

Turning to the Dark Side

The Building of Circulas 46 IIe

A Precision Aerobatic Control Line Model Airplane

– Electric Profile –

Part 9 – Flying at the 2021 AMA Nationals



Top 5 Finishers in ADVANCED

(Front Row Kneeling)

Michael Schmitt – 1st Place

(Back Row from Left to Right)

James Mills – 2nd Place, Enrique Diez – 3^d Place, Dennis Nunes – 4th Place, William Davis – 5th Place

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*Written by Dennis S. Nunes
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I THINK I CAN, I THINK I CAN...

"*I think I can*", puffed the little locomotive, and put itself in front of the great heavy train. As it went on the little engine kept bravely puffing faster and faster, "*I think I can, I think I can, I think I can.*" I'm sure everyone remembers the book entitled "*The Little Engine That Could*".

Could *Circulas 46 IIe*, an electric profile, compete at the national level with some of the best pilots and planes in the ADVANCED class? Would we even stand a chance of doing well? Would I get laugh off the Lpad? Keep in mind, many of those who enter the ADVANCED class are EXPERT class flyers in their local areas or regions. At the AMA Nationals, these EXPERT flyers can drop down to the ADVANCED class rather than fly with in the

OPEN division with the big boys, where many of the top flyers in the world compete.

The saying "*I think I can...*" secretly became my moto.

This would be my second trip to the AMA Nationals in Muncie, IN and it would be the very *first* contest for *Circulas 46 IIe*. How did this all come about? The planning for this trip began back in April. A group of us, Dave Fitzgerald, Brett Buck, Jim Aron and I were talking about who was going to attend the 2021 AMA NATs in Muncie, IN. This year the NAT's was moved up a month, to June instead of July due to the R/C World Championship being held there at this time. However, this event was later canceled because of COVID pandemic.

I know very little about Muncie, the consensus was that June is not a good time to be flying in Muncie because of the unpredictable weather,

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especially the wind. How bad can it get? Stay tuned...

I sent Brett an email in April to confirm that he was planning to attend and drive to the NAT's, which he was. However this year just like last year, there were only so many planes that Brett could get into his minivan. Dave, Brett and Jim were all planning on going this year. So I was the "odd man" out and I didn't want to prevent anyone from attending and so I wrote Brett letting him know that I would bow out and do whatever I could to support them in preparation for the NATs.

A day later and thanks to Jim Aron, I found out that Lanny Shorts was attending this year's NATs and would be driving to Muncie. After the NATs, he would be heading out to Oklahoma to see his sister for several days before returning home. The good news was that he was more than willing to take my plane and equipment to Muncie. I also found out that Lanny was taking David, his son's planes and equipment there. This would be David's first NATs. He was supposed to attend last year, but after a bird strike on his flight to Indianapolis, the flight was diverted and created a scheduling issues. David ended up catching a returned flight home. Sadly, what was supposed to be his first NATs was over before it really got started.

So with Lanny transporting our planes and equipment, I would be attending my second NATs after all. Getting my transportation issues resolved gave me more time to prepare for the upcoming NATs than I did last year. Last year everything was done pretty much at the very last minute with the COVID pandemic starting to get worst. So on April 14 I registered with AMA, made a reservation for a room at Comfort Inn in Muncie, reserved a car from Enterprise, and booked my flights with Expedia. Now it was time to get down to some serious preparations and practice.

But ... I had a decision to make: Which plane would I fly? Prior to all the talk and emails about the NATs, I've been working very hard on *Circulas 46 Ile*, an electric profile, getting

everything working properly and getting the plane trimmed. This plane flew pretty well but I wasn't completely sure I wanted to fly a *profile* at the NATs. So I turned to the plane that took third place at last year's NATs, my RO-Jett .61 powered *Circulas 61*, which I hadn't flown since last year's NATs in July.

Because I had more time this year to prepare, I decided to take *Circulas 61* out for some practice. *Circulas 61* flew fine but I didn't like the way it cornered because of being heavy. *Circulas 46 Ile* turned much better but was a little unstable in level flight and I wasn't sure how it would handle the windy conditions. At first I decided I would take both planes to the NATs with one of them being my backup plane. *But which one?*



Circulas 61 at the 2020 NATs

From last year NATs experience, Brett mentioned that I would need to make some changes once we got to Muncie because of the air density. We would probably need fuel with a 15% nitro content, add some nose weight and increase line spacing to the next set of holes in the handle. We eventually ended up making all these changes in Muncie last year.

Knowing this created an issue with *Circulas 46 Ile* because I couldn't move my battery further forward with the current setup in order to adjust the center of gravity which might be required for Muncie. I really didn't want to add any additional stick-on weights to the nose of the plane as the plane was heavy enough. So I

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needed to make a modification that would allow me to move the battery more forward. All I had to do was reverse the battery mount which allowed me to move the battery forward another inch if needed. This also allowed me to move the battery a little forward during our practice sessions to see what would happen. As a result of this move, *Circulas 46 Ile* level flight became very solid. Yet, I still have some room to move the battery forward for Muncie if necessary.

Next, I was able to get in touch with Howard Rush to see if he could make me some elevator wedges from his 3D printer for my 1/4" thick elevators to try out for both planes. Within a week Howard sent me four sets of wedges, two sets with a taller height wedge and the other two sets with a lower height wedge. I immediately put the higher height wedges on *Circulas 46 Ile*. These wedges helped tremendously in locking in the level flight even more and allowed the plane to track better in maneuvers.

I was also experimenting with two different Igor Burger props, the 11x6 undercambered 3-blade prop and a 12x5 narrow blade flat back 3-blade prop. When I flew the plane in the wind the 11x6 prop pulled the plane and accelerated through the corners really well, in fact, too well. As a result of the acceleration, the plane would "wind-up" too much in the corners. So I settled on the 12x5 prop. This prop really helped with the acceleration coming out of square corners, increased my battery efficiency because of its light weight and didn't allow the plane to wind-up in the loops or square corners. *Circulas 46 Ile* was flying *exceptional* well.

So I tried the elevator wedges on *Circulas 61* but this didn't help as much as I had hoped, which was a little disappointing. But it did help me make up my mind as to which plane would become my #1 primary plane.

There was also something else that helped me make up my mind. In Napa, I flew *Circulas 61* and then a few days later I flew *Circulas 46 Ile* fly in Elk Grove, Just to make sure I would be making the right decision, I asked Brett and Jim

which plane they thought I flew better, as they saw both of the planes fly. After I flew *Circulas 46 Ile*, they answered like a duet, without any hesitation ... *The profile!*

So on May 31, I made the decision to fly *Circulas 46 Ile* and that I wasn't going to take *Circulas 61* to the NATs, even as a backup. This decision would also help Lanny as he would not need to create more room to fit another plane and extra equipment in his truck.

With the decision finalized, it was time to get in some very serious practice. Because of the COVID pandemic, like many areas in the US, there were no contests held prior to this year's NATs. So the NATs became the "*I think I can...*" moment for me and *Circulas 46 Ile*.

We lined up many practice sessions in Napa and Elk Grove. Again Dave, Brett and Jim provide some valuable help and coaching during these practice sessions. On June 12, Dave and I got together in Napa for a practice and coaching session. Dave gave me some invaluable advice and coaching during this session. The next day we flew in Elk Grove for what would be my final practice session before heading to Muncie. This went extremely well. *Circulas 46 Ile* was "declared" ready for the NATs.

Now all I needed to do is deliver *Circulas 46 Ile* and my equipment to Lanny's house in Truckee, CA on Tuesday June 15. Lanny and his wife Joyce would be heading out for the 5-day road trip to Muncie on Wednesday morning. The plan was for him to arrive in Muncie on Sunday around noon. All that was left was for me is to pack a suitcase and get on a flight on Saturday June 19 heading for Muncie, IN.

Tuesday June 15, 2021: At 9:30 am I left home to deliver my plane and equipment to Lanny's home in Truckee. I have never been to Lanny's home before. It's 160 miles from my house to his and took a little over 2½ hours to get there. However, the GPS in my car had me take the incorrect exit to Truckee Airport Road,

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known as the Overland Trail on Google Maps. After taking the exit, just driving a couple hundred feet, the road turned into this single lane, rut-ridden, dry dusty dirt road that I soon discovered that I shouldn't be on. Perhaps if I had a 4-wheel drive Jeep maybe it would have been fine. Once I was on this road there was no real way to turn around safely and get off it. So I very slowly continued ahead. This dirt road was a couple of miles long. My car was so loaded with dirt that I had to rinse it off at Lanny's home before making the trip back home. I was very grateful that I didn't get stuck because I don't think anyone would have found me. The total distance traveled for this round trip was 320 miles. *Oh the things one will do for a model airplane contest!*

At Lanny's home I helped him load 5 airplanes, two for Lanny, and two for David and one for me, along with all of our equipment in the back of Lanny's shell covered pickup truck. Lanny and Joyce will get a good start for the long drive to Muncie starting the next morning.

Later that day when I got home it was a strange feeling not to see *Circulas 46 IIe* or my equipment. I just hope Lanny and Joyce make it to Muncie with no issues. Now it's just a matter of packing my clothes, computer, etc. and get ready to head out to the Sacramento International Airport (SMF) on Saturday June 19 to catch an American Airlines flight at 8:45 am and arrive at the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) at 10:23 am. From there catch a connecting flight straight on to Indianapolis International Airport (IND) at 11:10 am and arrive at 6:07 pm EST. Perfect!

Hang on . . . It's about to get interesting!

As the airline industry tries to get back on their feet during the post-pandemic era, and with more people traveling, there are some traveling uncertainties and things can change and change rather quickly.

Well... The first change of my flight came on April 20. My departure flight from SMF to IND changed. I would now depart from SMF at 6:30

am, two hours and 15 minutes earlier. But instead of heading to LAX, I would be landing in Phoenix. AZ (PHX). I would now catch a connecting flight from Phoenix (PHX) and from there on to IND. Ok, so I would have to wake up a little earlier. I accepted this change.

On April 25 I received a notice that my departure flight on Delta Airlines for June 26 from IND to SMF had changed. Originally I was to depart IND at 6:13 pm with a connecting flight to Minneapolis. MN (MSP) and then arrive at SMF at 10:04 pm. Again perfect!

Now, my departure flight was moved up to depart IND at 4:20 pm. This meant that I would have to leave Muncie earlier than I would like as it's about an hour and twenty minute drive from Muncie to IND. So I would have to leave Muncie no later than 2:00 pm. I still should be able to see the Top 5 OPEN Finals. This was not great but I could live with it. Now I would arrive in SMF a little earlier at 8:30 pm, which was fine.

On April 26 I received another change on my departure flight from SMF. This flight was to leave SMF at 6:45 am, 15 minutes later than scheduled. The connecting flight from PHX to IND remained the same. No big deal, so I accepted the change.

On May 1 another change to my returning flight from IND. This involved a flight number change on the first leg of this flight from IND to MSP, no big deal. The connecting flight from MSP to SMF was moved from 6:40 pm to 6:45 pm, 5 minutes difference. Again, no big deal.

However, on June 18 at around 7:30 pm, *the evening before my departure*, I received an email from American Airlines stating that my departure flight from SMF to IND had completely changed and severely I might add. I was asked to confirm a flight that left SMF at 10:08 pm Saturday night to Charlotte, NC (CLT) and arrive at 5:56 am on Sunday morning. Then I was to catch a connecting flight Sunday morning from CLT to IND that departed at 7:39 am and would have me in Indianapolis at 9:21

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am, a day late. No way was this going to work as it messed up my hotel and car reservations.

I very quickly got on the phone and called American Airlines (AA) directly. *I ended up waiting two and a half hours on the phone for the representative to get on the line!* I explained my dilemma and the AA representative said there were no flights that would get me from SMF to IND on the same day nor was there a flight from SMF to PHX to catch the connecting flight to IND. I asked if there were any flights from San Francisco International (SFO) airport to IND or PHX. I had looked earlier on AA's website while waiting for the AA representative to come on the line. I found a flight from SFO to PHX that departed at 6:15 am that would allow me to keep my connecting flight from PHX to IND. The AA representative changed my ticket on the spot and I was set for my departure flight to IND. By 10:30 pm that evening everything was set.

All that I needed to do was let my oldest daughter know, who was driving me to the airport that we would be going to SFO instead of SMF. We needed to leave the house no later than 3:15 am. I texted her to let her know of the change as she was spending the night at a friend's home. She said she would be at the house at 3:15 am. I'm all set.

Now it's time to try and get some sleep as we would be leaving the house some 4½ hours later. But that was next to impossible as I was still pretty wound up in dealing with AA.

Saturday June 19 at 3:00 am

(Traveling Day): So at 3:00 am I was up and ready to go but no sight of my daughter. No problem she not expected to be at the house until 3:15 am. Just to see if she awake and on her way, I called her cellphone and it went directly to voice messaging. I texted her, but no response. Its 3:15 am and no sight of my daughter. 3:30 am and still no daughter, its 3:45 am where is she? I'm starting to panic! Then my mind went wild. Was she in an accident or did something else happen?

I wake up my wife to let her know of the situation and told her that I would take my car and drive to SFO and park it there. But then I realized that my return flight was bringing me back to SMF not SFO and this would create more issues. It's at this point that I thought of giving up and *not* attend the NATs.

My wife *hates* driving in and around San Francisco or driving my car. But I was out of options. So I asked if she would be willing to drive my car and take me to SFO. *I was disparate!* Mind you she was sound asleep, but she jumped to her feet got dressed and we were on our way to SFO at 4:10 am, almost an hour late! Would we make it in time? Then the thought, "*I think I can, I think I can...*" came across my mind again. That early in the morning there was very little traffic and going a *little* fast, we made it to SFO by 5:25 am.

I set the GPS in my car to help my wife find her way back home and off both of us go, she's headed home and with my boarding pass on my phone I'm looking for the TSA Checkpoint entry.

I stepped into the terminal and all I could see is this massive throng of people as far as my eyes can see. And they don't appear to be very happy. I ask a gentleman standing in line, what were these lines for? American Airlines!

Oh no, I'm flying American Airlines! Would I need to wait in these lines? If so, there was no way that I'm going to make my flight . . . if it even existed. I started walking to try and find the end of the lines. I'm really not sure what to do.

I see a TSA officer standing under a sign "TSA Checkpoint". I asked him what's going on and is this where I need to go. He stated that the large crowd were those who flew into SFO on American Airlines and were trying to get flights because either there flights were canceled or changed. What a mess, total chaos!

He asked, 'let me see your boarding pass', which was on my phone. He then directed me to just follow the ropes and go to the TSA

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inspection area. There were only a handful of people in this line compared to the large crowd that was dealing with American Airlines.

Thankfully I get through the TSA inspection and 10 minutes later I'm off to my gate to catch my flight with 15 minutes to spare before boarding started! My flight was NOT cancelled and YES I made it — and I'm off to Muncie!

What happened to my daughter? At 4:45 am I receive a text message from her. She claims that her alarm didn't go off and of course she had her phone on silent mode. Kids . . . what can I say? Now I'm worried, because she is supposed to pick me up at SMF when I return from Muncie. Oh well, I'll worry about that later.

So from SFO I flew into PHX with a 90 minute layover, then off to IND. I even had time to stop and get a breakfast burrito from one of the shops in the airport. Expensive, but good.

When talking to the AA representative Friday night and getting my reservation straightened out, I was asked if I would be 'willing and able' to sit by the exit door on the connecting flight from PHX to IND. Having no idea what was involved, I didn't care, I quickly said yes. So when I boarded, I find my seat by the exit door. A tight seat but I have all the leg room in the world and nobody sitting next to me! Plus there was a nice flight attendant sitting adjacent to me right next to the door.

I soon found out what was involved when sitting next to the exit. The flight attendant ask me and those sitting on the other side of the aisle if we were 'willing and able' to assist in case of an emergency. Great, now I can be a hero if we have an emergency. The only emergency running through my mind is a plane crash! Ah, just what I needed. Thankfully there were no emergencies!

While waiting to pull away from the terminal, I spoke with the flight attendant about flying last year and how the flights were empty. Not this flight, it was completely full. But again I was grateful just to be on the flight. We arrived on time at IND.

Once in IND, I headed to the Enterprise car rental booth, picked up my rental car and I was off to Muncie. Got to my hotel around 6:30 pm. Got checked in, unpacked and headed out to the Lpad where I found Brett Buck, Dave Fitzgerald, Jim Aron and Paul Walker talking and walking about. We decided to go to Puerto Vallarta Mexican Restaurant for some food that night. Afterwards it was off to bed as I was pretty worn out.

Sunday June 20, 2021: I woke up at 5:30 am, slept good and felt pretty decent. It was decided that we would head out to the Lpad around 8:30 am for the others to get in some practice. The wind was blowing around 10-15 mph with some gust. Very difficult flying conditions. I decided to head over to the farmhouse to check in and purchase some NATs shirts and a hat.

Circulas 46 Ile was still in transit and should be arriving in Muncie around 12:00 noon. The next thing I know Lanny calls me. I look at my watch and its 12:00 noon. I was driving back to my hotel at the time. So I made the stop at his hotel to pick up my plane and equipment. Everything and everybody arrive safely and so I headed back to my hotel to reassemble my plane with hopes of flying later that afternoon or evening, if the wind died down.

That afternoon I decided that it was a good time to head over to Wal-Mart to pick up some food and drinks for the rest of the week. We headed out to the Lpad at 3:30 pm but the wind conditions did not improve. If anything it got worse. So we decided to go to the Sunshine Café for an early dinner with the hope of return later that evening and try to get in some flights.

One of the *highlights* of this trip took place at the Sunshine Café, Jim Aron ordered meatloaf for his dinner. I looked like the meatloaf had been sitting out for a couple of weeks and according to Jim it tasted awful. Even pouring catsup on it didn't help. We ended up kidding Jim about that meatloaf all week long. I was just glad that he survived the meatloaf and didn't get any food poisoning. It looked that bad!

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After dinner, the wind wasn't getting any better, if anything it was getting worst plus it started to sprinkle. Dave had flew earlier that afternoon in the windy conditions and lost one of his elevator wedges. So afterwards we ended up in Brett's hotel room "assisting" Dave with his repair. It sort of reminded me of the joke about 'how many individuals does it take to change a lightbulb'. But the repair was eventually made.



Dave Fitzgerald Repairing Elevator Wedges

Later we would try to fly once more, but the wind did not cooperate. After repairing Dave plane we went to our rooms with the hope of getting together tomorrow morning at 7:30 am and try to get some practice flights in. The weather forecast for tomorrow didn't look very promising.

Monday June 21, 2021: The morning was greeted with wet grounds from a late night rain and some wind. We decided to head out to the Lpad at 7:30 am. The wind was barely flyable for a very short while. I decided to put up a flight but the wind was about 10-15 mph with gust to 20 mph. My first full flight was too slow at 5.35 second laps. On the next flight I decided to increase the rpm up two settings and flew a 1-minute flight at 5.15 second lap speed. After that we packed up and got out of there as the wind was getting wild.

We were going to head over to the AMA Museum but it was only 9:15 am and it didn't open until 10:00 am. So Jim and I headed back to our hotel room to get our planes ready for

processing and appearance judging later that afternoon at 1:00 pm and to get some rest. It should be very interesting to see how this was going to be accomplished outside, under the Pavilion with the high winds.

I arrived at the Lpad for processing and appearance judging at 1:00 pm. The wind was howling. Everyone was having difficulties holding on to their planes. All the planes must be weighed and the plane presented for appearance judging. The wind made this extremely difficult.

The weighing of the planes took place in a small trailer next to the Pavilion. Once weighed we were directed to the Pavilion where the appearance judging took place. When it was your turn, you were to place your plane on a table and hold on to it to prevent the winds from blowing it off the table. The judges would look it over and asked you to turn it over for inspection. The judges would huddle together and discuss how many appearance points to give the plane.

Last year after the planes were judged, they were placed in rows based on your appearance score on the grass outside the Pavilion. But because of the high winds we were told to take them back to our vehicles.

The Event Director, Dave Tribble decided that we should bring our planes back on Tuesday, sometime after Classis was flown, for the Concours voting, presentation and award. Brett, Dave and I decided not to bring out planes back as we were not expected to win the Concours award. However Jim did bring his plane back, but didn't win. Jim received 18 appearance points, Brett received 17, Dave got 16 and *Circulas 46 Ile*, my profile, received 14.

I was ecstatic as I thought maybe I would receive only 10 or 11 points because of being a profile, at the most 12 points. 14 points – unbelievable!

Tuesday June 22, 2021: We wanted to get an early start to the Lpad and decided to get there around 7:00 am. This was the best

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weather we had. Winds were mild at 5-8 mph. I was able to get in 4 flights. The first flight was at the rpm set for the high winds which gave me 5.0 second laps, which was too fast. I dropped the rpm down one setting to 9,840. This was perfect with 5.2 second laps. I also increased the line spacing at the handle to the next set of holes. The remaining flights were done just to get accustom to the windy conditions as tomorrow the winds were expected to increase.

Sadly, the 2021 NATs for Lanny Shorts was very disappointing. His first practice flight on the Lpad was with his new electric Formula S. I launch his plane. It took off straight and then decided to take a left turn to the center of the circle. Lanny didn't react quickly enough. The plane tried to takeoff, came down hard on the nose, breaking the motor mount and nose. There was also some damage to the wing.

Later that afternoon, he brought out his electric Gypsy, an older backup plane. He struggled with some electrical issues. Jim Aron spent some time with him and got things working. But after the last full flight Lanny noticed that the motor mount had come loose. So it was back to the hotel room and make the needed repair.

We left the Lpad for lunch and headed to McAlister's Deli. We would later get together that evening for dinner at Johnny Carino's.

Dave got a hold of the Circle Assignments for Wednesday. However we later discovered there was some errors as two OPEN flyers were inadvertently placed in the ADVANCED class. Revised assignment sheets were posted later that evening on Stunthanger.com. I downloaded the revised Circle Assignments and found that my circle assignment and flight order had changed.

Wednesday June 23, 2021: This was the first day of qualifying flights. Each competitor flies two flights on Wednesday and two flights of Thursday. The best score from each day is added together to determine your qualifying score. This year however AMA told the Event Director Dave Tribble to compress this year's

NATs to end on Thursday as a huge thunderstorm was in the forecast for Friday and Saturday. So the decision was made to use only the high score from today's flights to determine the Top 20 qualifiers for the ADVANCED and OPEN classes.

The wind started out to be very mild, between 4-8 mph. My first flight of 507 was good enough for first place in my group, so I passed on my second flight as the wind was really starting to pick up. This score was good enough to qualify for the Top 20 in ADVANCED.

C/L Precision Aerobatics AMA National Championships, Event 325 (Advanced) Qualification							
Contestant	Wednesday, Circle 3				Thursday, Circle 3		
	Round 1		Round 2		Round 1		Round 2
	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order
Robert Brookins	3	Scratched	4	Scratched	1		4
Paul Kobe	1	321	6	182	8		2
Ben Mills	7	438	3	382.33	4		1
James Mills	4	424	1	493	6		3
Dennis Nunes	8	507	5	PA-55	7		8
Lanny Shorts	5	Scratched	8		5		6
Leonardo Silva	2	397.33	7	466.33	2		7
James Vigani	6	471.33	2	472.33	3		5

Group B – Qualification Flights

Dave and Brett qualified for the Top 20 OPEN in each of their groups. Jim on the other hand struggled with the wind and failed to qualify, his flying at the 2021 NATs was over.

For Lanny Short, from what I recall, needing to repair the motor mount on his Gypsy, someone gave him some epoxy to fix the motor mount. But for some reason the epoxy didn't set up and the motor mount was still loose in the morning. By the time he was to put in his first qualifying flight on Wednesday it was still loose. He passed on his first flight and quickly headed back to his hotel room again and to try to fix it.

Once he returned to the Lpad the motor mount was fixed but the spinner was rubbing against the nose and he was having trouble with getting his prop on tight. He tried to put in a flight but the motor spun up, the plane took off, the motor stopped and the plane landed. Sadly, Lanny never got in an official qualifying flight and his NATs trip was over.

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On the other hand, Lanny's son, David who was flying in his first NATs, put together a good second flight and qualified for the Top 20 ADVANCED Finals. Way to go David!

Thursday June 24, 2021: Today the ADVANCED Finals, Top 20 OPEN Semi-finals, Top 5 OPEN Finals and Walker Cup Fly-off are to be flown. All this is scheduled to be completed by today. I didn't get to see any of Dave's or Brett's Top 20 OPEN flights as I had problems of my own to deal with. Dave qualified easily for the Top 5 Finals with the high score for the group. Brett on the other hand failed to qualify and finished in 12th place.

C/L Precision Aerobatics AMA National Championships, 2021 Event 322 (Open) Semifinals						
Contestant	Circle 3		Circle 4		Total Score	Place
	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score		
Konstantin Bajaikine	8	538.67	19	540.67	1079.34	11
Dan Banjock	19	502	8	508.67	1010.67	20
Brett Buck	1	528.67	16	550	1078.67	12
Matthew Colan	14	551.67	3	547	1098.67	6
Joseph Daly	9	548.67	17	552.67	1101.34	9
David Fitzgerald	15	567.33	4	574.67	1142	3
Joe Gilbert	17	557	10	566	1123	9
Craig Gunder	10	501	14	519	1020	19
Orestes Hernandez	3	563	20	575.33	1138.33	9
Richard Huff	16	540.67	5	516.33	1057	14
Robin Hunt	6	550.33	15	546.67	1097	7
Todd Lee	11	567.33	9	518.33	1085.66	8
Robert McDonald	4	525	13	535.33	1060.33	13
Michael McHenry	5	522.67	11	507	1029.67	17
Jose Modesto	7	507	12	519.33	1026.33	18
Matt Neumann	18	534.33	1	505.33	1039.66	15
Howard Rush	2	531.67	18	550.67	1082.34	9
Kenny Stevens	13	541.67	2	539	1080.67	10
Eric Taylor	12	521	6	516	1037	16
Paul Walker	20	567	7	568.67	1135.67	9

Top 20 OPEN Semifinals Scores

In ADVANCED, "a funny thing happened on the way to the forum" as the movie goes.

When I received the ADVANCED Finals Flight Assignment sheet the day before, there are two columns for the Flight Order. For some strange reasoning I *thought* that the first column was for the first round and the second row was for the second round. — WRONG!

I looked at the first column and saw that I was number 16 in the flight order. I *thought* this was cool. I can take my time getting to the AMA site

because it would take about 2 hours to get to my flight. In the second row I was number 5 in the flight order. Again I *thought* this is good, because it wouldn't be that long of a wait for my second or last flight. — WRONG!

I get to the AMA site about 8:00 am. So I headed over to one of the grass circles and did one practice flight and packed up my gear and headed over to the Lpad having plenty of time before my first flight — I thought.

Advanced Finals		
Contestant	Flight Order	
	Circle 1	Circle 2
Joel Constantino	8	19
Steven Daly	19	8
William Davis	1	16
Enrique Diez	14	3
Gerald Glier	9	17
Bruce Jennings	15	4
John Jordan	17	10
Donald Main	10	14
James Mills	3	20
Dennis Nunes	16	5
Pete Plunkett	6	15
Crist Rigotti	11	9
Michael Schmitt	4	13
David Shorts	5	11
Leonardo Silva	7	12
James Vigani	18	1
Gary Lutz	2	18
William Durr	13	2
Thomas Smeltzer	12	6
Ben Mills	20	7

Top 20 ADVANCED Flight Order

But this is not how the Top 20 is flown. There are no "rounds". The Flight Assignments indicates the order that one is to fly on Circle 1 **and** Circle 2. Both circles start *at the same time*, not one flight and then later in the day the other flight. So I'm 5th up on Circle 2!

When I arrive at the Lpad and started to unload my plane and equipment, Joyce Shorts saw me and said that everyone is looking for me, that I was 5th up. I said, "No I'm 16th" and looked at the Flight Assignment sheet – *and my heart sank*.

Turning to the Dark Side

Part 9 – Flying at the 2021 AMA Nationals

I forgot that the circles started at the same time, they were not flown in rounds. At first I thought I had missed my flight on Circle 2 completely, ending my chances to do well. As I approached the pits someone asked me where my plane was and if I was ready to do a pull test. I said I just got here and needed to get setup. Come to find out they started a little late and were only on the second flyer. I told the pit boss that I was late and that I need to move my car out of the unloading zone. He assured me that I had time to do that and get my plane ready before I needed to fly, which I did.

But by now I was *frazzled* and upset at myself for making such a dumb mistake. I got my lines rolled out and headed over for the pull test and still had one more flyer ahead of me. Now it was time to try and relax, but it was very difficult. Then, I couldn't find Jim, Dave or Brett to launch my plane. Jimby wasn't flying and was helping Dave and Brett with their planes as they were flying at the same time as I was but on different circles. I needed to find someone to launch me and quickly. David Shorts was getting ready for his flight as he was flying at the same as me but on Circle 1 so he couldn't help me.

Steve Hines was standing nearby so I asked him if he could help. Steve had launched my plane on the grass practice circle earlier. A friend of his stepped in and volunteered to launch my plane. I wasn't aware that Steve was dealing with a bad back and had trouble with his legs getting up and down to launch a plane. In fact while launching a plane the day before, he almost fell into the turning prop as his back had locked up and caused him to lose his balanced.

It was time to fly. It was a bit windy, somewhere between 5-8 mph. I put up a flight that was okay but it could have been better. My score of 482.5 put me in second place on Circle 2, 7 points behind James Mills. This was very surprising as I thought my score would not hold up. But Circle 2 was the lower scoring circle with judges with that had very discerning eyes.

After my first flight it was time to regroup and get things together for my second flight on Circle 1 as number 16. Jim came by and asked how I did on my first flight. I told him what had happened. He assured me that he would be here for my second flight. Later Jim recommended that we get Dave to launch me, as it might impress the judges to have a 12-time national champion to do that. I don't think the judges were impressed very much, especially when I grounded the tips of my carbon fiber prop on takeoff. Oh well, it was a good idea.

By now the wind had picked up to around 10-12 mph with gust up to 16 mph. *Circulas 46 IIe* handle the wind much better than I did. When all said and done I scored 506 on my final flight. The only problem is that there were 5 other flyers who flew earlier with the lighter wind conditions and scored better. But for what I've been through, due to my own fault, all was good. My total score of 988.5 was good enough for 4th place and into the Top 5. For me this was quite an accomplishment for my second NATs. I believe I was the only individual flying a *profile* airplane that made it in the Top 20 and into the Top 5. I was very pleased with how *Circulas 46 IIe* performed.

Contestant	Circle 1		Circle 2		Total Score	Place
	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score		
11 Joel Constantino	8	489	19	453.5	942.50	13
13 Steven Daly	19	488	8	469	957	11
14 William Davis	1	510.5	16	469	979.50	5
17 Enrique Diez	14	517.5	3	476	993.50	3
22 Gerald Glier	9	502.5	17	460	962.50	9
33 Bruce Jennings	15	491	4	480.5	971.50	7
34 John Jordan	17	174.5	10	445	619.5	19
39 Donald Main	10	455.5	14	416.5	872	17
45 James Mills	3	510	20	489.5	999.50	2
49 Dennis Nunes	16	506	5	482.5	988.50	4
51 Pete Plunkett	6	498.5	15	445	943.50	12
53 Crist Rigotti	11	493	9	469.5	962.50	10
56 Michael Schmitt	4	515	13	485	1000	1
57 David Shorts	5	445	11	465	910	14
59 Leonardo Silva	7	453	12	485	938	20
66 James Vigani	18	458	1	447	905	15
Gary Lutz	2	514	18	463.5	977.5	6
William Durr	13	503.5	2	461	964.50	8
Thomas Smeltzer	12	432	6	430.5	862.50	18
Ben Mills	20	469.5	7	421.5	891	16

ADVANCED Finals Score

David Shorts did remarkable well for his first NATs and placed 14th for his first Top 20 NATs finish. Well done David!

Turning to the Dark Side

Part 9 – Flying at the 2021 AMA Nationals

My flying at the 2021 NATs had now come to a finish. All the preparation, practice and worrying was done. It was time to relax and enjoy the rest of the “shortened” NATs.

All that was left was the Junior (only one entry), Senior (2 entries), the Top 5 Finals for OPEN and the Walker Cup Fly Off. Remember, everything was compressed into one day. We had just completed the Top 20 ADVANCED Finals and the Top 20 OPEN Semi-Finals around 11:30 am. After a short break, the Top 5 OPEN Finals was to begin around noon with the Walker Cup Fly Off to start shortly thereafter. However because of a computer glitch, it wasn't until about 1:00 pm that things got started. By now the wind was howling, I thought it was somewhere between 18-20 mph with wind gust to 30 mph! But according to Jim Aron, “the wind started at 23 mph with gusts to 30 and about half way through was a steady 26 with gusts to who knows what”. Trust us, it was extremely windy!

The 5 OPEN finalist are to fly 3 rounds with the high score from two of their flights added together to determine their score. While their planes waited in the pits for their flight, they were using anything they could to keep their planes anchored down and from being blown away. Yes, the wind was that strong!

It was truly amazing and mesmerizing to watch these gentlemen fly. They put on a show of a lifetime! You really had to be there to fully experience and appreciate what took place. These conditions made for the ultimate test of their plane, equipment and nerves to say the least.

In the end it was Orestes Hernandez taking the top honor with a score of 1134.83, followed by Paul Walker second with 1134.00, Dave Fitzgerald third with 1127.00, Joe Gilbert fourth with 1108.17 and Joseph Dale fifth with 1056.66. The difference between first and second place was .83 hundredths of a points!

C/L PRECISION AEROBATICS AMA NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS, 2021								
EVENT 322 OPEN FINALS								
CONTESTANT	FLIGHT #1		FLIGHT #2		FLIGHT #3		TOTAL SCORE	PLACE
	FLIGHT ORDER	SCORE	FLIGHT ORDER	SCORE	FLIGHT ORDER	SCORE		
JOSEPH DALY	3	519.33	1	421.17	5	537.93	1056.66	5
DAVID FITZGERALD	5	556.83	3	545.5	1	570.17	1127.00	3
JOE GILBERT	2	554.5	5	544.17	2	553.67	1108.17	4
ORESTES HERNANDEZ	1	568.5	4	554	4	566.33	1134.83	1
PAUL WALKER	4	567.67	2	558.17	3	566.33	1134.00	2

Top 5 OPEN Finals Scores



Top 5 OPEN Finalist (From Left to Right)

Paul Walker – 2nd Place
Joe Gilbert – 4th Place
Orestes Hernandez – 1st Place
Joe Daly – 5th Place
David Fitzgerald – 3rd Place

I didn't get to see much of the Junior or Senior classes flying on Circle 4. But in the Senior event I did see Joe Daly's son, Steven Daly's plane get caught by a gust of wind in the overhead eights and crash, totaling destroying his plane. He was so upset that he dropped his handle and walked off the circle, leaving others to clean up the disaster. It didn't look very good for Steven to do something like that, but I'm sure everyone understood.

All that was left was the Walker Cup Fly Off. Orestes was the only one going to fly, as the Junior and Senior winners choose not to fly because of the horrible conditions. Orestes was required to takeoff and do at least a reverse wingover to make the flight official and capture the Walker Cup. He did a full pattern anyway, I believe this is his third Walker Cup. Congratulations Orestes!

Turning to the Dark Side

Part 9 – Flying at the 2021 AMA Nationals



Senior, OPEN and Junior Champions

To me the 2021 AMA Nationals will go down as one of the more memorable ones, not just for me, but I'm sure for a lot of others. Because of compressing the Top 20 Finals in ADVANCED, the Top 20 Semi-finals in OPEN, The Top 5 Finals, the Walker Cup Fly-off and the Awards Ceremony, all into one day, made for a very long day. Add to that, the blustery windy conditions, made it an experience that won't be soon forgotten.

There is something about trying to "reach for the brass ring" that is exciting when flying at the NATs. Hopefully one day I would like to be able to *grab hold of it* in ADVANCED! In the meantime, I just hope that I can make it back to Muncie and try again.

After the NATs... Because everything concluded on Thursday and my flight back home didn't leave until late Saturday afternoon, I had all day Friday and part of Saturday to do something. I wasn't alone, Dave and Jim were leaving on Sunday morning from the airport. Paul Walker would be headed for home driving some 2000 miles Saturday morning. And Brett would be leaving Friday morning to make the 2400 mile trek back home.

With an unplanned free day, Jim, Dave, Paul and myself decided to spend Friday at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio about 90 miles away. This is a huge museum that is in 5 humongous aircraft hangers! It can take several days to see the entire museum.

It was a pretty neat experience to have Paul, who is a retired structural engineer from Boeing, who worked on the design of some of

the planes. Dave, a pilot for United Airlines, flew some of planes on display. We spent the whole day there and it was worth every minute.



Air Force Museum – In the foreground is the Mercury and Gemini Space Capsule

My Sunday morning was also free. I wanted to go to the Indianapolis 500 Museum, Dave and Jim wanted to go, but didn't want to make the trip to Indianapolis and then have to travel back to their hotel in Muncie just to come back the next day to fly out. So I decided to go by myself. I checked out of my hotel room around 8:00 am and headed for the Indy 500 Museum.



The Borg Warner Indianapolis 500 Trophy

Turning to the Dark Side

Part 9 – Flying at the 2021 AMA Nationals

As a kid I remember when the Indy 500 would be televised by tape delay at around midnight on the West Coast. I wouldn't watch the news or listen to the radios all day long because I didn't want to know who won the Indy 500. In those days I was a fan of Johnny Rutherford and Rick Mears. Ah, the good old days.

It was really worth it as I saw the "cars of my youth" as well as many other Indy race cars. A room dedicated to 4-time Indy winner Rick Mears and all his racing accomplishments was spectacular!



One of Several Rick Mears' Indy Cars

But now it was time to leave the Indy 500 Museum and drive over to the IND airport, which was only a few miles away and head for home.

With this NATs concluding as early as it did, I'm sure it was a little disappointing for everyone not to have the full allotment of qualifying flights. Anyway, if the NATs hadn't been shortened, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to see either the Air Force Museum or the Indianapolis 500 Museum. Just to see these two museums made the even trip better. However, to finishing in 4th place at the 2021 AMA Nationals in ADVANCED was a very special highlight of my trip!

By the way, it was also equally reassuring to have everything work out well on my return flight home from IND to SMF, with no more changes! And to see my daughter at SMF to pick me up? That was the icing on the cake or as they say on the MasterCard commercial – *priceless!*

When all was said and done, I'm reminded of the line in the movie *The Wizard of Oz* . . . "There's no place like home". That is certainly true. What an outstanding trip and experience.

If you ever get the chance to attend and compete in the AMA Nationals – do so. You will meet some great people and for me, it's an adventure that won't be soon forgotten.

Just repeat the phrase, "*I think I can, I think I can...*" – You won't regret it!

Dennis S. Nunes



Me and Circulas 46 IIe after Appearance Judging at the 2021 AMA Nationals

Turning to the Dark Side

Part 9 – Flying at the 2021 AMA Nationals

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