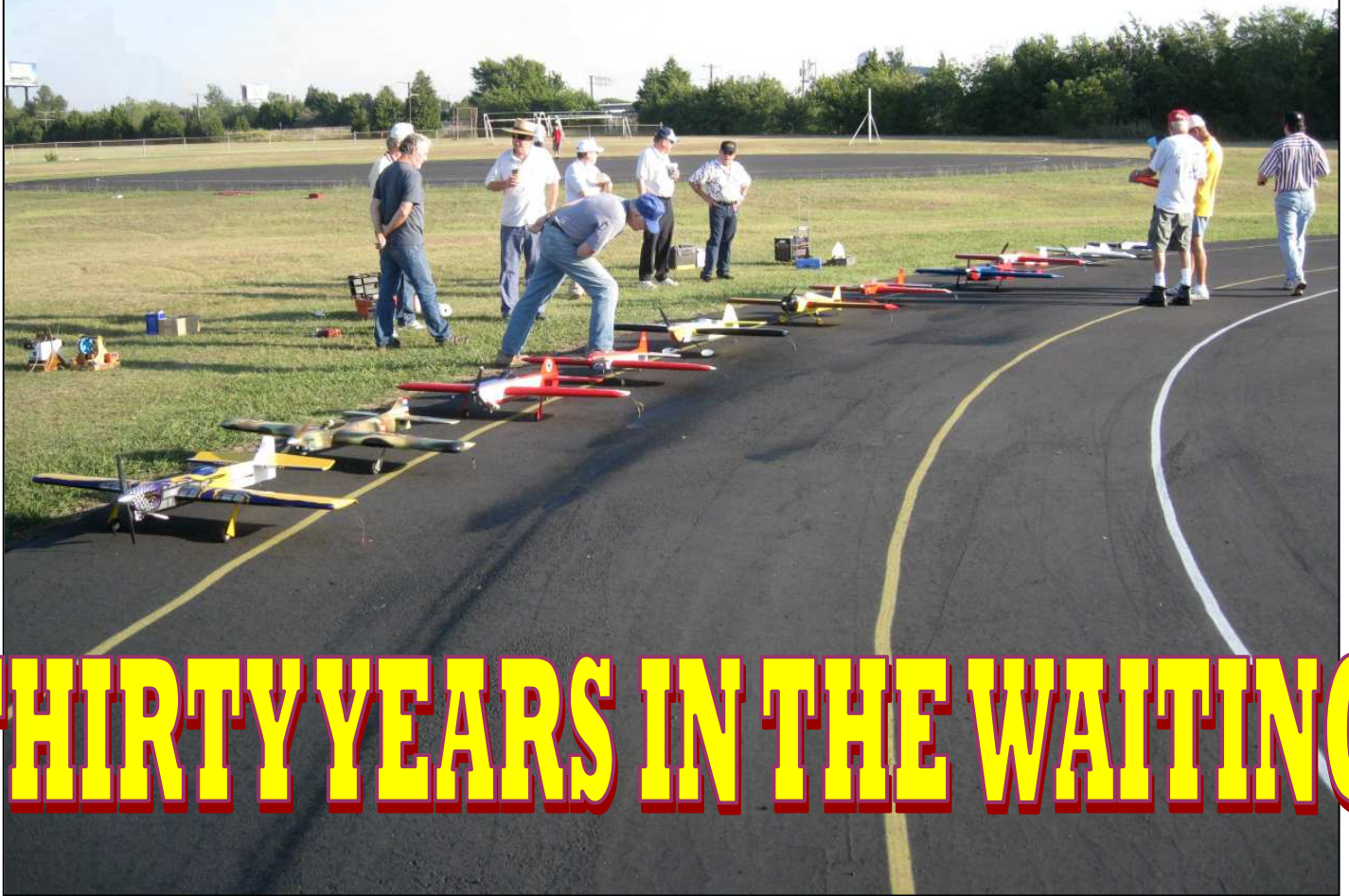


Comp day at the
Dallas flying circles



THIRTY YEARS IN THE WAITING

*Paul Winter realises a dream – to visit and fly with C/L stunt legend Al Rabe in the USA.
(Words by Paul Winter, photos by David Russum & PW, graphic layout by John Benzing)*

Many years ago as an eighteen-year-old on a soaking wet runway at the 1978 World Champs at RAF Woodvale near Liverpool I watched Al Rabe fly his Mustang ‘Snaggletooth’ model. I fell in love with the design straight away and now, after nearly 30 years, I found myself with the opportunity to travel to Dallas to see Al Rabe.

Over the years I have studied many of his designs and, if you follow the model press (R/C Model Flyer), you will have seen my article covering his Bearcat design that I built in 2008. Unable to take the model with me to Dallas as it’s a one-piecer – the box it would have had to have gone in would have been way too big for current airline regulations – I opted instead to travel with my take-apart ‘Strega’.



Strega assembled



Strega disassembled

I have travelled with models to the US many times before, but often the customs or the airline spring a surprise on you, so I did my homework carefully before booking the tickets. Models can and do get damaged in transit, so this time I put some extra braces across the fuselage in case it got thrown around excessively.



Braces across the fuselage for transit

At last the day of departure arrived and thank goodness there were no hitches at departure with the model box. Ten hours later I arrived at Dallas airport complete with luggage and model box – and no, you can never take these things for granted! Al Rabe was waiting to welcome me and assist with collecting my hire car. Unfortunately, the day before my arrival Al had fallen over looking at something he shouldn't have been, so now his knee was aching like hell and his face rather bruised. Ah well, I've done that myself so mustn't laugh. A serious downside to the accident was that it put Al out of action for flying in the comp that I had come to attend.



Al Rabe in his workshop

Al had very kindly offered to accommodate me for my short stay in Dallas, so once settled in my first task was to assemble my model ready for a test flight in the hot US air. Al has changed over the years and has become a very helpful and thoughtful modeller who wants to assist you in any way he can. Al's model workshop is two-fold and comprises a small workroom about 10ft by 12ft for the delicate work and a garage for all the messy stuff. All his earlier models hang on the wall and ceiling like trophies to his triumphs. Although well into his seventies, Al is still driven with the ambition to create the perfect flying stunt ship that doesn't look like a 'lawn dart'. As a real airline pilot for most of his life, Al builds and flies his models just like the real ones, and as a

consequence has a proper understanding of the technicalities that make them work. I could have sat for hours just listening to him explaining complicated issues in a very simple way.



Al's models on the ceiling.....and the wall

On Thursday evening Al took me to a club meeting at the local model shop about 10 miles away. The shop was enormous, plus it had a model car track for the local slot-car enthusiasts. The meeting followed the usual format with all the regular things being discussed, but with the addition of a chat about the forthcoming comp the weekend ahead. Next day, Friday, was sunny and very hot with light winds. In the evening, Richard Oliver of Jett engine fame came to stay with us in preparation for the comp the following day.



The competitors line up on one of the tarmac circles - the car park and gazebo are in the background at left.

Saturday dawned sunny and warm again, but guess what? Windy. We made an early start and headed for the flying site which is located about 25 miles from Al's house, a long way for sure, but mostly on motorway. It's situated by a football complex and has two tarmac circles and two others on grass. A fence around the facility keeps out unwanted visitors – dogs etc. A gazebo by the car park is used for scoring, shade and refreshments, and compliments what by anybody's standards is a first class facility.

I had two practice flights using my Saito 72 four-stroke powered Strega with no major problems, EXCEPT that with the site being positioned 400 feet above sea level, coupled with an exceptionally humid atmosphere, the engine was a bit out of breath. The fuel I was using was for normal English weather – wet and cold – so now I had to change to 20% nitro and more oil. This cured the problem so it was back to flying, but now the wind had started to get up and by 10.00 o'clock that was the day done as far as flying was concerned. On the other tarmac circle a competition was being run for profile 40's, so I stayed to watch.



Paul holds a legend - Al's Mustang 'Cavalier'

Sunday morning and the trees were dancing in the wind so flying prospects did not look good. However, we all set off, stopping en route for breakfast at the compulsory fast-food restaurant. On arrival at the flying site I hit a snag – insurance – I was told that only AMA members were recognised and as I wasn't a member I couldn't fly in the competition! However, \$20 later and intervention from the CD, Tom Farmer, and I was cleared for take-off. I had a practice flight, and although warm and windy, it was no worse than I am used to in the UK.

Another legend - Bob Gieseke - judged Expert



It's worth explaining that there are four competition classes in the USA, Beginners, Intermediate, Advanced and Expert. I opted to enter the Advanced category (well nobody has ever told me I'm an Expert in the UK!) and I found myself competing against 6 other flyers who I had never met before. Things started with Appearance judging (marked out of 20 and added to your total score) where I was awarded 17 – the best in my class. It's worth remembering that in the US they score out of

40 as opposed to the FAI system used in the rest of the world which is out of 10 (plus K factors). You also get a bonus for completing the schedule in its entirety. I was last to fly in the first round, but by then the wind was blowing at 20 mph plus, so strong in fact that it even blew the scoreboard over. My Saito 72 handled the conditions well with ample power in reserve. However, after the flight I noticed that one of the strands of my lines had snapped, which gives some idea of the pull I had to contend with. At the end of the round I was lying in second place just behind local star flyer Mike Greb.

By the second round (there were only two) conditions were almost un-flyable and many competitors gave their flight a pass. Come my turn and I thought what the heck, I've come 3500 miles to fly and fly I will. At the point of take-off the wind had dropped very slightly so off I went. Coming to the horizontal square eight however a sudden blast almost blew me off my feet. But because of the high temperature there seems to be some sort of up-current which is hard to describe – you would have to experience it for yourself.

After the flight I was surprised to see that I was the only flyer to improve in the round, BUT had still lost out on winning the comp by just ONE point! What can you say? After all the flying had finished the young ladies of the flying core treated us (at the field) to a lunch of meats, rice and lots more.....a big thank you to all of them.

Well that's the flying over because on Monday and Tuesday the wind was too strong to fly any of Al's planes. Rather a sad moment because I could have been one of the elite few to have flown one of his planes. But maybe this was a blessing in disguise, as the last thing I would want to do is bend one of them.

Monday evening we went to Kyle Tanks (he cuts all the laser parts for Al's kits). What a set-up, the laser cutter is only about 2 feet square and housed in a shed near his house. Tuesday morning was one of the highlights of the trip, we went to see Keith Sparks who moulds all the Canopies for Kyle's kits. While I was there he made me two canopies for the Mustang 'Cavalier' which is a 10%



Strega coming in for a perfect landing?

enlarged version of the Snaggletooth. If you follow Stunt News you will know that it's the same as the Millennium Mustang. This is the model I'm holding in the picture on page 3, but no picture can really do it justice – the finish has to be seen to be believed.

I must conclude by passing on my warmest thanks to Al and Mia Rabe for providing the much appreciated hospitality and for making me feel so welcome for the duration of my stay in Dallas.