

# Cobb Hobby's Purdy Combines Country Living With Nationwide R/C Business

■ When we asked a friend how to get to Cobb Hobby Mfg. Co. plant in Georgia he replied, "Well, you turn off the super-highway in Marietta onto a two lane concrete highway; go along that for awhile and then you are on two-lane blacktop. Then you turn west on a narrower blacktop road and after that you come to a dirt road through the woods—at the end of that you'll find Cobb Hobby". While we found this literally to be true, the concern isn't really as isolated as it may sound.

Len Purdy, now sole owner of Cobb Hobby, got his start in modeling back in 1932 at the age of 11 when he designed and built his first rubber stick plane. That one must have been a success because he has been building them ever since. Not long after this he began constructing scale models and won his first competition trophy with a low wing non-flying job. At that time his family was living in Red Bank, N. J., but soon after moved to Hampton, Va. There Purdy became interested in free flight gas planes (he also built a few F/F rubber models) and flew an original gassie at the 1939 Nats; it had a radical 75% stab—didn't place.

While living in Virginia, Len flew with such famed modelers as Woody (National Champ) Blanchard and Dick (Way Out West) Everett; one of his prized possessions is a trophy with several names on it including his own and Everett's, this being for Class B gas hydro models.

During high school and college and throughout the war Purdy built and flew models. In college he turned his abilities to a more lucrative field—architectural models. A good many of these were produced, including several for Sears Roebuck stores. One was a layout for the entire Cleveland branch of the NACA (now NASA).

Upon leaving college Purdy went to work for the NACA, says his hiring was entirely due to his being an accomplished model builder. While at NACA he worked in the "prop shop", also built flutter and strain models. Many of his co-workers of that period are still there or in industry in various technical and engineering jobs. Purdy enlisted in the A.A.F. while still at NACA, spent the war years as a B-26 pilot and twin-engine plane instructor.

Upon leaving the service he went to work for Lockheed at their Georgia plant as a tool designer. Most of his work was on the C-130 Hercules turbo-prop cargo plane; when he left Lockheed he was a Tool Design Supervisor. While at Lockheed Purdy took the plunge into R/C—he bought an Aero-Trol outfit. He remembers his first transmitter was built into a bread box—to hold the large batteries then in vogue—and his first radio plane was a Brigadier. During a stay at the Lockheed plant in California, Purdy spent his spare time designing an escape-



Len Purdy is former Hampton, Va., air modeler. Flew with national champion Woody Blanchard and AM's Everett.

ment, as there was nothing on the market that would do what he required; he wanted one that could be used to control both rudder and elevator. Back home in Georgia he started making these escapements, which had a plate cam, utilizing the facilities of a friend who had an extensive machine shop.

This was the start of Ectron Products Co. (Smyrna, Ga.), which was formed with four partners, all of them working at the time for Lockheed. Several of the group were model builders. This was strictly a spare time operation, with the units cellar-made and sold mainly mail order. Since the escapement took a rather tricky keying sequence (it could be keyed by pushbutton, but it was an art to do this properly) Purdy designed a "Pilot Control" unit to go with it. This spring-driven keyer was one of the first products of Ectron, and it is still a very good seller—will probably always have to be kept in the line.

Next came the Selector-4, designed to control a rudder, and to provide selective operation of a motor-driven servo for the elevator. The Slimline servo was designed and marketed especially to use in this control system.

Meantime Len had left Lockheed and gone to work for Scripto, where he was involved in the design of production and inspection machines. In the mid-50's he left this concern and went into R/C full time, using a rented building in Powder Springs, Ga. He had bought out his Ectron partners and changed the firm name to Cobb Hobby Mfg. Co., the first word of the name coming from Cobb County, Ga., where the firm was located. He designed and built his home near Powder Springs, his main helper on this big project being young Charles Grindle. They did every bit of the work on the rather large house except the outer brickwork; when this point of the construction was reached, winter was coming on, and Purdy felt it was wise to hire a contractor to hasten the finishing of the house. (Grindle is now Vice Pres. and Production Foreman at Cobb Hobby.)

Not too long after, the present plant was built on Len's own land (in what is known locally as the "Lost Mountain community"). Purdy is proud of the

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fact that this is an "integrated" plant—practically everything (except such small parts as nuts and bolts) that go into his products are made right in his own shop.

The "Electro" control units were all motor driven, but gave the same type of operation as various sorts of escape-ments—there was an SN or self-neutralizing unit, a Compound and a 3-position type. These were replaced by the present line of "Micro" servos. The latter all have plastic cases, and to facilitate production of these, a plastic molding machine was added to shop equipment. All dies for this molding work are made right on the premises (Purdy makes

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them himself). One of the early users of printed circuit plates for escapement switching, these are also a "home grown" product. Cobb Hobby does a moderate amount of contract work for outside uses, much of it in the printed circuit field.

One of the late editions to the Cobb Hobby line was the Micro Controller, an electric-motor driven stick box that can be used to put the Micro 4 through its paces; it was originally felt that the Controller would completely displace the old Pilot Control from the line, but as we've noted, the latter goes right on selling.

Though he lives in the mountains, Purdy is fortunate in having nearby a field large enough for test flying his many products. Not too much farther away is an airport where he keeps a Taylorcraft, used as a company plane for distant business trips.

Holder of quite a few patents in the field, Purdy has many innovations to his credit, including those P.C. plates (first used in the Pilot Control box), an electric brake for fast and accurate escapement and servo positioning, the "back-up" type of motor switch (utilized in the new BC servo), production of the first escapement that allowed simultaneous rudder and elevator control.

Cobb Hobby is not resting upon past laurels...many new developments are on the way. Among them is a very lightweight servo named the "Ouncer", intended especially for very small sized multi planes; it will weigh about 1.3 oz., work on 1.2 to 1.5 volts. To make this possible, Purdy has designed his own electric motor and will soon be in production on them. Also coming is a new

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type of control box, intended for use with reed equipment, but which provides many of the advantages of proportional control; it will allow 1/4, 1/2 or full control movement at will.

As we've noted, Ectron was originally a mail order operation, then came sales to a few hobby shops and R/C concerns. The first sale to a hobby jobber was to Leitzsey Model Distributors in South Carolina, and now most of the jobbers in the country handle the Cobb Hobby line. There are also very active jobber outlets in Canada, Germany, England and South America. You'll find Cobb Hobby items listed in the catalog of every R/C specialist in the country; they are sold in many hobby shops. Quite an advance from the days when you could only get the Electron units direct from the maker—and only then when the maker could spare the time from his full-time job to produce what you wanted!

## Air Youth Meet

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to serve as officials. Write to the A.M.A. for names of nearby contest directors. If you are starting from scratch with a group of men who are not familiar with modeling or contest flying, don't wait until one hour before contest time to brief them on their duties. Try to arrange a dry run flying session sometime preceding the contest. Then your "new man" officials can familiarize themselves with handling the stopwatch, scoring contest forms and their other duties. You may also wish to call on nearby clubs for help in the official department.

Whoever acts as officials and timers