

My Story and I'm Sticking to it

By Dennis S. Nunes

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2025 AMA NATs - Top 5 Orestes Hernandez (bottom center) this years National Champion (Back row – Left to Right) Doug Moon 3rd Place, Dave Fitzgerald 2nd Place, Derek Berry 4th Place, and Joe Daly 5th Place (Photo by Dan Winship)

I can't recall who it was, but someone asked me at this year's NATs, "Are you writing anything that might be coming out soon?" I told them very simply... No. But on my flight back home from the Indianapolis International Airport (IND) to the San Francisco International Airport (SFO), I had a few hours of sitting on a plane with nothing to do and started thinking about all the things that transpired over the past year, especially the last several months. Then it hit me, I think I have some pretty interesting stuff happen and probably should put in down on paper. So here is my story... and I'm sticking to it!

Planning for the NAT's is really a yearlong process. There are things like, trying to figure out who's going, where are we are going to stay, how are we going to get there. One of the biggest question is, how will we get all our planes and equipment to Muncie, Indiana? These are just a few of many issues that we have to contend with. And it seems to change on a weekly basis.

Then, there's the famous words from an interview of the former NBA basketball player Allen Iverson, "*Practice, we're talking about practice*". California has its issues, but one of the benefits of this state is the weather. We can fly year round and do. Practice for the NATs starts in earnest about a month or two before we depart for the NATs. We schedule several "*intense*" practices each week.

Some decided to build a new plane for the NATs. For Brett Buck, Dave Fitzgerald and myself this wasn't an issue, we chose to fly our models from the previous year.

However, there was one individual in our group who wanted to have a new plane for this year's NATS, Jim "Uncle Jimby" Aron. Jimby was working on a unique plane and was on schedule to complete it before the NATs, but problems pop up during the painting of his plane. Sadly, Jimby would later have to make an unexpected trip to Australia to see a very close dear friend who was critically ill. So Jimby would not make it to this year's NATs.

Once we found out the dates of the NATs, figured who was going, how we were getting our planes and equipment back and forth to Muncie, it was time to register for the NATs, book flights and find a place to stay. For the last two years we have booked a 3-bedroom home through Airbnb. Like last year, Chris and Joan Cox, Dave and I (less Jimby) would share the cost of an Airbnb house rental. We wanted to rent the house we used last year that was very convenient and comfortable, but for some strange reason it was not available. After searching for other places, I had an incredibly difficult time trying to find a house to rent. Some of this was due to a Triathlon event that would happen at the same time as the NATs. Most of the homes were taken and the ones that were left were very expensive. So the decision was made to stay at the Comfort Inn in Muncie for the week.

I also needed to book my round trip flight from the SFO to IND. The redeye non-stop flight from SFO to IND, that we took last year, the price when up considerably. It was actually cheaper to take the redeye flight from SFO to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport (ORD) with a connecting flight from ORD to IND. This would entail a 90 minute layover and saving \$150.00 on the flight. It was an easy decision to make. Strangely, the direct, non-stop return flight from IND to SFO was the same price as the IND to ORD to SFO. Strange! (All these acronyms. I hate acronyms, but it sure make typing easier!)

Then, at the end of May I received a phone call that my brother-in-law had died unexpectedly. My wife and I had to make several trips up to Angels Camp, California to deal with this matter. We are still dealing with a few remaining matters. Hopefully this will be over with soon. However, we were able to work around most of this in my preparation for the NATs.

Dave emailed our group to let us know the days he would be off work. These would become our scheduled practice days. It all started on June 13, Dave, Brett Buck and I got together at the Jim Tichy Memorial Flying Field in Napa, California to begin our preparation for this year's NATs.



Our first scheduled NATs practice session at the Napa Field on June 13, 2025

Here's an interesting tidbit, at least for me. It was at the Northwest Regional in Roseburg, Oregon in May that many of us decided to fly each other's plane after the contest. Paul Walker, who did not compete, but was the Event Director, flew David's *Thunder Gazer 3*, Brett flew my *Circulas 61e* and I flew Brett's *Infinity*. Paul was supposed to fly my plane but teardown crew closed down the circles. Good thing, because we probably would have been out there until dark!

When Brett flew my *Circulas 61e* he was impressed on well it flew. He stated that this was the "second best flying electric plane" he had flown. The best being one of Paul Walker's plane. But he also mentioned that the "stick pressure" was a little heavy. Stick pressure? What is that? Brett said it took more effort to input control movement at the control handle than necessary. It wasn't bad, but something he wasn't accustomed to. He wanted me to fly his *Infinity* so I could feel the difference. So I did.

We place Brett's plane in the circle, I'm on the handle and Brett is starting his engine while Dave launches the plane. This is the first time that I had the privilege of flying Brett's Ro-Jett powered plane. Hopefully he couldn't see me shaking in my shoes some 70 feet away. But off it roars. It was loud, but very smooth. I decided to do a couple of lazy eights and some loops to get a feel for the controls. It was so, so sweet. Just a light flick of the wrist and the *Infinity* rolled over with ease (like our Chiweenie, a mix between a Chihuahua and a Dachshund) does when she wants her belly rubbed) and yet was extremely stable. I fell in love with this plane and started to do a full pattern. Now I knew and had positive feedback on what Brett meant about "stick pressure." I proceed to level off, the motor quits and I was gliding in to make the landing. But for some reason, the plane floated on me a little too much and was brought down with a hard landing. Oops, not what I had planned on doing! Thankfully there was no damage and Brett forgave me. But what an experience!

So I asked Dave on our way back home, “*What would I need to do in order to reduce the stick pressure?*” He said, “*It was a matter of moving the C/G back, reducing the elevator throw and/or increase the flap throw, adjusting the line spacing at the handle and/or moving the leadouts.*” That’s all?

All these changes were very easy to make. It didn’t require any structural changes to my plane. To change the C/G, it was a matter of moving the battery pack back, which I had plenty of room to do this. I had access to my elevator control horn and could reduce the movement of the elevators. I had several holes in my hard-point handle to adjust the spacing of the lines. And if needed, I can move my leadouts around.

June 13: I started the process of reducing the stick pressure. I started with moving the C/G back $\frac{1}{4}$ ". The plane was still very stable and flew well even as the wind increased. I could feel that the stick pressure was reduced greatly. I flew the plane all day and liked what I was feeling.

June 16: Dave and I were back at the Napa flying field. I reduced the elevator throw at the elevator horn. This lead to a sharp, crisp cornering that exited the corners very cleanly. The stick pressure was reduced a little bit more. The leadout location was fine. My plane was flying really well.

June 22: We adjusted some of the Fiorotti timer setting by reducing the lower RPM setting to slow the plane down on the decent. This work very well too.

June 26: Dave and I were to get together again in Napa. However, about an hour into my drive to Napa, my car’s engine light came on and I started to lose power. Apparently the engine went into what is called “limp mode” and I had to get off the single lane highway. It was not looking good. I eventually had to call AAA and have the car towed back to the Kia dealer in Stockton. Dave would have to practice by himself, which he does from time to time.

When my car and I arrived at the Kia dealership, they were very busy. I was told they would try and get a look at the car on Friday, June 27 but more than likely, it wouldn’t be until Monday June 30. — NUTS!

Once they got to it, it was discovered that the engine spun a main crankshaft bearing and that the engine would need to be replaced. BUMMER! I ended up renting a Nissan RAV 4 for a couple of days, until I had to leave for Muncie which allowed me to make our last scheduled practice session and deliver my plane and equipment to Brett’s place the next day.

My Kia had 120,000 miles on it. I purchased this car brand new in 2013. The car came with a 100,000 miles 10 year warranty on the engine and drivetrain which was exceeded. However, the good news was, Kia issued a recall notice about two years after I purchased the car. Many of the engines put together at that time were failing due to metal filing found in the engine during the engine assembly. So rather than replace everyone’s engine, they gave all the owners a life-time engine warranty. The result — *Kia would replace my engine at no charge!*

But of course, the dealer “*recommended*” that I replace some parts that was not covered by the engine warranty. These were parts that Kia considers “*maintenance items*” and are not part of the warranty. Things like, motor mount, timing sensor, belts, hoses, etc. I was also overdue for a transmission service. I gave them the OK to do that and replace all the maintenance items.

The young lady at the service department who was handling my case was fantastic. She kept me well informed and said the car would be ready on Friday, July 11. I explained to her that I was to leave for Muncie on July 5 and wouldn't be back until Saturday, July 12. So I asked if it would be acceptable if I picked up my car when I returned from Muncie on the following Monday, July 14. Not a problem, my car would be ready and it was.

July 1: This was our last scheduled practice session before leaving for Muncie. At our previous practice session, Dave noticed that my plane appeared to be losing line tension across the top at the third corner of the outside square maneuvers. He recommended that I add just a half turn of the quick link on my adjustable rudder to get bit more rudder offset. I made that adjustment prior to this practice session. The plane flew extremely well with nice line tension at that corner of the square maneuvers. Several more practice flights and we were done. The plane was alive and flying better than ever, *with less stick pressure!* It was time to deliver our planes and equipment to Brett's place the next day for the 3-day 2,400 mile journey to Muncie, Indiana.

Getting to Muncie – Plan A

The original plan was to deliver our planes and equipment to Brett's place on Wednesday, July 2 around 2:00 pm. Brett would leave early Thursday morning to make the 2,400 mile drive and meet us at the Comfort Inn in Muncie on Saturday evening. I would drive to Dave house in Napa very early Saturday morning and leave my car there. The two of us would travel together and use his employee parking space at SFO (in case you don't know, Dave is a pilot for United Airlines) and fly together to IND. Once we arrived at IND, we would pick up the rented minivan and drive to Muncie. When the NATs ended, on our return flight, we would fly back to SFO, then head back to Napa where I would get in my car and drive back home to Stockton. That was the original plan.

Our departure flight would leave SFO at 5:00 AM PST and arrive at our first stop in ORD at 11:27 AM CST. We would catch a connecting flight from ORD to IND that took off at 1:05 PM CST and landed at IND at 3:18 PM EST. From the West Coast there are 3 time zone changes we go through to get to Muncie. All these changes can drive you crazy when traveling!

Getting to Muncie – Plan B

However, Dave informed me that he had something come up. Upon landing at SFO on our return flight, he wasn't heading back to Napa where my car would be waiting. So I had to make other arrangements to get to and from SFO. So Plan 2 was put into operation. For this plan, I would drive to Jimby home in El Cerritos, California and leave my car at his place. Dave would make a brief detour and pick me up at Jimby's house at 3:00 AM PST, as it's on the way to SFO. From there, we would ride together and to get to SFO. On the return flight back to SFO, Jimby would pick me up a week later at the airport, on Saturday morning and take me back to his place where I would drive home from there. This was a solid plan until...

That is until the engine in my car decided not to cooperate with this plan. As a result Plan B was toast.

Getting to Muncie – Plan C

So now I am without a vehicle. We have one more scheduled practice day in Napa, plus I needed to deliver my plane and equipment to Brett's place in Sunnyvale, California on Wednesday, July 2.

Because of having the lifetime engine warranty, Kia would either provide me a loaner car, which of course they were out of, or Kia would reimburse me up to \$40 a day for a rental car. So I rented a nice Nissan RAV4 to make it to our last scheduled practice day and deliver my stuff to Brett the following day.

For this plan, I was able to talk my daughter into driving me to SFO at 1:30 in the morning. Then pick me up when I got back the following Saturday. I didn't need the rental car after delivering my stuff to Brett. So after delivering my stuff, I turned the rental car in later that afternoon. No need to keep the rental car as I would be in Muncie the rest of the time. Plan C was implemented with a slight modification. Read on...

Saturday July 5:

Dave and I were scheduled to meet at SFO in the early morning hours. At 3:02 AM PST, my daughter dropped me off at SFO. I texted Dave letting him know that I made it and he responded with a big thumbs up. I get through the security check point and I'm on my way to Gate D9 for our departing flight. I get to the gate and there is no sign of Dave. No big deal, he's a big boy, I'm sure he can find his way. At 4:30 AM PST, we start boarding the plane and still no Dave. For some strange reason, this brought back memories of Cheech and Chong's bit, ["Dave's Not Here"](#).

I'm now in my seat near the back of the plane and walking down the aisle comes Dave. He ask, "What are you doing back here?" I told him that I had to buy a real ticket and sit with the regular people. He laughed and then said, "I'm seated in 1st class, and I need to

get back to my seat. I'll see you in Chicago." Talk about rubbing it in! Oh well, at least I had the whole row to myself as the flight was not full. So off to Chicago we go!

Our connecting flight from ORD to IND is completely full. When I say full, I mean full! Dave is now in a precarious situation as he doesn't have a seat for this flight. When Dave flies, he can get on any flight — *if a seat is available*. Even if all the seats are taken, he can, if necessary, take the "jump seat" in the cockpit — *if it's available*. Well this flight was full and someone else was assigned the jump seat. So Dave is put on standby, waiting. If someone doesn't show up for their flight he can get their seat. But just in case, he starts eagerly searching on his phone for another flight that will get him to IND. I laughed, until I found out that I may need to wait at IND until Dave arrives, which could be hours! Finally, he gets the news that a seat is available. Then I laughed again because it wasn't in 1st class. He had to sit in the cheap seats with us regular people!

We arrive on time in IND. We head down to the car rental area where Dave rented a minivan from Avis for the week. It was a nice looking black 2025 Chrysler Pacifica. We inspect the minivan for damage before heading out. As we were looking over the minivan, though we didn't find any damage, we noticed the outside of the minivan was not washed. The front end and the windshield was covered in dead bugs. Then, a few days later, a warning light comes on indicating that it's time for an oil change. Also, when we learned that the middle seats collapse into the floorboard, when Dave went to collapse one of the seats, the latch was broken. Dave was able to eventually get the seat to collapse using a screwdriver and it remained that way even when we returned the minivan back at the airport. Dave was going to leave a 'not-so-kind' review. Anyway, the minivan worked and drove very well in spite of these issues.

Later that evening, Brett would meet us at the Comfort Inn in Muncie. We unload all our planes and equipment out of Brett's minivan. We look around for a luggage cart to haul our equipment up to our room on the 3rd floor and none was to be found. We asked the lady at the reception desk if there were any available. She said that they only have one cart and didn't know where it was located. After waiting about 20 minutes, she found the cart and we were able to bring our stuff up to our room. The next thing you know, we are rearranging the furniture to make room for planes, equipment and luggage. It's tight, but we got everything in its place.

Dave and I would head out to dinner while Brett checked into the Hampton Inn across the street. Brett had a bad experience at the Comfort Inn last year. He had collected points that allowed him to stay at the Hampton Inn. After a long day driving he was in for the night. After dinner, Dave and I assembled our planes and got them ready for an early practice session on the L-Pad the next morning. I was off to bed shortly thereafter. Dave is still amazed on how fast I fall asleep with the TV blasting and the lights on.

Sunday July 6:

After a very good night's sleep, we got up early and had breakfast at the hotel. Then off we go to the L-Pad for some practice. I put up four practice flights and the plane was flying fine. There are a couple of adjustments we normally make to our planes due to the altitude and air density at Muncie, which is different from our home field in California.

After my first practice flight, Brett ask, "*Did you make the line spacing adjustment on your handle?*" I replied, "*No, it feels pretty good where it's at.*" Both Brett and Dave know that I need to make this adjustment and have a way of making me feel guilty, convincing me to make changes when I don't feel comfortable in doing so. So without telling Brett, I adjusted my handle spacing, moving both lines out to the next set of holes. The plane responds very well to the adjustment. SWEET! Back in the pits, with Brett within earshot, I yell out to Dave, "Don't tell Brett, but the line spacing adjustment worked really well!" We all had a good laugh.

Later Dave and I go to the farmhouse to officially check in for the NATs. We pick up our 'goodie bag' and talk to Yolanda for a bit, thanking her for all the hard work she does not just for our event, but the entire NATs.

I can't recall but I think it was too windy to fly that evening, so there was no more practice for the day.

Monday July 7:

This is a short practice day. Appearance Judging takes place later that afternoon at 3:00 at the gymnasium at Union Chapel, formerly known as the One Eighty building. After practice, we get some lunch and head back to our hotel room to "*spit shine*" our planes and get them ready. If you never been to the NATs, Appearance Judging is awesome. All these beautiful model airplanes in one location is a site to behold.

Once the gymnasium doors are opened, each plane is registered and weighed. Then they are given to the staff and we are asked to leave the gymnasium and enter another room for the Pilot's Meeting that will take place shortly. Bob McDonald was scheduled to be one of the appearance judges, but could not make it. The appearance judges for this year was done by Paul Walker, Bob Hunt and Mark Weiss.

At the Pilot's Meeting, roll call is taken to see who's there and if their registration information is correct. After a brief explanation of what will take place, the flight order is made using the magical program by Howard Rush. Everyone is on edge to see which circle assignment they received and who is in their qualifying group. This is later printed out for all to have. At the completion of the Pilot's Meeting, everyone one is waiting for the gymnasium door to open once the appearance judging is complete. It seems like it took forever, but eventually the doors are opened. Finally the moment is here and everyone files in to the gymnasium in a calm and orderly manner looking for which row

their plane lies. Who's on the front row? Would there be a 20-points awarded? Sorry, no 20-point planes this year.

It's a great opportunity to look over all the planes close up. Each pilot is given a ballot to vote for a plane for the prestigious – *Concours d'Elegance*. This year it was awarded to *Don Jenkins and his beautiful Vertigo II*. Congratulations Don!

Those of us from the West Coast did well. Chris Cox led the way (though from Western Canada, we still consider him to part of the West Coast contingent) with 19 points, Dave Fitzgerald and Tim Just each received 18 points. And Brett and I receiving 17 points each. I was thrilled to see that my *Circulas 61e* made it up to the 17 point row! This was a good improvement over last year, where I'd received 15 points.



Many of the planes waiting for the gymnasium doors to open for Appearance Judging



More planes waiting for the gymnasium doors to open for Appearance Judging.



All the planes laid out by rows after Appearance Judging is complete.



Concours d'Elegance Award Winner – Don Jenkins beautiful Vertigo II

Tuesday July 7 (Day 1 of Qualifying):

Today is Day 1 of qualifying. Each competitor has the opportunity to put in two flights on the same circle. Dave and I get up early, head to McDonalds for breakfast so that we can be on the L-Pad in order to get in a practice before the competition begins. No one is allowed to fly before 7:00 AM. The competition begins at 8:00. I am there, first in line, ready for my practice flight. Seven o'clock comes and I'm putting in my arming plug, press the start button and head out to my handle. Everything goes as planned. The motor startup and away I go. Takeoff is good, level flight is fine. I pull up into the reverse wingover and snap the handle to go inverted. There's this pop and the next thing I see is my long top access hatch jettison my plane and dives into the asphalt. I level off inverted, make a couple of inverted laps, and then make a half loop to get the plane upright. Everything seems fine and I fly level for the rest of the flight.

While flying level, the thought hits me, "*Did I bolt down the top hatch?*" I know I did, but for a brief moment I wasn't sure. The motor shut off and I land. Dave had picked up the top hatch and said that the hatch broke off. Whew! It would have been very embarrassing if I had not bolted the hatch down. The hatch had broken completely free from the hold-down bolts, with the bolts still in place. In looking at the hatch, the front of the hatch was the damaged, but not too severely, along with a little damage to the rear hold-down attachment.

Now it's time to fix the problem and get ready for my first qualifying flight. I was 6th up in the flight order so we had some time for a make-shift repair. Dave, Brett and I accessed the situation and it was decided that we would put in a fresh battery, put the hatch in place and tape the hatch at the front and back ends on to the fuselage with several passes of tape around the entire fuselage. Brett come by with a fresh roll of transparent tape.



The make-shift repair prior to my first qualifying flight.

At this point, I'm not too concerned about how it looks. I just want the hatch to stay on for my first qualifying flight. Dave comes by to check on me and to see how everything is going and that I'm alright. He wants to make sure that I focus on my qualifying flight

and not focus on the damage to the top hatch. The repair is made and it's time to focus on my flight.

I'm reminded of my first NATs back in 2020 when Brett mentioned to me, "*Strange thing can happen at the NATS, and does.*" Last year I had an electrical issue that caused the motor to quit while I was inverted during a practice flight, I bounced the plane off the asphalt about two feet just shy of the grass area. I ended up breaking my prop, scratching the clear canopy and reducing the height of my rudder. All this just before appearance judging. This year, the top hatch decides to go solo on its own. The only bright side to this was, (1) it happened *after* appearance judging and (2) it didn't happen during my official flight. Go figure...

It's time for my first qualifying flight. Would my hatch stay on? I put in a pretty decent flight considering the situation. I had a score of 550, behind Brett Buck's 563 and Kenny Stevens' 550.5 who were in my group. After a short break, it's time for Round 2. I removed the tape very carefully, replaced the battery with a fresh one, and tape the hatch down once again. For my second flight I didn't improve my score with only a 539. So my first flight would be my high score used on Day 1.

Brett, did well and so did Dave who was in another group. Day 1 was done. Later that afternoon, at 3:00 was the PAMPA membership meeting held at the AMA Headquarters' building.

After the round, Dave and I went back to our hotel room to see what we could do to fix the hatch cover. We scrounge around for some balsa, CA and 5-minute epoxy. After a couple of hours the repair was made and we could bolt that hatch back on to the fuselage. Once the repair work was done, we headed off to the PAMPA meeting, knowing we were about 30 minutes late. Sorry Mark Weiss.

Later that evening, Brett and Dave wanted to put in a few practice flights. I on the other hand was spent with all the days' drama and chose not to fly. Dave and Brett thought I should have done at least one practice flight to see if the repair would hold up. I felt pretty confident that the repair would hold. But just in case, I would add a strip of tape to front and back of the hatch after the battery was installed.

Wednesday July 8 (Day 2 of Qualifying):

We repeat the same activity as we did on Day 1. We arrive at the L-Pad and head over to Circle 2 where Dave and I put in a practice flight. The hatch stay put for the entire flight with no issues. I remove the tape, install a fresh battery and tape the top hatch to the fuselage again. It's time to get focused on my first flight. For this round I flew decently and posted a score of 557.5, which was good, but not great. Brett led the round with a 578, followed by Kenny Stevens with a 569.

For my second flight, the stars and moon must have been aligned, as I posted a score of 575.5! This was 2 point behind Brett's flight of 577.5 and 1.5 points ahead of Kenny Stevens' flight of 574. Kenny came up to me before I had a chance to look at the

scoresheets and said, *“You put up a monster flight!”* When I saw my score I was totally shocked. That was my highest score ever at the NATs. At this point I’m ecstatic and astonished. It’s difficult to keep my composure and try to remain cool, calm and collected. As a result, I qualified for this year’s Top 20 Semi-finals in my group. All of us from the West Coast made into the Top 20, including of Brett Buck, Dave Fitzgerald, Tim Just, Chris Cox and myself.

C/L Precision Aerobatics AMA National Championships, 2025										
Event 322 (Open) Qualifications										
Contestant	Tuesday, Circle 4				Wednesday, Circle 2				Total Score	Place
	Round 1		Round 2		Round 1		Round 2		Best score from day 1 + best score from day 2	
	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score		
Dan Banjock	8	534.00	1	533.00	4	525.00	4	527.00	1061.00	26
Brett Buck	5	563.00	4	564.50	3	578.00	3	577.50	1142.50	Q
Gene Martine	1	512.00	2	529.50	6	539.00	1	535.00	1068.50	Q
Jose Modesto	3	523.00	7	546.00	2	535.50	6	550.00	1096.00	Q
Dennis Nunes	6	550.00	3	539.00	1	557.50	8	575.50	1125.50	Q
John Saunders	7	527.50	5	523.50	8	523.50	5	535.50	1063.00	25
Wayne N. Smith	4	524.00	6	517.50	7	513.00	7	542.50	1066.50	24
Kenny Stevens	2	550.50	8	561.50	5	569.00	2	574.00	1135.50	Q

Afterwards, we head over to the Sunshine Café to get something to eat. I felt so good that I decided to buy lunch for Dave and Brett as a small jester of my appreciation for all their help, their coaching and their assistance. But we’re not done...

Thursday July 9 (Top 20 Day):

It’s Top 20 Day and the L-Pad is very active as most are putting a practice flight before competition begins. For Top 20 Day we fly simultaneously on Circle 3 & 4 with a break after the 10th flight on each circle. I flew ok, but not great.

In the end, Dave is the only one from our contingent who qualifies for the Top 5 Finals. Chris Cox finishes in 6th place, just missing the Top 5 by 3 points. Brett takes 8th place and Tim Just is in 11th place.

In walking up to the scoresheet, Paul Walker passes by me and said, *“You and Tim are tied!”* What? No way. I go to look at the scoresheet and just as I get there, Frank Williams is writing the number 10 in the column for the places on the scoresheet, but there is quite a crowd in front of me and I can’t see who it’s for. As the crowd thins out, I make my way up to the scoresheet. The 10th place finisher is none other than me! UNBELIEVABLE!

Jose Modesto comes up to congratulate me and says something like, *“You’re a competitor! What you had happen to you and fly as well as you did, you’re an animal.”* I had a good laugh. It was an unbelievable feeling, my first top 10 finish at the NATs!

Then I looked to see who finished 11th. It was none other than my good friend, Tim Just. Tim missed out on 10th place by a measly ½ point. So close, yet so far.

Tim and I talk on the phone about every other day or so. To use the words of his late dear friend Rob Holland, *'We try to fly better than we did the day before.'* We pull for each other, he's tries to beat me, just as much as I try to beat him. It is a friendly rivalry that has been going on for years now. Today, just happened to be my day.

For those who may remember, last year Tim finished in 15th place and I went on to finish in 17th. This was the first time either of us qualified for the Top 20. Tim went on to win the Rookie of the Year award. In looking back, I still get chills up my spine when I think of what the two of us have accomplished through the years. It's been a fantastic time.



'Big Daffy' given to me by Tim Just at the of the 2024 NATs

C/L Precision Aerobatics AMA National Championships, 2025

Event 322 (Open) Semifinals

Contestant	Circle 3		Circle 4		Total Score	Place
	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score		
Orestes Hernandez	17	582.00	9	595.00	1177.00	Q
David Fitzgerald	1	570.67	11	595.00	1165.67	Q
Derek Barry	5	575.00	15	584.50	1159.50	Q
Joseph Daly	20	565.33	5	587.50	1152.83	Q
Doug Moon	6	564.33	19	585.50	1149.83	Q
Chris Cox	7	576.33	14	570.50	1146.83	6
Kenny Stevens	14	567.33	7	578.00	1145.33	7
Brett Buck	13	566.00	2	575.00	1141.00	8
Mike Palko	3	544.00	16	577.00	1121.00	9
Dennis Nunes	8	556.67	20	559.50	1116.17	10
Tim Just	2	558.67	13	557.00	1115.67	11
Steve Moon	11	557.33	4	555.50	1112.83	12
Gene Martine	19	546.67	8	560.00	1106.67	13
Matt Neumann	10	555.00	17	542.00	1097.00	14
Jose Modesto	15	542.67	3	552.00	1094.67	15
Eric Taylor	12	543.33	10	544.50	1087.83	16
Craig Gunder	16	539.33	6	543.50	1082.83	17
David Tribble	9	548.67	12	525.00	1073.67	18
Tim Stagg	4	532.00	18	537.50	1069.50	19
Joe Gilbert	18	0	1	570.00	570	20

Friday July 10 (Finals):

Even though I'm walking with my head in the clouds and basking in the sun with my 10th place finish, flying at the NATs is over for me. Dave is in the Finals, along with Orestes Hernandez, Derek Barry, Joe Daly and Doug Moon. This will be followed by the Walker Cup Flyoff.

These gentlemen put on a fantastic show with some of the best flying you will ever see. Brett and I are there to support Dave in any way we can. It's been a long, hard week and it's about to come to an end.

Dave fly's very well and after the second round, Dave is 0.51 points behind Orestes. On the last round Orestes solidifies his lead with a 588.33 to Dave's 582.50. Orestes is our Open Champion for 2025. Dave is 2nd, followed by Doug Moon 3rd, Derek Barry 4th and Joe Daly 5th.

C/L Precision Aerobatics AMA National Championships, 2025								
Event 322 Open Finals								
Contestant	Flight 1		Flight 2		Flight 3		Total Score	Place
	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score		
Orestes Hernandez	3	585.17	1	591.17	5	589.33	1180.50	1
David Fitzgerald	5	587.50	3	588.33	1	582.50	1175.83	2
Doug Moon	1	571.17	4	584.00	4	587.67	1171.67	3
Derek Barry	2	581.83	5	582.33	2	588.67	1171.00	4
Joseph Daly	4	567.83	2	572.33	3	573.17	1145.50	5

Junior/Senior Finals:

For the Junior Champion, there was only one entry, 9-year old Wesley Smith. This young man had his hand full, literally. Because of his physical size, he flew his plane that was almost the same size as him, with two hands on the handle! Everyone was very impressed with Wesley flying and calm cool demeanor. Well done Wesley!

For our Senior Champion, this year it was duel between Gabriel Alimov and Angstrom Eberenz with Gabriel taking 1st place honors. Gabriel will be a force to contend with when it becomes time to move up to the Open class. Nice flying Gabriel!

**C/L Precision Aerobatics
AMA National Championships, 2025
Event 322 Junior**

Place	Contestant	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Total
1	Wesley Smith	386.33	0	0	386.33

**C/L Precision Aerobatics
AMA National Championships, 2025
Event 322 Senior**

Place	Contestant	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Total
1	Gabriel Alimov	565.33	564.67	566.33	1131.67
2	Angstrom Eberenz	479.33	502.00	494.67	996.67

Walker Cup Flyoff:

After a break, it was time for the Walker Cup Flyoff, the last of all the flying. This was between Orestes the Open Champion, Gabriel Alimov the Senior Champion and Wesley Smith the Junior Champion. The flying conditions started to deteriorate quickly as the wind was become very strong.

After two rounds, Orestes had a sizable 90 point lead. Gabriel was the only one who chose to fly the third round. Though he improved his score, it wasn't near enough to catch Orestes. Orestes was the Walker Cup Flyoff winner. Congrats Orestes!

C/L Precision Aerobatics AMA National Championships, 2025 Event 322 Walker Cup Flyoff									
Contestant		Flight 1		Flight 2		Flight 3		Total Score	Place
		Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score	Flight Order	Score		
Open Champion	Orestes Hernandez	3	574.60	1	572.00	2	0	1146.60	1
Senior Champion	Gabriel Alimov	1	525.00	2	530.80	3	541.60	1072.40	2
Junior Champion	Wesley Smith	2	304.20	3	343.00	1	0	647.20	3

The 2025 NATs comes to and end:

Well, with a look back over the week's activity, I would say that we probably had the best weather, along with some of the strangest weather conditions in recent years. From sunshine with mild temperatures and humidity, to a light short shower on one day. Then there was the heavy fog one morning where you literally could not see the other side of the circle, causing a slight delay. This reminded me of our winters in Stockton, California where we have zero visibility fog for weeks on end. The wind pretty much cooperated the majority of the time, from dead calm to light wind that was very mild and pleasant... Until the end of the last day.

The NATs was run very well, in spite of some last minute changes in staff. Congratulations and thanks to Frank William and John Paris for stepping in at the 11-hour and make the 2025 NATs a memorable one. Thank you for all the volunteers and those who helped out. We couldn't have a NAT's if wasn't for all these hardworking people. THANK YOU!

It was great to see so many faces. Some of them I only get to see once a year. What a special group of people! It seems like each NATs becomes more and more memorable. For me, to place in the top 10 for the first time is unbelievable. For this year's NATS, it will one that I remember for a long time.

Oh, remember “**Plan C**” on how I would get back and forth from SFO? My daughter dropped me off at SFO as planned with no problems. However, a few days later her car decided to act up and she didn't feel comfortable enough to drive it to SFO to pick me up. She texted me saying, Joey, my grandson, would drive to SFO to pick me up. He's 19 years old, has his own car. He's been driving for almost 2 years. To say I'm a little concerned, is an understatement. I've never been in his car since he's been driving. Needless to say, I soon discover that he drives better than my daughter!

He picks me up and we are headed back home. But before going home we stop off at the Black Bear Diner for breakfast in Tracy, California. As we pull into Stockton, I have him stop at a gas station and buy him a tankful of gas. How many 19 year olds do you know that turns down food and gas? He is very grateful and so am I. Then off to home. My grandson did a fantastic job and I'm very proud of him!

Well, that it for the 2025 NATS. I hope you enjoyed my story — and I'm sticking to it! Now it's time to start planning for next year...



*Receiving the 10th Place Award
at the 2025 NATs*