

## Pretoria Radio Flyers History



*Written by Daan Connelius*

After the Second World War, around 1947, the Pretoria Aeromodelling Club used an ungrassed site in the middle of what we now know as Queenswood. Here enthusiasts flew "control line" "free flight", rubber band power models and some "chuck gliders". A flyer from Germiston Skyriders also brought his Vampire, an all-aluminum "pulse jet" model of almost a metre wingspan. It flew. In those days the characters who pioneered the sport in South Africa included Monte Malherbe (owner of Jix Hobby shop), Doc Alien, Cliff Culverwell, the Heym brothers, Charles Marincowitz, Stan Fine (who to this day still supports the Club and provides his aerial taxi for radio-controlled "parachutists"), Gerald Matchet, Ian Hutchinson, Jimmy Connacher, Ken Simons et al. Queenswood started to develop a residential character and PAC moved to Kilnerton, South/East of Waverley circle. R/C equipment was rudimentary and fickle, single channels. Flyers included Chris Joubert (Life member PRF), Hessel Scholtemeier, Jan Koper, Dries Welgemoed (owner of Bambi's toy shop in Sunnyside), John Collins, Ian and Stan, Daan Cornelius too. The top flyers in "multi" were Monte, Cliff, Jimmy, Jack Marais and a few others.

When multi-channel reed equipment became more readily available, the list of aeroplane models included the Onion, Tauri, Flat top Stormer, Sultan, Astro Hog and the Smog Hog. A more suitable site near the "Flying Saucer" roadhouse was secured by Dries from Dr. van der Bijl. Monte and his group meanwhile moved to Wonderboom Airport. In those days, as now, equipment to grade the areal 200 sq. metres) was difficult to come by but with Dr. van der Bijl's help and that of the City Council this small site was levelled and fenced in time for the first snowfalls in Pretoria. Our thanks to John Collins and Mr. Bothma amongst others. As far as memory serves Dries Welgemoed got the chaps together in May of 1964 and Pretoria Radio Flyers was born. As it was then, the Club today still welcomes any aerial enthusiast to join in and enjoy the variety of experience and camaraderie that this technically complex and sociable sport has to offer. The precursor of SAMAA (South African Model Aircraft Association) was the South African Association of Radio Flyers (SAARF) and it was in the middle sixties that Dries got the Association off the ground.

When Pretoria Aeromodelling Club, under Monty at Wonderboom, were denied access to their field - they joined up, en masse, one Sunday with the "Flying Saucer" crowd. The flyers at " Pretoria Models Park" as Dries called it were now a strongly representative group of the City's aero modelling fraternity. When the road to Kempton Park was built in 1967/8, the Club was forced to relocate again. Monty secured the current site at Zwavelpoort and work began in earnest on gaining international recognition for South African flying skills. In 1974, the PRF South African gliding team won the World Championships. Daan is reasonably sure that PRF was born on the 1st of June 1964 and the closest weekend to this date should be dedicated to the memory of those men, women and children whose presence we miss. This weekend should celebrate all the wonderful things that aero modelling means to flyers and spectators of all ages. In 2000, PRF received notice from the owner of the property that Zwavelpoort field must be vacated. Relocation to a new flying field, Rietvallei took place in February 2001.