

# THE LEADING EDGE

Newsletter of the Northern Illinois Rocketry Association,  
NAR Section #117, Proud Winner of the 1996 and 1997 Rockwell Newsletter Trophy!

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Special MRFF Edition



Rick Gaff actually gets to fly his Arcas.



Dave Miller's USS Antares at lift-off.



Bob Wiersbe readies his Little Joe II.



Mark Smieska with a Texas sized Mosquito.



John Barrett with one of his fleet, but I don't know what it is.



Al Rognlie with a Big Bertha.



Kevin Wickart with his staged Astrobee 500.

**So What is MRFF Anyway?  
compiled by Bob Wiersbe**

MRFF is short for "Midwest Regional Fun Fly", which is a two day Sport Launch that NIRA has hosted since 1990. What it really means is two days of having fun flying rockets, making new friends, seeing old friends, eating some great food, participating in fun contests, and maybe winning a rocketry related prize.

For many people, MRFF is one launch that they don't want to miss. Dave Miller from Wisconsin said, "Of all the events we attend, I have to say MRFF is what we look forward to every year, because of the people. There is no funner bunch of people to fly with!" Mike Vaughn, of Vaughn Brother's Rocketry, has used his Frequent Flyer Miles to come from California to attend MRFF twice. To me, this says a lot about the kind of people at MRFF and the kind of launch that we run. The emphasis is on the FUN!

People have come from all over to attend MRFF. Places like Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, California, Minnesota, Iowa, and Ohio, just to name a few. And it can't be because of the flying field. In fact, we'd like to find a new one. So it must be something else.

What do people fly at MRFF? Anything and everything. Little Mosquitoes and Crayons, Big Birdies, Astrocams, Fat Boys, scale models, gliders, CHAD (CHeap And Dirty) staged Estes Generic rockets, Star Wars models, scaled up and scaled down rockets, mid-power and a few HPR rockets, and even an occasional food container. As long as it's safe, we fly it.

This year MRFF was held at the Hoover Outdoor Education Center in Yorkville, the same field that we used last year. There were a few differences this year though. First, the range was set up near the large tent that the scouts use, and second, the wind was blowing in the right direction. Having the tent so close to the range was great, and having everyone gathered into one area was even better. Lots less walking to do the talking.

The weather cooperated for the most part, except for it being very hot, humid, and sometimes too breezy. But there were times of calm

winds, and I don't think many people didn't fly because of the wind. The heat was another matter. I tried to stay in the shade during the hottest parts of the day, and noticed others doing the same.

What do you do at MRFF? First of all, you have to register. We had 56 people pre-register, and another 22 register on the field for a grand total of 78 fliers. When you register you get a name tag (courtesy of Ric Gaff), a raffle ticket, and a packet of goodies (stuffed by NIRA members). Then you stake a claim to a table or spot on the ground and put your stuff out on display for all to see. After that, you do whatever you want, talk, fly rockets, check out other people's stuff, or go buy some stuff.

Balsa Machining Service and Nordic Rocketry were both on hand this year, selling kits, glue, and all types of balsa parts. Rumor has it that they did good business.

Flying a rocket is only a bit more complicated than one of our normal club launches. But not much. All you have to do is bring your prepped rocket up to the check-in table and fill out a flight card. The Safety Check Officer looks over the rocket and flight card, approves the flight and assigns you a pad. You put your rocket on the pad, hook up the wires, and then wait for the Launch Control Officer to announce and launch your flight. As usual, it's up to you to recover your rocket.

One nice thing about this arrangement is that you don't have to bring out any launch equipment. The only exception to that is the person who brings out the NIRA range gear from his garage - Bob Kaplow. The gear fills up most of his van, leaving little room for his own stuff and family. Thanks for hauling the gear around and storing it, Bob!

The range gets set up on Friday, usually by a bunch of guys that are tired from a long week. This year you could really tell something was wrong because the range was laid out counter-clockwise. I don't think anyone except the LCO's noticed though.

The wind, what little of it there was on Saturday morning, was blowing the length of the field (the right direction, for once). The range opened right on time, 9am. This year Steve Smith



The Business side of MRFF: the BMS and Nordic Rocketry tents. (D. Miller photo)

decided that the honor of the first flight at MRFF would be raffled off. Jeff Pleimling decided that a kit should be added to the honor. They picked my number, while I was off parking the van. I just happened to have a rocket all ready to fly (a left over from the Mooseheart demo), and had it on the pad in a couple of minutes. 5..4..3..2..1... nothing.

I had spent the week charging up the three batteries we've used for the past 3 or 4 years, only to discover that they were all dead on arrival at the field. They were questionable to begin with (rejects from UPS supplies at work), and I think that sitting in the garage during the cold winter without being charged did them in. Fortunately, Bob Kaplow saved MRFF with one of his batteries.

After a few minutes of fussing with batteries, my Sprint made a nice, straight flight, and recovered down in the field. MRFF '98 was officially underway. There was a steady trickle of folks going from the tent area out to fly a rocket, and very little wait for a pad. Lots of us just hung out under the tent talking rockets and keeping cool.

For the second year in a row, the range tent blew down while Cheri Chaney and Robin Miller were on duty. We're not sure what it is about these two that always brings the house down. Leo Ringwald saved the day on Sunday by bringing out a really nice tent that he'd bought the night before, otherwise I think the range crews would have suffered from heat stroke. Thanks, Leo!!

What do you do when the range shuts down? Some folks had had enough of the heat and



Peter Olivola and Leo Ringwald work the check-in table, while Robin Miller provides color commentary at the LCO position. (R. Gaff photos)

The range head on Sunday, under the great canopy that Leo provided. (D. Miller photo)



Chef Bundick and Trainee at work. (R. Gaff photo)



Ken Hutchinson with an ill-fated experiment of a flight recorder. (R. Gaff photo)



Bob Kaplow checks the damage to the truck that his Uncola landed on, then checks what's left of his rocket. The truck won. (R. Gaff photos)



decided to just head home for the night. The rest of us stuck around for another spectacular BBQ put on by Mark and Barb Bundick. We feasted on chicken, hot dogs, hamburgers, Italian sausage, bratwurst, salad, chips, beans, and of course, brownies. Mark says he still can't figure out how many pans to make, I think he had at least 5 this year and I don't remember seeing leftovers. As promised, Mark, you get next year off.

After stuffing ourselves and relaxing for a while, we head indoors for an evening of Kitbash and People's Choice. People's Choice is a very simple contest, just bring in your favorite rocket, put in on display with all the others, then vote for the one model you like best. There are separate categories for Youth and Adult, and the top three vote getters win a prize. Next year we're going to have a special category just for Dave Miller, as he usually shows up with some really spiffy scaled up model, like a huge Saturn V, and wins.

Kitbash is always an interesting event. The idea is to take several kits and combine the parts into a new creation, based on some kind of theme that Bill Thiel has come up with. Teams are picked at random, and the participants are given one hour to build their rocket. The rockets are then judged for creativity, and are flown on



Mark Smieska with what has to be the tiniest crayon conversion ever seen. (R. Gaff photo)

Sunday for flight points. The flying is almost as fun as the building, since they can be unstable.

After Kitbash is done folks are free to hang around and talk, head for home, or back to their campsite (for those who chose to stay at the field). Mark Smieska did some experimenting with night rocketry and photography, taking pictures of about five rockets in flight. He used a cylume stick in the payload section so he could track the rocket and recover it. It was really fascinating to watch the sparks during the coasting phase, during the day you just can't see them. While he was doing his tests, a deer came up to watch from the far end of the range. It didn't seem disturbed by the rockets at all.

When the range opened on Sunday morning there was hardly any breeze, and there was a flurry of activity on the range as people were getting in as many flights as they could before the weather changed. It did get a bit windy, but not as bad as the day before, and it wasn't quite as hot and humid. All in all, a great day to fly rockets!

The Kitbash flights were flown on Sunday afternoon, and amazingly they all made nice stable flights. There was a fierce competition for the coveted "I Flew the xxx Rocket at MRFF 98" buttons. My son Kyle would have had flight #600 if he didn't have a misfire, but he hung in there and got #700. Once again showing his leadership skills, NIRA Vice President and MRFF Organizer Extraordinaire Steve Smith declared that the honors of the last flight at MRFF would be raffled off. The winner of the raffle was Craig Fahy, but like a true sportsman Craig gave the ticket to my son Chris. Craig had already won flight #500, and wanted to give the ticket to someone who hadn't got one.

MRFF couldn't happen without the efforts of many individuals. Steve Smith was the organizer this year, and deserves a lot of credit for how well it went. Jeff Pleimling did another great job soliciting vendors for prizes, and Ric Gaff spent a lot of time generating badges and

special buttons. Thanks guys! Special thanks go to those brave souls who helped to set up the range: Bob Kaplow, Ric Gaff, Steve Smith, John, Kimber, and Michael Guzik. And Thank You to all of the kind people who stuck around to help take down the range!

We also need to thank those people who have generously donated prizes to MRFF. If you won a prize, please take a minute to let the sponsor know. The 1998 Contributors were:

Aerospace Composite Products, Aerospace Specialty Products, Balsa Machining Service Belleville Wholesale Hobby, Countdown Hobbies, Custom Rocket Co., NAR Technical Services (NARTS), Nordic Rocketry, Public Missiles, Ltd., Quest/Toybiz Inc., Seattle Rocket Works, Shecter Rockets, Thrust Aerospace, Tower Hobbies, Vaughn Brothers Rocketry, Yankee Rocket Parts.

And finally, we want to recognize those people who sacrificed their own flying time to run the range so that others could fly:

Registration: Mike Ugorek, Cheri Chaney, Kimber Guzik, Steve Smith.

Check-In: Steve Smith, Alan Rognlie, Leo Ringwald, Steve Piette, Rick Gaff.

LCO: Rick Gaff, John Guzik, Robin Miller, Alan Rognlie, Cheri Chaney, Jack Wiker, Jeff Pleimling

RSO: Bob Kaplow, Ken Hutchinson, Mike Vaughn, Dave Miller, Steve Smith, Bob Wiersbe

Pad Manager: Bob Wiersbe, Adam Elliot, Bill Thiel, Pete Olivola.

I'm sure I've missed a bunch of people, so if you worked a shift thank you very much!

If you couldn't make it to MRFF this year, plan now to come next year. The dates will be Father's Day weekend, so mark your calendar!



Bob Kaplow with Woodstock - LeMans Eat has never been so funny.



Adam Elliott readies one of ten Astrocam flights he made during the weekend.



Ron Husak gets ready for some serious flying.



Ric's Arcas lifts off.



Mark Soppet actually gets to fly one of the gliders he built.



Dave Miller readies a Star Wars X-wing for a mission against the Dark Side.



Tom Pastrick caught flying something other than a glider - a Topkat!



Mark Smieska really knows how to make an inconspicuous Alien Probe.



Steve Smith is grinning because he gets to fly something. In this case, his Impulse.



Bill Thiel and Pringle Rock, a clustered odd-roc that really works.

**From the "Blast from the Past File": Left, Nichole Eastman painting an Initiator at MRFF 1993, and Nichole at MRFF in 1998.**





Mike Ugorek with what looks like an old Estes Bat, or maybe an upscaled one.



Emil Bartholet launches another Galileo probe.



Hey! Who let that kid on the range with a stock Fat Boy???



Ok, I don't recognize these two, but that is a Ninja on the pad.



Another face I don't know, and I don't know the rocket either.



John Guzik with a really neat T-shirt and a Blackhawk on the pad.



"So many reloads, so little time"



Left: Norm Heyen gets in an IRIS flight.



"What was that?!?"



Tom Pastrick prepares one of many, many glider flights.



Matthew Duckworth is walking on air with his Airwalker.



Mark "Cool Dude" Soppet loads up a Stingray.



Bill Thiel looks at the business end of his Trident.

**TEAM KIT BASH**  
by Bill Thiel

It's Saturday night and time to get ready for the long over due team kit bash we have not had this much fun since last year (ha ha). We had three teams of 5 members and one team with 6 members.

The teams now got to pick the theme for the rocket from a hat. The themes picked are as follows, GARDEN TOOLS, PLUMING, POWER TOOLS AND NUTS & BOLTS. The themes are all departments of a hardware store. The rockets that the teams had to use were the Quest kits Courier and Flash. At this time the teams had one hour to think of a name for the rocket and the team and then build their rocket.



Kitbash Team 1 (D. Miller photo)

Team 1 picked Nuts & Bolts, they then picked the name Lighting Bolts & peanuts for the team and they call the rocket The Bolting Nut. The members of the team are Jonathan Charbonneau, Al Rognlie, Eric Christensen, Andrew Christensen, Michael Guzik and Matthew Duckworth.



Kitbash Team 2 (R. Gaff photo)

The second team to pick pulled the theme of Power Tools from the hat. They used the name The Taylor Family and they called their rocket the Binford XT2200 Power Drill. This team had as its members, Mark Soppet, Ron Husak, Mike Ugorek, Craig Fahy and Kurt Smieska.

Team 3 as its theme picked the Pluming Department. The team name was The Bobbits and the rocket has the name Lorena. The master plumbers were Joe Duckworth, Mark Smieska, Steven

Eastman, Mark Eastman and Steve Smith.



Kitbash Team 4 (D. Miller photo)

The last team to pick pulled the theme of Garden Tools from the hat. The team name is Hecks Gardeners and they call their rocket Phil's Pitchfork. This team has as its members John Guzik, Kimber Guzik, Nicole Eastman, Rick Gaff and Tom Pastrick.

All the teams worked hard to design the rockets and the smell of CA and balsa dust filled the hot humid air of the meeting room. After the allotted time of one hour the rockets were picked up by the judges and kept over night.

In the morning Robin Miller and Bill Thiel did the static judging of the models. At this time the Bobbits are in first place with 780 points for the pluming that they did in the men's wash room the rocket had two urinals, shower and wash rack this did not look like any ordinary rocket.

In second place are Heck's Gardeners with a big pitchfork that they say will spew out flowers at ejection. They have a point total of 735.

The Taylor Family is in third place with 700 points. They have one of Tim's modified Binford power tools the Binford XT2200 Power Drill. They say that it will have a corkscrew/spin and may also loop, dive and drill good holes in the ground.

The Lightning Bolts & Peanuts are not that far behind with score of 670 they can make up that in the fly off if The Bolting Nut has a good flight.

After the judging the rockets are passed out to the teams for prepping and the flights. The first



Kitbash Team 3 (R. Gaff photo)

rocket up to the launch pad was The Bolting Nut. The flight was stable but had a parachute not fully deploy. The flight added 400 points to their score to bring the total to 1070 points.

The next rocket was the Binford XT2200 Power Drill this rocket also looked too much like a rocket not to be stable. They said that it will spin and it did spin. They also had a parachute fail on one of the rocket sections but that section had a back up streamer so this only cost them a 25-point deduction. They got a 75-point bonus. The final score was 1250 points.

The third rocket up to the pad was the Lorena. The rocket did not look too much like a rocket so the L.C.O. made the HEADS UP FOR THIS FLIGHT announcement again. The rocket did not disappoint us as it did go unstable it only cost them 25 points out of the possible 500. Giving them a final score of 1255 points.

The last Rocket up to the pad was Phil's Pitchfork. This rocket had a perfect flight and it received the 100-point bonus for a sub total of 600 points that brings their total to 1335 points and a first place for the 1998 kitbash contest. The team members then all got to pick a rocket kit from the prize box.



The winning Kitbash entry - Phil's Pitchfork.

**People's Choice**  
by Bob Wiersbe

People's Choice is the simplest of all the contests held at MRFF. Just bring in your favorite rocket, put it on display with the others, then vote for the one you like best. The top three vote getters win a prize.

There were fewer entries in the contest this year, which led to some pretty close voting. In the Youth Division there were five entries; Matthew Duckworth's SA14 Archer, Nichole Eastman's Sunflower, Steve Eastman's Venus Probe, Mark Soppet's Atlas, and Kyle Wiersbe's Bullet. In the Adult Division there were seven entries; Mark Eastman's Fab Toy (guess what that was), Bob Kaplow's Crayon, Dave "I always bring something really big and really cool" Miller's Saturn V, Steve Smith's Mercury-Redstone, Mike Vaughn's Deltie Thunder, Kevin Wickart's Lambda 4S, and Bob Wiersbe's Little Joe II.

When the polls closed and the votes were tallied, the results in Youth were: First - Matthew Duckworth, Second - Kyle Wiersbe, and Third - Mark Soppet. The results in Adult were: First - Dave Miller, Second - Steve Smith, and Third - Bob Wiersbe.

The winners received really nice kits, like an original NCR Big Brute, a PML Black Brant VB, a PML Ariel, a Nordic Rocketry Velocity, a V-2 and a Corporal from Aerospace Specialty Products. Next year I think we're going to add a rule that you have to fly your entry first, that way it'll be harder for Dave Miller to win (just kidding, Dave!).

**THE YEAR LONG  
TEAM SPOT LANDING**  
by Bill Thiel

This is the new team fun event for this year. The teams are randomly picked by drawing a color flag for my hands we had 4 teams of 4. The idea for the event is for each team member to pick a rocket and bring it to the measuring spot for the judge to measure. The total length of the four rockets the total length for the rockets was to be 98 inches. The distance off the mark was the multiplying factor for the error distance to be added to the average for the team. The teams had one spot to aim at with their rockets and get as close to spot measured for the tip of the nose cone the flag.

The teams are RED with Mark Smieska, Erik Christensen, Al Rognlie and John Guzik. Their rockets total length was 98 5/8". This gave them a 6.25% error factor.

The BLUE team was made up of John Barrett, Jeff Pleimling, Dan Kutschke and Bob Kaplow. This team has a total rocket length of 97" which means they have an error factor of 10%.

The Green team has the following members Rick Gaff, Joe Duckworth, Matthew Duckworth and Ron Husak. This team has a total length for the rockets of 98 11/16" and this means that the error factor is 7.25%.

The PINK team is comprised of Mark Soppet, Andrew Christensen, Kurt Smieska and Steve Smith. 97 5/8" makes the error factor 6.25% for this team also.

For the RED team the spot distances are for Mark 348' 4", Erik 293' 6", Al 278' 7" and for John 168' 5" or a total of 1088' 10". Thus an



Bill Thiel sees just how long a year is. (R. Gaff photo)



A partial look at the People's Choice Entries. Notice the scale of Dave Miller's Saturn V. He actually flew this rocket at ECOF. (R. Gaff all photos)



The Adult winners: Steve Smith, Dave Miller, and Bob Wiersbe.



The Youth winners: Mark Soppet, Kyle Wiersbe, and Matthew Duckworth.

average of 272' 2 1/2" plus the error of 17" gives a final distance off the spot of 289' 3".

The BLUE teams distances are for John 142' 3", Jeff 287' 3", Dan 88' 4" and Bob 38' 4". Their total was 606' 2". That gives them an average of 151' 6 1/2" off and to that we add the error of 15' 1" or a total of 166' 7 1/2".

The GREEN teams distances are for Rick 152' 1", Joe 35' 10", Matthew 69' 9" and Ron 187' 3". The total was 444' 11". Thus making the team average 111' 2 3/4" adding the error of 8' 1/4" thus a total of 119' 3".

The PINK team members distances are for Mark 211' 1", Andrew 88' 8", Kurt 70' 10" and Steve 144' 6". Their total was 445' 6". Adding in the error footage of 7". The final average total footage off the spot was 118' 4" and this was the closest to the flag.

As a side note the rocket that landed the closest to the flag spot was flown by Joe Duckworth at 35' 10" and the rocket that I had to walk the farthest to measure was flown by Mark Smieska at 348' 4". The most popular rocket for this was the big berth.

**MARSHMALLOW EAT**  
by Bill Thiel

It's time to get the taste buds working again with the marshmallow eats contest. The not so scientific rocket science of getting the blood sugar level up and flying a rocket at the same time. We had 9 flights for the single marshmal-

low flight. The flight engineers with the times are as follows. Adam Elliott 5.86 sec. Steve Smith 11.11 sec. Mike Ugorek 13.45 sec. Mark Soppet 9.70 sec. Matt Duckworth 11.78 sec. Joe Duckworth 9.75 sec. Craig Fahy 9.58 sec. Bob Kaplow 1 min. 09.82 sec. Steve Smith tried a second flight but it was a DQ. The winner of the single marshmallow eat was Adam Elliott with his winning time of 5.86 Sec. This time is a new record for the single marshmallow eat last years record was held by Ed Thiel at 8.69 sec.

Bob's time would have been better if he did not just lie on the ground and laugh instead of eating the marshmallow. Bob used an A6-4 in his Woodstock rocket (big badminton birdie) the birdie just mad it over the minimum 10-foot height requirement then it fell back down into Bob's hands and he had to hold it with the nozzle pointed away till the delay burned off and ejection fired. Bob laughed so hard that he fell to the ground. This action put the rest of the contestants in a good humor.

We now move on to the dual marshmallow eat. The number of entrants was lower for this one. We had Mark Soppet with a time of 12.66 sec. Bob Kaplow 19.85 sec. Adam Elliott 9.39 sec. And John McCallum 15.63 sec. The winner of the dual marshmallow eat was Adam Elliott with his time of 9.39 sec. This time was still short of the record time of Ed Thiel Last Year his time for the dual marshmallow eat was 7.85 sec.



“Got my tape, digital camera, floppy hat, sunglasses, neat Far Side T-shirt, badge, oh yeah, and a rocket! Yep, I’m having a good time...”

**THE LEADING EDGE**  
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