support of as many groups and sponsors as possible; pray for good weather; and hope! It all came together on April 21, when 39 of the country's best gathered in Coral Springs, FL, to do battle!

All the static judging took place on Friday, and each con-



Could this Brit be confused? He's holding a German Focke Wulf, wearing a Japanese headband and is competing in a Yank contest. Dave Platt participated in the International Dogfighting Association show.



1 Ted White did some spectacular demo flying with his Byron based P-47. He competed with the same airplane. 2 As close as you care to come! Chuck Fuller's Ryan overflies Wayne Siewart Mooney/Porsche. 3 Bob "Top Gun" Fiorenze's impeccable F/18 Hornet just about ready to lift off. 4 Wayne Siewart's full detailed Mooney Porsche is one of two that he flies. A kit is available. 5 High-flying cars or low-flying airplanes? Both! Floric AMA show team conducted lunch-time "races." 6 High Stat Award of the meet went to the Grand Master, Dave Platt, for his superb A6M2 Mitsubishi Type 0.

testant had a specific time slot in which to present his airplane to the judges. Three judging positions, each manned by a pair of judges, enabled this portion of the competition to move along rapidly. The weather couldn't have been better, and since there was no flying going on (although trim-flight time was available for anyone who requested it), I had a perfect opportunity to wander around the flight line and do some hangar flying (in addition to fending off the abuses of some of the competitors, who took the opportunity to remind me of how typical it was of me to show up *without* an airplane!). The quality of most of the models on hand was outstanding. Many were veterans that I'd seen before at Scale Masters competitions, but others were brand-new airplanes, built especially for this event. The variety of subjects was amazing; everything from Jeff Troy's lazy-flying,

1/3-scale Bleriot to Bob Fiorenze's twin-fan-powered F/A-18 Hornet.

Attending a meet of this significance, especially when its fo-



Tom Street absolutely dazzled the crowd with the routine he flew with his 4-stroke-powered B-17. It's rock solid and very stable.



This Staggerwing Beech was one of two in the competition. This one by Mel Santmyers started life as a Byron kit and uses an O.S. 240 trim for power.



7 The Spitfire Mk.XIV of Brian O'Meara was built from the Platt kit and hauled around by a S.T. 3000. **8** About the only thing that would have made Dee Lopez's simulated ditching more realistic would have been if the blacktop were the Pacific Ocean. **9** Heading for the Channel and the white cliffs of Dover is John Guenther's Spit Mk.IX
10 A .10-powered Mustang, Spitfire and Focke Wulf 190 duel it out in the sunny skies of Florida. (International Dogfighting Association demo.)
11 Tail-high on the takeoff roll is Bill McCallie's FW-190D-9. Belly tank is "jettisonable." **12** A pair of Hornets—twins. Dan Parson's deHavilland (left) and Bob Fiorenze's McDonnell Douglas (right). **13** Mike Mas' aerobatic presentation with his XCell heli brought new meaning to the term "hot-dogging."

cus is scale, offers the opportunity to learn a lot about how other modelers do things—how they build, cover, finish, detail and fly. It also makes you keenly aware of just how important a role preparation and practice play in where you end up when the scores are tallied. Here are some interesting bits of information: For all you guys who think a military airplane *always* has an advantage over a civilian bird in scale competition, Dave Platt posted the high static score with his Zero at 91.14, while Steve Sauger and Charlie Nelson, with an Aeronca Sedan and a VKS Waco, respectively, each garnered 90.21 points—less than a point behind. "Conventional-size" airplanes (60- to 70-inch span) can still compete on an even plane with some of the larger, or even "giant," machines, as evidenced by 8th-place Bob Frey with his "smallish" 62-inch P-47 Thunderbolt. Sure, he flew it extremely well; has for years, but so what? It came in ahead of 31 other tough competitors, that's what! Well, actually ahead of 23 other tough competitors, if you consider attrition, which accounted for a loss of 20 percent of the airplanes on hand.

Eight beautiful pieces of work bit the dust, and this has to rank it right up there with Christie Brinkley's wedding an-



You can almost hear the clackety-clack of the OX-5 valve train in Dick Hansen's beautiful JN4D Jenny.

nouncement in "heartbreak factor." Among the casualties was Mike Kulczyk's beautiful F-105D Thunderchief, whose engine decided to head south when he was farthest away from the runway. Mike elected to land gear-up on the grass and looked like he had it made, except for a berm alongside a ditch that slowed the Thud from 50mph to zero in an instant, throwing parts at least 50 feet forward of the impact point. After the initial shock wore off, Mike seemed convinced (after nearly everyone told him that the airplane *needed* to be rebuilt) that there would indeed be another "Nickle" around. The "Critics Choice Award" (a new 1024 Futaba radio) might have removed some of Mike's unhappiness, and it will undoubtedly find a happy home in

his next project, which we now understand might be a BD-10.

Other models sharing this unfortunate fate were Jeff Troy's Bleriot, Frankie T's P-39 Airacobra, Shailesh Patel's F6F Hellcat and a magnificent Hawker Sea Fury from north of the border by our Canadian friend Gerry Fingler. Gerry augered in from about 400 feet after his wing folded. Former U.S. Scale Team member George Rose lost his super Curtiss P-6E Hawk early on, much to the disappointment of the many spectators. (The Hawk



TOP GUN STANDINGS

Finish	Pilot	Airplane	Total
1	Bob Fiorenze	F/A-18 Hornet	183.26
2	Neil Snodgrass	Midwing Special	175.15
3	Skip Mast	C-130	174.84
4	Cliff Tacie	Savoia-Marchetti SM81	174.69
5	Chuck Fuller	Ryan PT-22	174.66
6	Dick Hansen	JN4D Jenny	173.67
7	Charlie Nelson	Waco VKS-7F	172.84
8	Bob Frey	P-47D Thunderbolt	172.64
9	Bob Violet	F-86F Sabre	172.55
10	Jeff Foley	A6M32 Zero	171.31
11	Shailesh Patel	F6F Hellcat	170.20
12	Dave Platt	A6M2 Zero	170.02
13	Bill McCallie	FW-190D-9	169.03
14	Don Srull	Eindekker E-III	167.58
15	Bob Heitkamp	JU-87G-2 Stuka	167.24
16	Diego Lopez	F6F Hellcat	167.12
17	Bob Underwood	Petyakov PE-2	165.62
18	Shane Cramer	P-47D Thunderbolt	165.23
19	Jack Buckley	CAP-10B	164.19
20	Bob Hanft	Neuport 28C-1	163.21
21	Ted White	P-47D Thunderbolt	162.87
22	Steve Sauger	Aeronca Sedan	162.71
23	Mel Santmeyers	Beech Staggerwing G-17	162.45
24	Wayne Siewert	Mooney Porsche M20K	161.19
25	Brian O'Meara	Spitfire MK XIV	161.19
26	Tom Czikk	P-40C Tomahawk	159.25
27	Dan Parsons	DeHavilland Hornet	158.17
28	Charlie Chambers	P-51D Mustang	157.27
29	Bill Carper	P-47D Thunderbolt	157.22
30	Chuck Collier	Beech Staggerwing	155.23
31	John Guenther	Spitfire MK-IX	153.34
32	Tom Street	Boeing B-17G	152.59
33	Mike Kulczyk	F-105D Thunderchief	109.32
34	Jeff Troy	Bleriot XI-2	93.15
35	Art Johnson	B-26 Marauder	93.10
36	George Rose	P-6E Hawk	88.73
37	Gerry Fingler	Hawker Sea Fury MK II	88.68
38	Frank Tiano	P-39L Airacobra	84.84
39	Mario Yederlinic	Hurricane MK IIC	83.06
	Critics Choice	Mike Kulczyk	
	Pilots Choice	(Military) Bob Violet (Civilian) Steve Sauger	
	High Flight Score	Bob Fiorenze	
	High Static Score	Dave Platt	

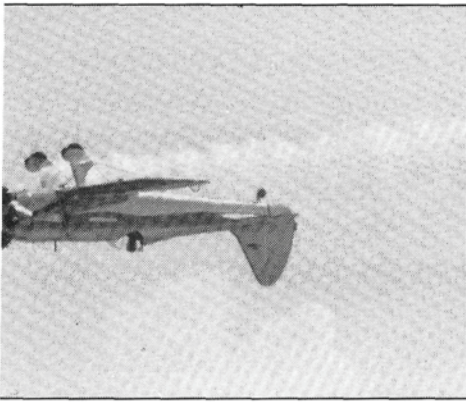
Frank Tiano's Bell P-39 Airacobra fell victim to at least one anti-gravity occurrence... careened into the fence shortly after takeoff. Frank says he'll do another.

was truly a precision scale model.) Art Johnson's 4-stroke-powered Martin B-26 Marauder appeared to lose power from one engine on takeoff; Art tried to get it level again, but to no avail. Rounding out the list was Charlie Chamber's metal-clad P-51 Mustang, which, like all the entries, had to be seen to be believed. There's probably no real way of accurately assessing the number of man-hours that ended up in the junk pile at this meet, but when you're competing at this level, it's the risk you take.

While the contest was in progress, it became readily apparent that it had been very well planned. Unlike other events where the lunch break finds a decided lull in flying activity, this one featured some of the best R/C demonstration flying to be witnessed anywhere. Everything from .15-powered Mustangs, Spits and Focke Wulfs (designed to be expendable) doing combat with the *intent* of knocking each



Bob Violet's F-86 sheds its drop tanks as it crosses an imaginary Yalu River in search of Migs.



Chuck Fuller flew his "MonoKoted" (fuselage anyway) Ryan PT-22 impressively. Smoke added to the appeal.

other out of the sky, to Mike Mas' helicopter artistry; from Chuck Fuller doing low-level aerobatics with a Sig Space-walker, to Skip Mast using his contest entry C-130 Hercules to perform loops and rolls; and Ted White using his contest entry Byron P-47 in a display of maneuvers that would have made any Jug driver proud. One flier *not* using his entry for the demos was Bob Violett, who chose to leave his F-86 in the hangar during lunch to fly his Viper, once again pleasing the crowd with the broad speed envelope of this ducted-fan rocket. And then there was the Florida AMA Show Team, which treated all of us to a Grand Prix-type air/road race. Art Johnson traded his B-26 in on a Ferrari and "raced" around an airborne "track" against a pair of similar flying cars. The crowd loved it.

Special mention has to be given to one of the Cloud Dancers' Show Team members, Don Muddiman, who did things with

WHAT'S A TOP GUN?

In the strictest and, by the way, original, sense of the word (or at least the one that put the term on the street, so to speak), it's *Ultimo*, *Head Man*, *Ganze Mache*, *Top o' the Heap*. It's the exalted title that the Navy bestows on the hot-stick crews that "best" all their peers in aerial gun-fights that would cause mere mortals to seek milder forms of competition—checkers, maybe! These are the guys who speak with God on a daily basis, or at least have a handle on His address. No foolin'! The games these guys win are played with no "shoo-ins," no gifts, they're strategized, exercised and fantasized, where the name of the game is WIN! Prepare for the mission, compete as a team, fly at the edge, and use the next guy's mistakes to your advantage.

Is it any wonder why the name "Top Gun Invitational" was chosen for this new event in the world of R/C scale modeling? All the requirements are the



Rich Uravitch presents 1st Place cash award of \$2,000 from MODEL AIRPLANE NEWS to the 1989 Top Gun, Bob Fiorenze. Bob's "co-sponsor," Ann, might redirect some of the winnings!

same; the competition, in its own way, is as fierce. The ingredients are also the same: planes, pilots, ground crews, mission, judges and scores. This was the first year for this competition, and indications are that it has all the necessary qualities to become an annual occurrence. Model Airplane News was proud to be a major sponsor and offers its congratulations to all the competitors—especially to Bob Fiorenze, scale Top Gun, 1989. RAU

his airplane that I still don't believe! A lot of you might have seen this performance, as the Cloud Dancers have appeared at many R/C events around the country, but it was the first time for me. I had been told,

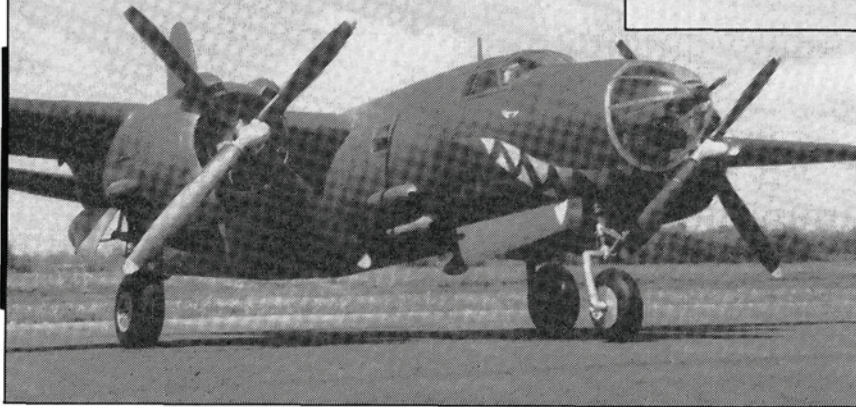
just as I can tell you, but you have to see it! Don starts with a vertical hand-launch and concludes with a vertical dive from about 1,000 feet to a dead-stick pull-out at about 10 feet to a couple of rolls end-



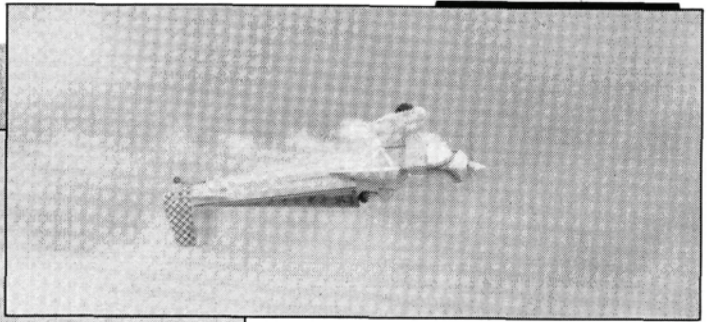
Mike Kulczyk on the ready line with his F-105D Thunderchief. Rumor was that helper on the left contributed to subsequent crash owing to inadequate calling! Mike received well-deserved "Critics Choice" from fellow competitors.



One of my favorites was the Hawker Sea Fury built by Canadian scale ace, Gerry Fingler. Superb finish! Wing folding at a non-scale location caused it to smite the earth ... with much energy!



Above: Art Johnson's Martin B-26 Marauder was O.S. .90 4-stroke-powered and was a beautiful piece of work. Crashed on takeoff.



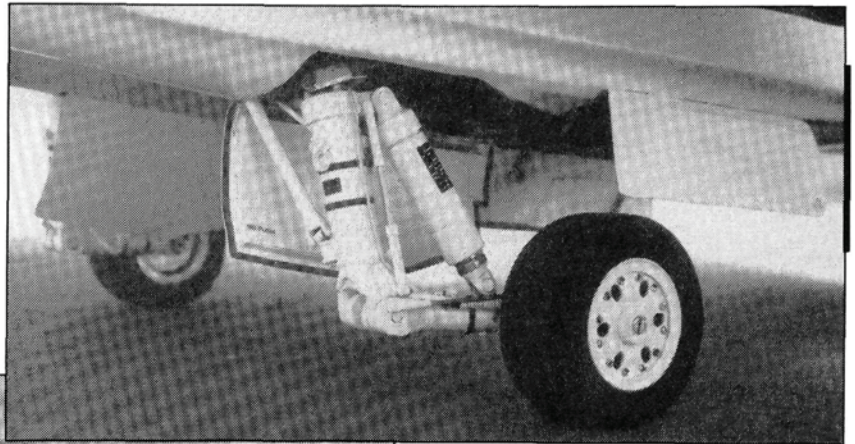
Inverted on a smoke pass, here's the Midwing Special designed and built by 2nd-place finisher, Neil Snodgrass. Proves that well-flown, relatively simple subjects can still be very competitive.

ing with a feather-like touchdown at Don's feet. Truly spectacular!

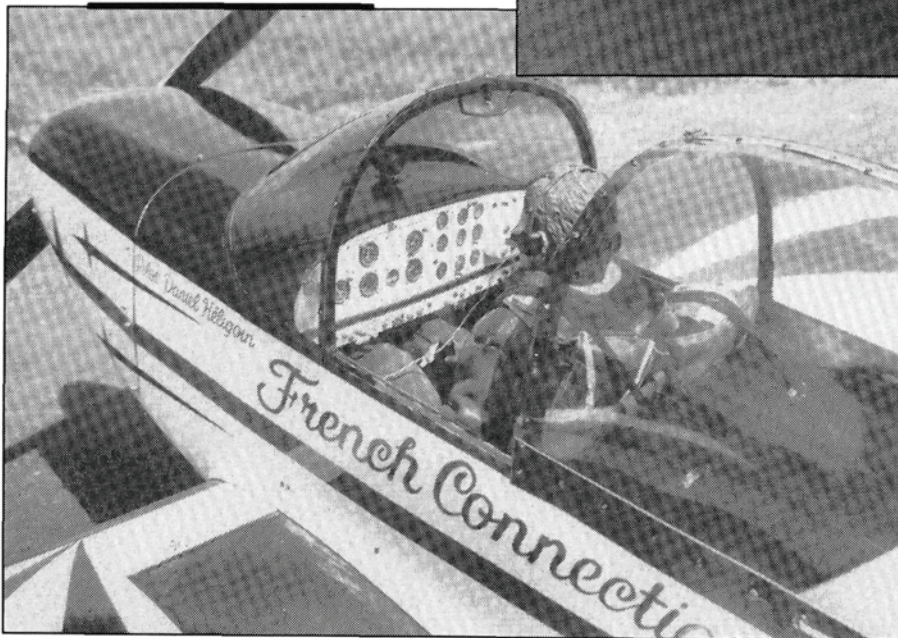
Generally speaking, the posting of the static scores, which usually occurs after the first round of flying has been com-

pleted, is when the contestants get down to business. They know where they stand and what they'll have to do to remain in the running. Top Gun was no exception. Strategies were developed, and the toughest competitors prepared for the battle ahead. This was one contest where every fraction of a point would count, and could even mean the difference between winning and just finishing. Each pilot chose his maneuvers, options and sequencing carefully, because they recognized that

Below: Cockpit detail of Jack Buckley's CAP-10B modified from the Yellow Aircraft kit clearly shows the amount of detail that's typical of the models at "Top Gun."



Above: Close-up of left main landing gear of the Firenze Hornet. This all works! Individual gear doors are sequenced to operate in the scale fashion.



not much, if anything, would escape the eyes of the judges.

Tom Street literally re-enacted the full-scale Confederate Air Force show, in which their B-17 makes an emergency touchdown on one gear with one engine shut down and smoking. If Tom's static score had been better, he would, no doubt, have placed much higher. During aerobatic routines, smoke was used to good advantage by both Chuck Fuller in his Ryan PT-22 and Neil Snodgrass with his Midwing Special. Yet another use for smoke was found by Bob Heitkamp, who