

# THE UNSTABLE ROCKETEER

by Kevin Funk



**M**odel rocketry enthusiasts have been touting the educational aspect of our hobby for years. Personally, I view the educa-

tional argument as just another way for adults to legitimize our involvement in a "kiddy" hobby. Recently, however, my thirteen year old nephew opened my eyes as to just how important the educational slant can be when flying rockets on a limited budget.

My nephew, Alex, wanted to get into rocketry, but his parents couldn't see spending more money on his hobbies. He was already an avid R/C racer and goalie on a street hockey team; how could he possibly spend more time (and more of his parents' money) on yet another hobby?

Alex's desire to become a rocketeer went unfulfilled for months until the annual science fair was announced at his school. Normally science fairs are dreaded events, making kids and parents cringe at the thought of making yet another papier-mâché volcano or using miles of doorbell wire to hook up a Rube Goldberg-like contraption demonstrating "the miracle of electricity." This year would be different, though, because my wise nephew saw the science fair as a means to an end. What parent could deny their child the materials needed for a science fair project? He quickly came up with a quasi-scientific experiment that would demonstrate the effects of drag on model rockets. Big rockets, small rockets, scale rockets. To his credit, my nephew doubled the number of rockets and motors he would need for the experiment and he got them, paid for in full by parents who didn't want to snuff out their son's enthusiasm for science. (If the science career doesn't pan out, a procurement officer position at the Pentagon is waiting for him.)

My nephew went on to win first prize in his class and, more importantly, now has a fleet of model rockets and a range box full of motors to fly them with. And he didn't have to shell out one thin dime! Wouldn't it be great if we, as adults, could pull the same stunt on our bosses?

It probably wouldn't take much of an excuse to get your boss to buy rocket kits and motors for you. Just as with Alex's parents, your boss won't have a clue as to what you're going to do with model rockets or how it pertains to your job, but if you throw enough rocketry mumbo jumbo his way he won't want to look dumb and will probably have the



company buy what you need just to get you out of his hair.

When making the rocketry presentation to your boss use

phrases like, "Newton seconds," "average total impulse" and "pushing the envelope." It may help if you wear aviator-style sunglasses and a jump suit with NASA shuttle patches sewn on to it. Be a name dropper! Mention the Wright Brothers, Steven Spielberg and Evel Knievel. (You could mention Goddard, Von Braun and Neil Armstrong, but your boss won't be familiar with them. Use names he'll know!)

Finally, throw together a packet of thrust curve diagrams from motor packages you already have and repeatedly stress that these motors "just don't cut it" or that you need "more power!" If your boss is a Tim Allen fan, give him a grunt or two. Your boss will be so impressed with your initiative and enthusiasm (something he rarely sees in you) he'll probably start writing you a check or opening the petty cash drawer before your presentation is finished!

As easy as it is to trick your boss into subsidizing your rocketry hobby, you'll be wise to remember that your boss isn't a total fool. Eventually, and perhaps accidentally, he'll remember your rocket requisition. "How'd we do on that project?" he'll ask nonchalantly, still not wanting to let slip that he hasn't a clue as to what it was all about. Stay calm, don't panic and by all means don't tell him how you were able to compete at NARAM courtesy of the company!

Slowly shake your head from side to side and explain in a whisper how the project was "hampered by unforeseen anomalies" and how, due to your own bad planning, the project was "under funded." Put your hand on your boss's shoulder and tell him how sorry you are for letting him and the company down. Realizing how devastated you are, he'll offer up words of encouragement, perhaps suggesting you not give up on the project. "I can't go on," you'll agonize, "not now, not like this. Maybe...maybe...next summer I can give it another go."

As you hug your boss with tears in your eyes, thanking him for making the project possible, no doubt your boss will already be thinking of ways to work your rocketry needs into the company's annual budget!



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