

# The Comets' Tale

***The Official  
Newsletter of the***



**July 2012**

|                      |                  |                |
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## Bored of Directors

George Boston, Mike Ambarian, Dale Nash, Alastair Brennan, TJ Moran

## Instructor Pilots

Emery Balasa Steve Billings Andrew Carlson Bob Root Ron Scott

George Lanquist TJ Moran Steve Steinmetz Alastair Brennan

The Comets' Tale is the official newsletter and record of the Ventura County Comets, AMA Chartered Club #173 and is published monthly at the Comets' Tale Plaza, somewhere in Ventura.

*Editorial contributions are welcome.*

**Next Meeting: 7:30 PM,  
Thursday, 19 July, at the  
Oak View Community Center**



## Coming Up!

**Saturday, 28 July**  
Comets Warbird Day, BBQ &  
Swap Meet at lake Casitas  
\$10 Includes Lunch

**Saturday & Sunday,  
21-22 July**  
IMAC Flying Competition At  
Camarillo Condor Field

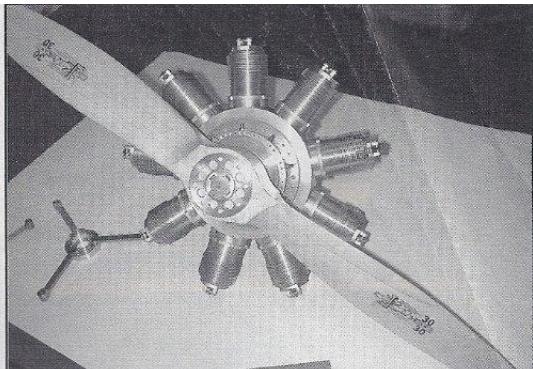
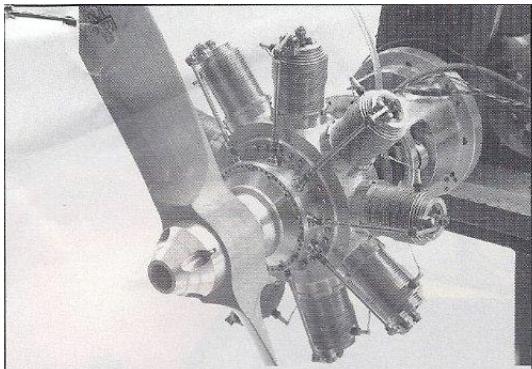
**Sat. & Sun., Aug. 18 & 19**  
Camarillo Airport Airshow

**Fri.-Sun 24-26 Aug.**  
Fun Float Fly at Lake  
Cachuma. No BBQW, No  
Raffle

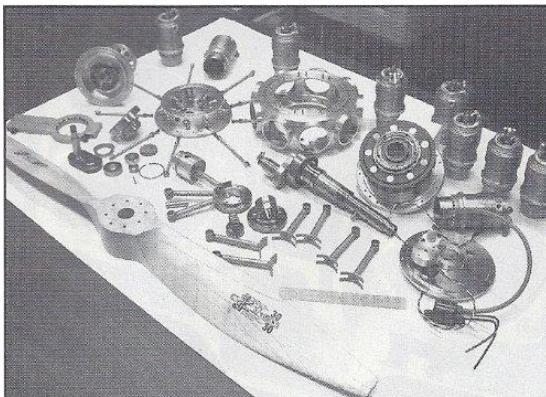
First Sunday of each Month  
Open House at Santa Paula  
Airport

## Root's Rambling

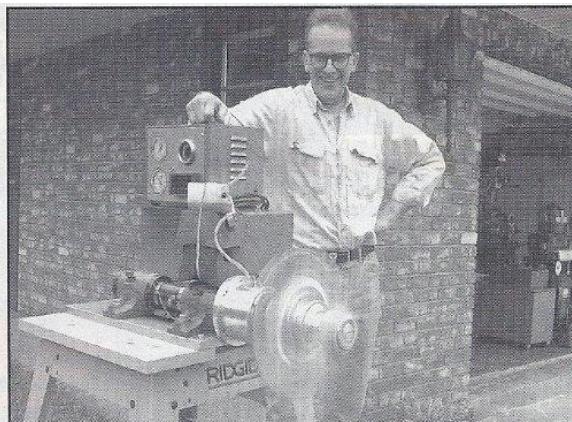
Last week I flew my  $\frac{1}{4}$  scale Fokker Dr I triplane and a discussion ensued concerning the rotary engine that was used in this airplane. This was a common engine type used during WW I. It was popular because it was a relatively light engine for the available horse power. The engine crankcase was bolted directly to the propeller so they rotated together. The discussion concerned the lack of a model engine equivalent. I commented that I had seen a  $\frac{1}{4}$  scale Gnome rotary engine running on a stand in the parking lot of the annual model show when it was still held in Pasadena. This was before Bill and Anita Northrup sold the show rights to the AMA. I recently found an old 2002 RCM article in my file discussing a  $\frac{1}{3}$  scale Gnome engine built by a modeler in Florida. I thought the following pictures from this article would be of interest to our readers:



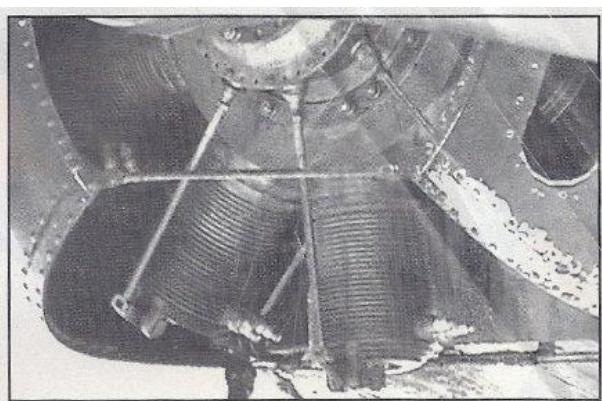
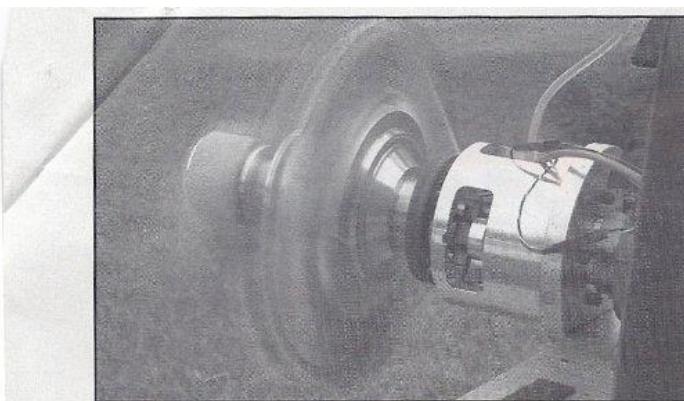
LEFT: It is hard to believe this project until you see it. A 1/3 exact scale model of the Gnome 160 hp rotary engine of WWI. Designed and built by Ray Williams, the engine is shown here attached to a dynamometer test stand. RIGHT: The 30 x 30 prop is firmly attached to the crankcase and cylinders all of which rotate together as the engine runs.



LEFT: What a job just to assemble all the parts for the Gnome engine, much less to machine each one individually. All parts are identical to the original except for being smaller and minor internal bearing changes. RIGHT: The model cylinders differ only in color from the originals.



LEFT: This is a full-size cylinder from a Gnome rotary engine as displayed to spectators at the Fantasy of Flight Museum near Orlando FL. The originals were machined from a solid piece of steel. RIGHT: Ray looks pretty happy listening to his Gnome engine running on the test stand. The engine weighs 11 pounds including mount.



LEFT: It is clear that everything rotates with the prop except for the shaft and mount. Ray anticipates a lot of torque when it runs in the model. RIGHT: This is an original Gnome rotary engine just before starting at the Fantasy of Flight Museum. It is in an Avro biplane of WWI vintage. Ray is building a model of one for flying with his new engine.

## MINUTES of the JUNE 2012 MEETING

The 22 members were called to order at 7:46 by Vice President Dale Nash.

This was after we partook of some pizza and sub-sandwiches.

There were no new members or guests.

The **Minutes** were approved and the Treasury Report showed that there are 73 members and that the finances are in good standing. This too was accepted.

The **Safety Officer** had nothing out of the ordinary to report. Yet continued and said there is a plan in place to fill a couple cracks in the runway. This was planned for June 27<sup>th</sup>.

Our new position, **Sunshine Person**, had nothing to report.

### **Old Business:**

Our club's President is on his way home and should be here for the July meeting.

The club considered renting a fence to keep the non-natives off the runway when they use the area in a few weeks. The price of the fence rental was considered too high to justify it. The Park Liaison will speak with our Lake representative so that he is aware of it and will help monitor the parking. In addition we will speak to the Lake about using something like cones to put around the runway to protect it. A couple club members are planning on going to the flying site that morning to ensure the campers are not parking on the runway.

There was a Quaker Fun-Fly and water balloon drop. Who went? Tell us about it at the next meeting.

### **New Business**

Berny Hammer became the latest Lifetime Member. Congrats Berny!

Leo Gabriels donated plastic fencing to the club. This is the material that we have in front of us when we fly. Stops the odd plane from hitting pilots in the shins if a landing/take-off goes wrong. The old fence was looking worn and has been repaired a few times. Other members, TJ and George Lanquist helped install it. Thanks guys, for improving our flying site.

The will be a couple members, led by TJ to 'repair' the parking logs. It was being scheduled a few weeks from the meeting. So by the time you read this is it most likely completed.

***Dick Hannah, brought a framed-up Quaker for show and tell. It is for sale – contact him at 805 649-3246.***

We ended the meeting with no-entry fee raffle. Tickets were pulled from a club-meeting-attendance bucket

Some people won some nice stuff.

Club T-shirts are still available. Contact Marilyn for these. They are \$12 except for XXL are \$15.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00



Respectfully Submitted, *Alastair Brennan*



### Last Month's Mystery plane!

So, here's the plane, only this time you can see the registration number. Bob Root says he got this photo from a buddy and asked me if I knew what it was. I had no idea, so I did a Google search on the N-number, which came up with a Cessna 195. Hmm, had to go 'way back, but finally came up with it... it's a Larkin Skylark KC-3. Keith Larkin started

working on the design in 1961, started building around 1971 and it first flew in 1972. They said builders would only need skills shooting rivets, but it sure looks like there's a lot of fiberglass there. Anyway, it's powered by a converted VW engine, and some sites call it 65 horsepower, some claim 100 (really doubtful). They call it a semi-amphibian, which is really interesting. Seems you could take the wheels off and install a fiberglass hull on the bottom, and fly off water. It's an attractive airplane, but it apparently came to nothing. This is the only one built, and it was decertified somewhere along the way. I have no idea what became of this airframe, but as I mentioned, the N-number belongs to somebody else now.



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OK, so here's another **Mystery Plane**. Actually, not much of a mystery this time... just about everybody should recognize this biplane... these things were as common as weeds at one time.

### Crash Etiquette

*From the Long Island Radio Control Society, NY*

While bent over your model tweaking the needle valve, too often you hear "I ain't got it ..." followed by a low frequency thump. Usually several expletives will be inserted, some used imaginatively. A hand-crafted masterpiece of airframe miniaturization crammed with state-of-the-art electronic equipment, and powered by an exquisitely machined engine is no more. The pilot who is frequently the builder/owner has made an unscheduled landing or has discovered the radio in his hands has a greater range than the eyes in his head. Your immediate problem is how to react. Generally, it is considered bad form to immediately ask if you may borrow the pilot's glow plug battery. Similarly, you probably shouldn't ask if he's finished with the clip. Any equipment related reasons for the crash you hear are, by definition, reasonable. Pilot error is too rare and sensitive to suggest, so don't say, "That's odd, I haven't had any problems on that frequency today," until at least an hour after the crash. Offer to help go look. Don't say "It sounded like it hit something solid."

Note that most lost models are found and returned. Don't ask if he has his name and phone number on the model, or wonder out loud if the model hit a house or a car.

If it looks like more than enough people have volunteered to help with the search, try to weasel out of going. There are ticks and poison ivy out there, and seeing a grown man cry isn't pleasant. If the pilot takes a plastic bag with him or comes back empty handed to get one, assume the worst. Actually, in a really bad crash, two hands and a pocket are enough space for anything worth salvaging.

Whatever you do, don't hold a postmortem on the spot. The pilot probably doesn't want to discuss:

- Battery condition
- Poor construction
- Pilot error
- Used rubber bands
- Fuel tank capacity
- Light blue covering
- Model selection vs. pilot skills

As best you can, avoid specifics, sound supportive, and look appropriately grave. You'll want the same consideration someday.

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I am sad to report that Comet Bob Lake died last December. I don't have any details, but Bob was a great friend and long time Comet. Bob was with Better Built Airplane Products in Camarillo, builders of the Cuda and Super Cuda pattern models that made a big impact on Pattern flying in the 70s. There was a Cuda Cub that was popular, too. Our sympathies to Bob's friends, family and his wife, Clara.

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**RANDUMB THOTS :-)** It's been a bit tough for the full size flyers lately, with two fatal accidents in the last two weeks. The crash near Piru of the Sting Sport made headlines in the Ventura County Star. Although the FAA said it was an ultralight, it was really a light sport airplane flying out of Whiteman Airport. I had a chance encounter with the NTSB investigator and he told me the airplane spun in flat. The rocket-deployed airframe parachute didn't fire because apparently, when they pulled down on the handle, something delaminated in the cabin roof and the cable wasn't pulled. Two guys died in that one, very sad. If you Google N177N, you can see photos of this airplane at Santa Paula Airport in happier days.

Then there was the crash of a Camarillo-based Cozy III in Winslow AZ. It's still pretty early for any details on this one. Best I have so far is the pilot and his wife landed at Winslow, and asked about getting a mechanic to look at their engine. The pilot said he need to clean spark plugs, but on hearing there was no mechanic at Winslow, he said he would fly the airplane to "clear the engine" (?). They crashed just off the end of the runway in a dirt field. Nobody is saying what happened... if the engine quit, if they stalled, anyway, the poor wife was killed and the pilot is in the hospital in stable condition.

The Cozy III is a canard-type airplane, looks much like a chubby LongEze. Three seats, the two in front sit side by side, and I believe the back seat is for a child.

Then I see just this morning that an ultralight came down near Highway 126 by Saticoy. Happily, no injuries in this one, although the airplane looks like it took some damage after a precautionary landing with a "mechanical issue."

We all try to make flying business as safe as possible, but in the end, all that aluminum, wood, steel, fiber-glass and soft pink people are intruders in the air and making them stay there (and get down safely) takes a lot of care and finesse. We've gotten pretty good at it, but I don't think the risk will ever completely go away.

If you're connected to the internet, here's a link to a forced landing that came out fairly well. Looked like no injuries, but a sailplane got bent: [http://www.gadling.com/2012/07/13/video-a-crash-landing-from-the-pilots-point-of-view/?a\\_dgi=aolshare\\_facebook](http://www.gadling.com/2012/07/13/video-a-crash-landing-from-the-pilots-point-of-view/?a_dgi=aolshare_facebook)

So, there you have it.... Fly safe, guys!

Fight Gravity!

*Jerry*

## **Red Face Department**

Brain fade? Old Age? Bad memory? Our guys Ron Scott and TJ Moran both sent me great stuff on the Quaker Fun Fly & Balloon drop last month and I missed getting them into the 'Tale. My apologies to both, and to the rest of our loyal readers. Here are TJ's and Ron's narratives on this Prestigious Event:

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Excitement filled the air as the annual Ventura County Comets Balloon Drop was held as scheduled on the morning of 23 June, 2012. The weather was wonderfully cooperative with no usual early morning June gloom as we have been seeing for the past few weeks.

The contestants, Leo Gabriels, TJ Moran, George Lanquist, Ron Scott, and Michael Thompson were "chomping at the bit," to begin the competition, however, the lack of a CD and no discernible leadership, led to some confusion as to the start-up. Experience with this sort of thing helped pilots to assume duties and get the whole shebang off dead center and going.

In round one, perennial favorite George Lanquist once again showed us his superb piloting skills and took an early lead in round one with a drop of 13 feet even. General consensus among the more astute members of the "peanut gallery" was that a 13 foot drop would most likely be bested as this highly competitive cadre of pilots warmed up their thumbs and got in their respective "grooves." The also-rans in round one all dropped outside of 24 feet, leaving George at the top of the leader board.

Round two saw a significant improvement in the contestants' overall performance. George again posted a round best of 9 feet even, to remain atop the leader board. However the rest of the field had him in their sights with one drop at 25+ feet and the other 3 ranging between 13 feet 2 inches and 22 feet 5 inches. George was obviously feeling the pressure and knew he had to pull off a really great drop in the third and final round if he was to prevail.

2010 winner and crowd favorite Leo Gabriels lead off round three with a personal meet best drop of 8 feet 10 inches (and didn't wad in his airplane as in 2010.) Would this stand with the 4 highly competitive pilots still in the wings awaiting their turns? The tension in the peanut gallery was so thick you could cut it with a knife.

Weather was starting to become a factor. How would the steadily increasing wind affect the water-filled latex orbs? The cheers and cat-calls from the fans was fast reaching a never before heard-of level. George launched and unfortunately put in his last drop at 25+ feet. Alas, he snatched defeat from the jaws of victory and would not find himself in the winner's circle this year. This left three contestants, TJ Moran, Ron Scott, and Michael Thompson, all with a chance to best Leo's drop of 8 feet 10 inches. Who would prevail and take the proud walk into the winners circle with his head held high, and savor the sweet taste of victory? TJ and Mike both succumbed to the vagaries of the wind and some less than great piloting (according to the peanut gallery) and posted 25+ feet drops. That left "dark horse" contestant, Ron Scott, with a shot at taking the coveted gold cup from Leo. With nerves of steel, Ron limbered up his thumbs, launched and carefully judged the wind - - a few passes, and then the drop. Leo was on pins and needles as the glistening orb accelerated towards the target. Splat ! ! It's going to be close. The line judges carefully measured. It was 7 feet 10 inches. Ladies and gentleman we finally have your winner and 2012 Ventura County Comets Balloon Drop champion, **Ron Scott!** In a post-contest interview, Ron revealed his secret to success - - dumb luck. Ron is an AMA instructor pilot, and I'm sure will be willing to give lessons in the sport of competitive balloon dropping.

Well, the Quaker Fun Fly & Balloon drop event had a good turnout on Saturday 6-23-12.

There were 7 Quakers, in all sizes, from TJ's big 200% Quaker to the smallest mini Quaker at about a 34" wing span. There were only 5 participants in the balloon drop contest. George Lanquist, Leo Gabriels, Mike Thompson, TJ Moran and Ron Scott. After 3 tries, Ron was the lucky winner (by Accident) and got as close as 7' 4" from the center circle and George got the next closest to center circle with a distance of 7' 8". I won a whapping \$20 which made me happy. See picture attached.

We all had a good time and no mishaps except for Paul Moran who was flying a small flying wing after the event. Paul managed to re-kit his plane after 2 minutes of flying and getting disoriented!!!!!!! "OOOO WWEEEELLLL.

Happy Landings,

*Ron*, .....

### **Hinge Installation is Critical**

If you are working with an almost-ready-to-fly (ARF) aircraft or are building from a kit or scratch, you will be installing hinges. This is a critical step in model construction. If the control surface binds or has too much of a gap, your baby is going to be a dog and you will have definite control problems.

There are two basic types of hinges: the “living” hinge that is installed using CA glue and the “pinned” hinge that is put in with epoxy. There are advantages and disadvantages to using either type. I have used the living hinge for several years and like the fact that it only takes a few drops of CA to set the hinges in the control surface; however, I have had these hinges break and always seem to get the CA all over the covering, no matter how careful I am. I also have glued the control surface to the wing and tail.

Recently, I went back to pinned hinges. These hinges move with much less resistance and are more durable. I cover the hinge with lip balm before installing it with 5-minute epoxy. When the epoxy dries, the excess can easily be removed from around the hinge.

The Great Planes Slot Machine is a good investment, and it makes hinge installation much easier. Just hang on tight when you start it or you'll have a hinge slot where you probably don't want it.

Finally, after you have a control surface that moves easily and permits adequate throw, don't forget to seal the gap. It is amazing how much difference this will make in the performance of your aircraft. A strip of clear MonoKote will seal the control surfaces of all the aircraft you have. It also keeps the hinges secure and helps prevent control surface flutter.

—*Jim Bronowsky, Mid-Missouri Radio Control Association, Columbia MI*

