

PEAK OF FLIGHT

N E W S L E T T E R

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Dr. Zooch Rockets: Igniting a Fire for Rockets and History



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PEAK OF FLIGHT

Dr. Zooch Rockets: Igniting a Fire For Rockets and History

By Carter Askren

"It's a niche market; I'm the only guy who sells an Apollo 5 rocket," declares Dr. Zooch Rockets founder Wes Oleszewski, as he helped an elementary schooler stuff "dog barf"—paper insulation—into a rocket's airframe tube at the 2014 Red Glare rocket festival. The annual event is sponsored by the Maryland and Delaware Rocketry Association (MDRA - www.mdrocketry.org).

Mr. Oleszewski offers his vending booth as a staging area for the rockets MDRA loans youth as part of its strategy to cultivate interest in rocketry. Are you a kid new to rocketry and don't have a rocket on launch day, but feel inspired to fly one? No problem—the MDRA will loan you a rocket, insulation, engine, and igniter free of charge. In the meantime, you can peruse the several Dr. Zooch rocket kits Oleszewski sells interested rocketeers.

"My kits are for BARs—Born Again Rocketeers—people who have reawakened their childhood interest in rockets," Oleszewski said. As part of reaching that market, the majority of Dr. Zooch kits are modeled after the historic U.S. Space program rockets—Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, and the Space Shuttle—as well as famous Soviet rockets such as Sputnik, Vostok, Luna, and Soyuz. Oleszewski's highest selling rocket is none other than the historic Saturn V, comprising 80% of his sales.

"I like Wes's kits because they're innovative, well-done, great flyers, and they model subjects that most other rocket companies either have never offered, or haven't produced in decades, or which are only available in high power versions costing hundreds of dollars," says Jeff Roberts, a self-described BAR who also serves as one of Oleszewski's beta-builders who test the new models' instructions, design, and flight patterns before the kits are mass produced.

The Dr. Zooch kits are known for their attention to detail, the characteristic 4x4x12 cardboard box, and their witty, perhaps even abrasive, illustrated instructions that feature Dr. Zooch, an ant comic character Oleszewski originally created for his college newspaper.

When completed, many of the models can be stored



Photo 1: Wes Oleszewski (far right) is the creator of Dr. Zooch rockets. This NARCON-2014 photo shows a group of rocketeers who also happen to be alumni from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Left to right: Jim Banke, Brian Nicklas, Tim Van Milligan (of Apogee Components), Patrick McCarthy, and Wes.

in their box, a feature appreciated by model rocketeers as they transport their handiwork to and from the firing range. For kits modeled after actual rockets, the instructions also include historical background information.

The rocket company's name certainly commands attention. When asked how he came up with the name, Oleszewski said, "The marketing professionals tell you that companies whose name begins with an A or a Z are most profitable. I had the rights to 'Dr. Zooch,' who was a cartoon character from one of my comic strips, so I used him. I just made the name up. I use him as a character to guide the instructions."

Apogee Components rates the skill level for most Dr. Zooch rockets at either level 4 or 5 due to special details in the construction. These details include such particulars as the Soyuz and Mercury Redstone escape towers, the Saturn V F-1 engine cones, and the Space Shuttle orbiter and its attach pads. Each detail requires patience and perseverance that pays a dividend in the finished model's aesthetic authenticity. Exceptions to this skill level rating include the

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Dr. Zooch's Ant-Scale Size Rockets

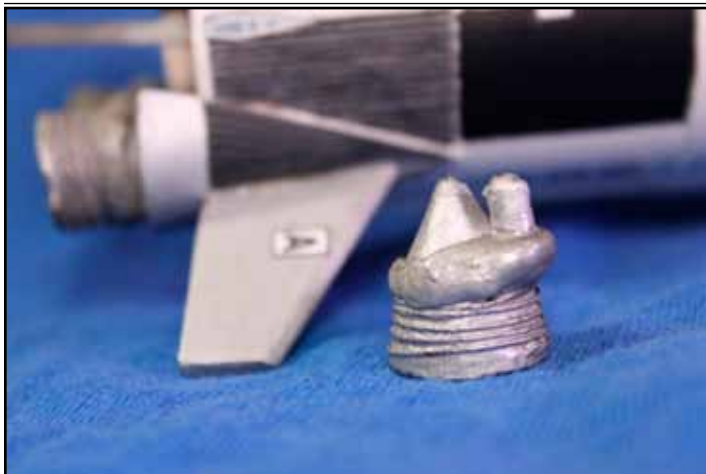


Photo 2: Close-up of a simulated nozzle from a Dr. Zooch Saturn V rocket. To give you some perspective, the main tube is a BT-60 size (1.637 inches in diameter).

Gumball Lofting Vehicle at skill level 2 and the C3C CLV-75 at skill level 3.

"Just because Dr. Zooch kits are 'builder's kits' doesn't mean that you have to be some sort of artisan to build one....," remarks Jeff Roberts.

"The kits give you flexibility. If you want a flying model of a semi-scale rocket, you can build it straight out of the box according to the instructions and have it flying quickly. You don't have to go crazy with the appearance and details if you don't want to. On the other hand, if you want to really

make it pop, make it look like a museum model, you can do that too. It's easy to add details and put a little more effort into the Dr. Zooch kit and make it look better than the models in most museums if you choose... it's up to you," Roberts said.

"My kits are old school—no pre-cut laser fins, no hole-punched, pre-tied parachutes," says Oleszewski. "My kits are old school because you can't build skills if you don't practice them. I wanted to get as far away as I could from the buy-it-and-fly-it kits as I could," he said.

Oleszewski takes pride in the fact that all of his kit parts are made in the United States, with the exception of the balsa, which is grown in South America but milled in the United States.

"My instructions are designed for the builder to make their rocket as simple or as complicated as they want. When I was a kid, I never read the instructions. You can't do that with my kits. I want you to read the instructions," he said.

Roberts adds, "Wes designs the kit primarily to be a good flying rocket when built by rocketeers of average skills. If you've built a few rockets before by various other manufacturers, you can confidently build a Dr. Zooch kit."

Although most of the Dr. Zooch kits are marketed to the Baby Boomer generation for whom they hold nostalgic appeal, Oleszewski has been developing rockets for younger consumers.

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Dr. Zooch's Ant-Scale Size Rockets

The GLV, an acronym for "Gumball Lofting Vehicle" was designed with kids in mind at a price considerably less than the Zooch historic rockets. Featuring a gumball machine capsule that separates from the booster and utilizes parachute recovery, the GLV offers the thrill of the old fashioned "spam in a can" concept of the NASA capsule spacecrafts. The rocket's heavy booster, with its through-the-wall fins, recovers with streamers.



Photo 3: The nose cone of the Gumball Launch Vehicle is made from a small egg out of a gumball machine.

The twin recovery design is unusual for the Dr. Zooch rocketry line. "I don't really have a favorite recovery system. The idea of the GLV's two types of recovery and the heavy booster was to get it out of the way, so the kids could spend their time tracking the space capsule," he said.

The Gumball Lofting Vehicle also allows rocketeers to send aloft a gummy bear or a toy figurine as an astronaut. (Star Wars and Marvel comic hero Squinkies are prime candidates for the flight manifest.)

Young rocketeers may not be familiar with the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo rockets from the 1960s, but they do

emotionally connect with the Dr. Zooch Space Shuttle. The stack is instantly recognizable on the firing range.

At MDRA's 2014 Red Glare, Oleszewski displayed two of his shuttle fleet orbiters, "Earthnail" and "Audacity." The shuttles' underside is covered in a paper wrap that features a photograph of the shuttle tiles on the actual space vehicle, giving the orbiters a tremendous amount of realism. Additionally, the two orbiters are mounted with a sliver from an authenticated space shuttle tile Dr. Zooch somehow finagled from the space program. (Needless to say, Dr. Zooch Space Shuttle kits do not include a shuttle tile flake.)

As Oleszewski was designing the Zooch Space Shuttle, he did not have the benefit of the RockSim software. Yet he figured out how to correct for some instability found in the Estes 1284 shuttle, whose production ran from 1976 to 1998. The result is an elegant semi-scale shuttle stack that looks impressive both on the firing range and on a desktop or in a display case.

Though Dr. Zooch kits can be ordered online (www.klydemart.com), most of his business is retail. The Dr. Zooch Orion EFT-1 and Jupiter C models are on sale at Florida's Cape Canaveral Air Force Space and Missile Museum gift store, and Apogee Components carries each of the 29 historic rockets that comprise the Dr. Zooch product line (www.apogeerockets.com/Dr._Zooch_Rocketry).

Oleszewski's model rocket business began in 2004 as the realization of a childhood dream to create a model rocket company that manufactured only hard-to-build models. But that interest had been fueled during his childhood in Saginaw, Michigan, after watching a neighbor launch a rocket that landed in a cornfield and was presumed lost. Wes found it and took it to his father, who said he should return it the owner. Oleszewski did, and as a reward his father, who worked as an auto mechanic for Montgomery

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Dr. Zooch's Ant-Scale Size Rockets

Ward, bought young Wes his first rocket, an MPC Flare Patriot. The launch rod his father made for its maiden flight was 6 inches short of the required 18, and the rocket went ballistic, landing in another neighbor's yard as he cut the grass. But Wes kept at it.

In 1978 Oleszewski attended Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach Florida, where camping out to witness space shuttle launches was a regular part of

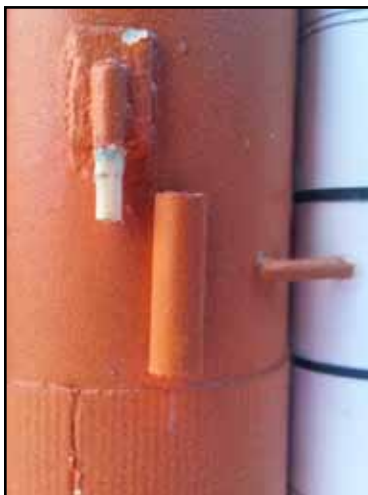


Photo 4: Close-up detail of a Dr. Zooch Space Shuttle.

his education. He gained a reputation for making just about anything fly, winning bets with classmates that he could make a plane out of whatever you gave him.

At Embry-Riddle, Oleszewski started drawing a cartoon called Klyde Morris, a tale about an ant's adventures in college. The strip has been in production for 36 years. A stuffed doll of the ant Klyde Morris even

enjoyed a ride into space on Dick Rutan's Spaceship One flight.

Upon graduation Oleszewski worked as a pilot for East Coast Flight Services, flying Falcon Jet models 10 and 20 and the King Air 200.

The Dr. Zooch production did not begin until 2004 when Oleszewski attended a Maryland-Delaware Rocketry Association launch, selling CDs on rocketry history. That day he brought along a model he made of a Saturn 1-B.

"Someone asked me why don't you kit them? So I contacted some people in the business—longtime NAR members Pat McCarthy and Tim Van Milligan for the RockSim software and Balsa Machining and put together 20 Saturn V's, 10 Saturn I: SA-6's, 10 SA-5's, and 10 Saturn IB SA-205's. They all sold out, from 10 am to 1:30 pm when I had them on display at NARAM 2004," he said.

"I said to my wife, I think we have something here. It started out as a hobby and turned into a business. I do all the illustrations, the writing and the design," Oleszewski said.

He also volunteers at Shady Side Elementary School as an instructor for their rocketry club. The kids love the rocketry, he said.

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Dr. Zooch's Ant-Scale Size Rockets

Currently Oleszewski works as a space flight analyst for the space news network, Aero-net.net, and researches and writes maritime histories of the Great Lakes. He is the author of sixteen books on Great Lakes shipwrecks.

When he's not designing, illustrating or assembling kits for Dr. Zooch or writing about shipwrecks, Oleszewski is working on a six-volume history of the space flight scheduled for publication in 2015.

Though Dr. Zooch models build technical skills in rocket modelers, they do not bankrupt the hobbyist. Says Roberts, "These kits are priced right... where else can you get an "ant-scale" (semi-scale) rocket kit of a Saturn IB, Saturn V, Vostok, Soyuz, Titan III, etc. for about twenty to twenty-five bucks? Most three fin and nose cone (3FNC) plain-Jane kits from other manufacturers list for well above that price, and they're much simpler kits, usually of cheaper materials."

What advice might Oleszewski give to youth considering a career in rocket science?

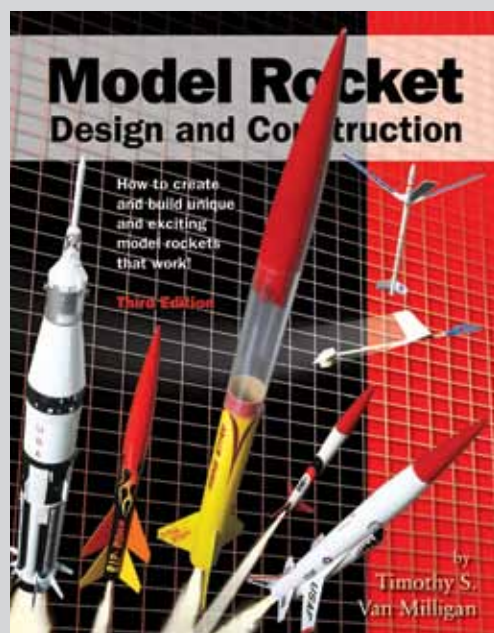
"For rocket science, attend a good university, get a degree, and always have a back-up plan. When I was a pilot, we had a saying in the cockpit when the job seemed too scary or demanding, 'At least you can do something else.' Piloting is a great job with a great view, but there is always something else to do."

For Oleszewski, that something else was building an ant-scaled rocket empire named Zooch....



About the Author:

Carter Askren lives in Alexandria, Virginia, and is a V.I.R. customer with Apogee Components (www.apogeerockets.com/Frequent_Flyer_Program).



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