



2006 NATS Recap

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The Nats is unlike any other annual “contest” in the world. The idea of the event is to attract competitors from across the nation so that they may come together in a face-off, if you will, to determine who is the best. With luck, skill, or otherwise, a champion is crowned who has outdone those who have participated in a particular special-interest event.

The AMA Nationals reflects, to a reasonable degree, what is popular in the hobby today. Not every discipline can be held during the summer at one location; some exceptions have to be made.

The Indoor FF portion of the Nats has to be held off-site in Johnson City, Tennessee, at the East Tennessee State University Mini-Dome. And holding an RC Slope Soaring event on the open plains of Indiana isn't exactly an attractive idea.

Exceptions are made as to what events are run, but the clear goal is to promote excellence in the hobby. New events are added to the Nats schedule when enough interest and support are generated.

Opportunity is a side effect of vying for a national title. Many participants see the Nats as a chance to be recognized, and they can make their mark on a number of levels. The recognition of their peers is a great reward, but sometimes a person can catch a lucky break and be “discovered” as a new talent, the benefits of which vary greatly, but the prospect is exciting.



The streamlined fuselage of Scott Gray's Kyosho Sylphide 90 FAI helicopter aids in presenting smoother-looking maneuvers to the panel of judges.



Bob Harris scratch-built this Hiller OH-23D. Larger gas-engine-powered models proved to have smoother flight characteristics, which earned them higher flight scores.



Terry Duke's Vario 1:5.5-scale Hughes 500E is powered with a Zenoah G-23. It uses four-point CCPM control and a dual-axis gyro for solid hovers.

The most gratifying, and most often accomplished, aspect of the Nats is the opportunity to have a lot of fun while in the pursuit of what can be learned about this treasured pastime. But the really cool part is that modelers put their best foot forward at the Nats, and they do it for many reasons—some of which are more humble than others.

Imagine the Oscars, with the celebrities and the screaming fans. The heroes and talented individuals who attend the Nats create an aura that breeds excitement. What happens at a Nats competition is the stuff legends are made of, and anyone who is privileged with the experience can't help but feel like part of something that is truly special.

Many pilots in the popular events make good on their promises to their sponsors, but there are also those who use the Nats to maintain friendships and continue their pursuit of becoming better modelers. Most times these people are one and the same—a point that strongly illustrates the personality and character of those who are attracted to this hobby.

I've never witnessed more moments of pride than at the Nats. Sportsmanship flows freely, which is an example of why aeromodeling has so many time-honored traditions.



Windy Urtnowski rounds the Stunt circles. Finished in real Ferrari paint.



A Big Bruce Racing Products Polecat waits at the ready line for the next Quarter 40 RC Pylon race. Equipped with the stock Nelson Q40 engine, the combination is a winner.



Bill Wisniewski adjusts the engine on his CL Formula 40 Pink Lady. His engine-tuning skill has earned him numerous championships.

Sportsmen are those who have an obvious affection for what they want to do well; in this case it's anything having to do with model airplanes. They have an attitude that encourages others to envy them and challenge their aptitude in a friendly manner.

When friends get together to play, a good time usually prevails. Traditions unfold into events that are organized with the same passion so the future of those events can be secured for generations.

Bringing the Nats together takes an enormous amount of effort. If you've ever been to any kind of flying event, or a simple backyard barbecue for that matter, multiply that amount of planning, preparation, and affection by 100. If you can imagine that level of commitment, you might realize, in a small way, how really big the AMA Nats is, and perhaps how much it means to so many people.

Planning for the Nats actually starts in October of the year prior. Volunteers led by Ron Morgan, Wayne Yeager, and Bob Brown (just to name a few) take time out of their busy schedules to meet with SIG volunteer representatives. These SIG personnel take the opportunity to challenge themselves with the prospect of running one of the more than 15 RC, CL, or FF events hosted at the 1,000-plus-acre AMA National Flying Site in Muncie, Indiana.

The AMA facility is basically at the disposal of the individual SIGs so they can run their own contests. After all, each of these groups has the responsibility of keeping up with the times, so they're the experts when it comes to running an event that best emulates the current status of that particular part of the hobby.



To snatch an opponent's streamer, Randy Hodges coats his RC Combat model's LE with a sticky paste called Tanglefoot Bird Repellent.



Standing at the center of the circle, Don Cranfill launches a CL Combat F2D model for an eager beginner. These airplanes are some of the fastest in competition.



A good launch in RC Pylon can give the pilot that added edge. Gino DelPonte catches some air as he launches Lyle Larson's Dago Red.

The Nats is where many competitors come to make a statement. Winning here means having bested top modelers and pilots from across the US. An enticing aspect of making it at the Nats is that it's an open event, meaning that anyone can compete.

Let's say you're new to the hobby and you've got some skill. It's not who you know; it's what you know and that you make the effort to go—as in to the Nats. Great stories come out of the Nats about this very phenomenon—about nobodies becoming somebodies in the blink of an eye.

To ask one author to spill out in one article all that happened during a 38-day contest is ludicrous and degrades the meaning of everything the event honors. However, I will share some stories that represent what this year's Nats experience was for me.

My goal at this year's Nats was to meet as many people as possible to gain as much information as I could about the contest happenings. Lucky for me, the AMA Publications Department had an ace in the hole called NatsNews.



RC Combat Scale 2610 winner Brian Gilkey holds his streamer-covered Zero. His aggressive tactics (and keen eyesight) made him the pilot to beat.



Eric Henderson's O.S. 1.60 engine-equipped Oxai Pinnacle for RC Aerobatics used a custom-built exhaust header made by Karl Mueller. Attention to these details sets the winners apart.



World Champion Chip Hyde (R) mentors Ryan Archer before Ryan's next flight in the Intermediate-class RC Pattern competition.

The Nats is a huge event, and it justifies a worthy report from those who know the interests. NatsNews Chief Editor Liz Helms and I led a team of skilled reporters to bring everyone—not just AMA members—news from the Nats on a daily basis.

Posted online (at www.modelaircraft.org/events/natsnews.asp) and printed for the people on-site, almost 300 pages and more than 800 photos streamed with stories to bring the reader deep into the events. In addition, there were extra tidbits of information that reminded us that we're out there to have a good time.

The NatsNews is fun to read, with a lot of good inside information. If you missed the event, be sure to catch up with those newsletters. You'll get a good idea of what equipment the winners were using to make it to the podium. Study them carefully and you'll see what might be needed to be the next contender. When you come to the Nats, count on being noticed worldwide.



Quique Somenzini found that the addition of the fixed fin behind the canopy of his RC Aerobatics model made a positive difference in side-area control performance.



Jason Shulman carries Sean McMurtry's Astral XX to the runway. The anhedral stabilizer offers more finite control in FAI-class rolling maneuvers.



Mark Gellart launches his RES Soaring model as Don Richmond times the flight. The winch systems used new trickle chargers to help ensure consistent launches.



One of the most popular events in RC Soaring is Rudder-Elevator-Spoiler (RES). Pilot skill wins out over radio-programming skill.

As I mentioned, an event such as the Nats has many stories—countless is more like it—both large and small. However, a couple affected me in ways that were favorable and encouraged greater participation among those involved. They were inspirational experiences that would be shared to charge others with the mission of coming to Muncie next year to perhaps build their own benchmarks.

Much of what is inspirational about modeling comes from the living history of full-scale aircraft. Dreams of flight are the primary reasons why aviation enthusiasts turn to modeling, because it's a practical and much safer outlet.

Leo Loudenslager was one of those full-scale aviators who carried out his aspirations methodically and triumphantly. He took his Laser 200 aircraft to the limits of its capability and set the standards for air-show performances and safety along the way.

Leo's pursuits led him to create a radical new aerobatic aircraft that was duly named for its unique appearance. However, he died before his commissioned aircraft was able to be flown.



Just for fun, Cox Models hosted an unofficial pylon race with its latest RTF Micro Warbirds. Could this be a future Nats RC Electrics event?



Ric Vaughn launches Ernie Schlumberger's Unlimited-class RC Electrics model. Ric designed the Stardust Special just for this competition.



Paul Wicks leans way back to draw his FF Catapult Glider into the launch position. The tough part is trimming for high winds and best glide.

Baron Johnson is an aspiring aeronautical engineer who is involved in full-scale aircraft and RC models. With the aid of his father Fred Johnson, Baron sought to find out whether or not Leo's ideas could finally be realized. Baron studied the Shark, as Leo's aircraft came to be known, to complete his research and build an RC model of the Zivko Aeronautics-built aircraft.

The biggest tell about the Shark model is the tail section that includes an upper and lower fin that pivot together at a root point. The lower fin is retractable, as on the full-scale version, to provide ground clearance. (JR/Horizon Hobby made a servo especially for the application.)

Numerous other points about the model, such as the airfoils, fuselage side area, and wing placement, were carefully calculated to promote a harmonious relationship. Baron produced countless amounts of data concerning the expectations of the full-scale aircraft and how he needed an IMAC (International Miniature Aerobatic Club) model to perform.

Wanting to use the popular DA-150 engine, Baron scaled the model at exactly 38.8%. His Loudenslager Shark mimics all the innovations of the full-scale airplane except the full-flying stabilizer (but he's planning on having that function on a future model).



Larry Davidson's T-bird is inverted after its dethermalizer is deployed. The 1950s design is a popular choice in the class B Nostalgia Gas event.



Stewart Cummins' FF Old Time Rubber Cabin model gets an inspection while poised on its winding stooge. Braided rubber motors are known to improve performance.



Chris Starleaf launches his FF Curtiss SB3C Helldiver for a max time. A biplane with retracts has an advantage.



Jay Steward flew this Curtiss F8C Helldiver in RC Team Scale. His brother Jack modeled the aircraft after the type used in the vintage King Kong film.

Did it work? The model was flight tested approximately a month before the Nats, finally recording into history the first flight of a Loudenslager Shark. Even at the Nats Baron flew the model cautiously. He says it will do 3-D, but since his primary goal was to compete in the RC Scale Aerobatics Unlimited class, sequence flying had been its only repertoire.

The Shark's success allowed Baron to qualify for the finals. However, Fred took ill the evening before the final rounds, so Baron reverentially bowed out of the competition to see his father safely home. (Fred is recovering very well.)

Baron's scores from the preliminaries were strong enough to keep him well away from last place; he came in eighth out of the 12 finalists. That has to say something, doesn't it?

Bene Rodriguez of Brazil has made it a point to attend the Nats CL Precision Aerobatics (Stunt) competition for years and place high in the standings. He has a thing for Mustangs and has modified Al Rabe's famous P-51 to suit himself.



Greg Hahn, with wife Susie, connects the flight batteries to his electric-powered Sport Scale B-25. Top Flite will soon release this model as an ARF.



Kevin Knebel modeled his Ziroli Stearman after the Navy N2S-3 variation. Its Saito 2.20 four-stroke engine was perfectly hidden among the six dummy cylinders.



RC Scale welcomed the spectators out onto the runway for the noon lineup. These models are contenders in the Sport Scale through Expert classes.

As I understand it, Bene's close friend Thomas Case used his own finances to arrange for Bene and 28 of his friends to attend the Nats. That's 28 pilots in addition to all the support personnel (family and helpers). Dubbed the "Brazilian Invasion," it was more like a celebration with a P-51 theme. All the aircraft used were the same Rodriguez-modified Mustangs, for which he supplied kits.

You might think this was some kind of stunt (pun intended) to flood the scoreboard in their favor; however, the gesture was nothing of the sort. Not that there weren't any "ringers" in the group, but overall these people were a fine cross-section of modelers from beginner to expert.

The Brazilian group exemplified the meaning of sportsmanship. Each pilot proudly flew his Mustang to some level of stature, much to the delight of his benefactor. In addition, Thomas Case Jr. placed second in Junior CL Stunt.

The AMA Nats was only the beginning of this group's tour; its next stop was Spain, where it was going to support its team at the CL World Championships.

It's great to see hard work pay off with a win at the Nats. Any initiative to recognize achievement is rewarding not only for the talent, but for the aeromodeling community in general.



David P. Andersen entered his 1/3-scale Lynx in RC Designer Scale competition. The reliable Zenoah GT-80 engine was used for power.



Frank Beatty makes a level pass around the CL Scale circle with his Designer-class Pasped Skylark. Frank was inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame during the Nats.



Dennis Crooks's Eurofighter Typhoon proved to be a smooth flier in the RC Sport Scale competition.

A special promotion to recognize worthy individuals was led by NSRCA (National Society of Radio Control Aerobatics) Treasurer Rusty Dose and was called the Concours d'Elegance. This was basically a beauty contest in which RC Aerobatics (Pattern) participants were asked to judge the models and sight on the numerous points regarding craftsmanship and quality of the aircraft.

The event concluded with two winners: Sean McMurtry and Mike Hester. Their aircraft clearly emulated everything Pattern competitors are known to do extremely well. From the construction, to the application of the paint, to the choice of hardware, Sean's Astral XX and Mike's Black Magic were perfect examples of form and function.

The reminder here is that craftsmanship is still a huge part of the hobby. As the CL Stunt community has done for years with static points as a regular part of competition, it is hoped that this new program will inspire future craftsmen to step up.

The FF portion of the Nats is the biggest, with the largest number of registered contestants. The Outdoor portion alone had more than 200 pilots, and all of them competed in multiple events. Roughly 1,000 aircraft were flown during the five-day competition.



A typical lineup of aircraft at the RC Scale Aerobatics Advanced and Unlimited flightline. The 40%-scale models were typical.



Scale Aerobatics Intermediate competitor Josh Jordan's 40% 3W Extra 330 was finished with an airbrushed tribute to the Manhattan skyline.



Baron Johnson makes a knife-edge pass with his scratch-built Loudenslager Shark. Notice how the entire vertical fin rotates.

The FFers arrive with trailers and recreational vehicles—everything a modeler would need to set a duration record and then race cross-country to retrieve the beloved aircraft floating downwind.

FF attracts the most diverse age range of contestants, with seasoned masters strutting their stuff while mentoring neophytes who are soon nipping at their teachers' heels. And in some cases the new fliers win out. It's the nature of competition and, lucky for aeromodeling, a phenomena that hasn't quenched the sportsmanship.

Even though the interest of FF is thickly coated with tradition, there's still room for innovation to peek around the corner from time to time. This year Bruce Kimball barked at tradition and made many scratch their heads as they bent their necks skyward in amazement. In the highly contested Hand-Launched Glider event, in which physical agility is as much a part of winning as modeling skill, Bruce introduced the discus-launch method.

RC Soaring gave up the overhand toss long ago for this spin-and-fling launch technique. Some design changes were made to Bruce's model to accommodate the different stresses involved in the discus launch, but there seemed to be almost no detriment to flight performance.



Kenny Willis, shown with his sister Kimmy, took second in Advanced RC Scale Aerobatics with his Composite-ARF 40% Extra 330.



All the way from England, Len Mount's scratch-built, turbine-powered Westland Scout AH Mk.1 took first place in the RC Scale Helicopter category.

The future of the sport is certainly changed forever. The performance of the launch technique dramatically put Bruce's flight times far past any other, soundly putting any chance for sudden-death flyoffs to bed.

The 2006 Nats produced many memories, any one of which will hopefully have sparked the participants' positive outlook on the hobby/sport of aeromodeling. What I enjoyed experiencing was the springboard effect that this type of event promotes.

The AMA Nats is for all to share in the aviation passion. The competition attracts the sportsman and the professional who come to the event hoping to excel and reap the rewards, not just in the form of a trophy, but also in the successes that might occur on the sidelines. It was gratifying to see that the people who made the sacrifice and put in the hard work were rewarded with a place in AMA history.

I encourage anyone who is looking to debut any new program or idea about the hobby to use the Nats as the avenue toward launching themselves into the mainstream of the hobby.

In a location where CL, FF, and RC contests are happening at the same time, I find it hard to choose where I want to hang out. I feel fortunate to have experienced the Nats for a second year and find myself anxiously waiting for the third.[dingbat]

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