

### "Voodoo" 8 oz Wakefield by Ron Warring 1950

"Voodoo" was one of the more famous British post-war Wakefield designs by Ron Warring. He was known as "The Witchdoctor" because of his unique ROG launching style and was arguably the greatest among his British contemporaries and probably unlucky never to have won the Wakefield Trophy during its heyday. "Voodoo" was the last in a line of truly competitive models from the master before the rules changed in 1951, following on from the "Zombie V" and its prior 1947-9 lineage, and an earlier version from 1946 known simply as "Warring's Wakefield".



I built my version in 1985 with encouragement from Mike Kemp who had responded to my unremarkable efforts with a "KK Gypsy" by suggesting that "Voodoo" would give me the opportunity to fly and compete in Wakefield competitions with a model that was relatively easy to build and trim and had proven competitive pedigree. Indeed it was Mike who set the gold standard for modern Vintage Wakefield flyers by his prowess on the field and his authoritative writing in the original

SAM35Speaks "Rubber Column" which commenced in 1982. He was, and still is my mentor and placed vintage rubber firmly on the map by his outstanding contribution. Of course, there were other very competent Vintage Wakefield flyers around in the early 1980's and their numbers grew rapidly through that decade and most of the next one too.

For me, "Voodoo" marked the start of a gradual departure from flying power models until in 1987 with several other rubber designs added to my stable I gave up on internal combustion and concentrated totally on the Crazy Rubberband.

As well as the plan, obtained from Ben Buckle's Plans Service, Mike Kemp gave me copies of all his construction notes from when he built his version a year or so earlier. These notes were remarkable in their own right. Mike weighed every single component and stick of wood that went into his creation, all recorded in meticulous detail, which I still have. In addition there was a mass of contemporary material from the designer himself, in "Aeromodeller" and "Aeromodeller Annuals".

I tried to emulate Mike's precise methodology but every time I weighed a piece of material I feared it would not be strong enough and replaced it with something sensible. This singular failing (of mine) leads directly to an end game that whatever model I try to build it always finishes up too heavy. Although "Voodoo" did have an avoirdupois problem it has also stood the test of time by rewarding me with twenty-one years of reliable service and a bunch of very happy memories. Also, despite its longevity, it has hardly ever been AWOL and for the most part behaved immaculately. This is in direct contradiction to my "New Look" Wakefield which was difficult and malevolent for all its fabulous performance.



Seen here are some simple details. Firstly the finely adjustable hinged trim tab on the fin. The inset shows the pressure spring made from 24swg wire and on the other side of the fin, a screw thread adjuster fashioned from a tiny screw, some 16swg aluminium tube and miniature ply horns. All very small. See also the simplest possible freewheel clutch using 14swg wire all contained within a plug in nose cone retained with bamboo pegs. Finally, the fuse activated DT is operated by a single rubber band which provides both leverage and location forces against a thirty degree angled face at the front of the stabilizer unit.

In all probability it was Warring's own written material that further elevated his well earned status as an expert modeler and encouraged many others at that time to follow the cause. I say this because, like so many other contemporary authors such as appeared in those early Annual and Year Book publications, not all the theory contained therein was either accurate, or relevant. He even added to the mythical status of his undoubted experience by his written descriptions of adjusting glide trim on his models by the use of cigarette papers. What are we talking about here? A couple of thou at the most, and according to Ron it could make a difference. Fred Chapman told me it was definitely true as he witnessed Ron's use of this technique and I suppose it would make a difference however small, but at the bottom line, Warring was probably the only one who could tell the difference or believed that he could. Personally, I love to think he was that good.

Given the time-line history of his "Zombie" and Voodoo" designs, it is very likely that Warring never flew "Voodoo" in competitive anger. Even though he claimed it to be his ultimate Wakefield and therefore incapable of further improvement, he broke and/or lost two of his three models whilst trimming for the 1950 Wakefield trials and had to revert to components gleaned from the previous years' "Zombie" to compete therein. And of course the Wakefield rules were changed at the end of 1950 so there was no additional development of this particular design. There was another enigma, in that Ron also published a folding propeller version with a retracting under-carriage. However a popular view today is, not only, that it probably never flew but Warring never actually built the model either. Like most retrospective reflections of that era, of course it all depends on opinion, and it is very likely that many other designs may have equally been non-flyers, merely drawn and published to satisfy the insatiable demand from a hungry readership.

However, my own recall of what happened to my "Voodoo" remains reasonably clear. As mentioned, built in 1985 it was soon flying but was not performing at all well. I took it to the Nats and was trying to sort things out when J O'D observed what was going on and

advised me that it was “mushing”. I’d never heard of that, seemingly due to CG too far back (or more likely, heavy tail feathers). Anyway I added a two pence coin to the nose and it helped to sort things out very nicely. It certainly competed at all the available Wakefield events held that year with encouraging performances. Mind you, my “Voodoo”, nor any other version I have ever seen, ever performed as well as Ron Warring claimed for the model (“a true 5 minute, still air, Wakefield”).

It was about this time that I made the acquaintance of the esteemed and aforementioned, Fred Chapman. Fred (seen in this photo) was a contemporary of Warring and flew Wakefield competitively at that time, so he remembered the model well. Consequently he was very helpful to me getting “Voodoo” sorted out. In spite of Mike Kemp’s ascertainment



that the model would be easy to trim it took me a couple of years to get it on rails with sixteen strands of quarter Black FAI before the more docile Tan I became available. Either way I was practicing the “balls out” method of Wakefield flying within a very narrow flight envelope that depended upon putting as much power to the propeller as I could scarily achieve and trimming the power run for a tight right hand spiral. All my contemporaries were capable of building lighter airplanes and my solution to this failing was to learn how to pack in and handle more torque from the dreaded Black and Tan. Was it Sal Taibi who expounded “there ain’t no substitoot for altitood”? Anyway, whoever it was, I tried to aspire to it. Performing ROG with “Voodoo” presented no real difficulty. With its highly powered motors, it did not stay near the ground for very long, leaping rapidly skyward, as it were. It was also much easier to handle and place on the ground due to its short fuselage and normal wingspan.



Something which transpired at this time was that “Voodoo” was very capable of handling strong winds, probably due to the generous dihedral and short fuselage, and it was at Woodbury in 1987 that this proved to be an extreme advantage. I chose to fly the model in the Champagne Fly-off (longest single flight wins) competition. The wind speed according to the Hipperson’s anemometer was gusting hard to 33mph and carnage was all round. Rain was also forecast. Fred Chapman was my timekeeper and we chose to try launching

below the ridge to get some quieter air. Hell, it was going to end in disaster anyway, so why worry? He gave me the nod when he thought there was a lull. He could have fooled me 'cos it seemed to be going flat out still. Anyway at launch "Voodoo" went straight up and did a massive loop under full chat from 16 strands of Black FAI rubber. For those who remember this stuff, that was a lot of torque. It was the choice of launch point that saved the model as it missed the steep downhill gorse by 2 feet and punched its way up through the turbulent rollover to a massive height. Fred really struggled to see the model

CHAMPAGNE FLY-OFF VINTAGE	
PRALL	5.27
ALBAN	3.36
EDMUND	1.02
LEE	0.53
HARRY	0.13
STRACHAN	0.04
DONNELL	0.03
KEMP	0.02

POWER CHAMPAGNE FLY-OFF

in the gathering drizzle and reluctantly clocked the model off at 3.36. My younger eyes saw it down at 4.59. So maybe it is a five minute model after all, but not exactly in still air. As you can see from the results only two flyers made a proper fist of the situation with some noted names making pretty short flights indeed. The last four all formed and joined their own collective splinter group.



Simple arithmetic told us five minutes at thirty mph could be as much as two and a half miles. At Woodbury that is a hell of a walk, and its raining. Anyway I had a good bearing and set off in good heart to make the retrieve. Fred came with me but he had to retreat after a short while. I was then joined by Mike Kemp who saw the model down and fancied a walk after crashing his model in a spectacular vertical termination. Thus we navigated the difficult terrain to make the retrieve right on the money and steeled ourselves for a trudge back to the flight-line into the teeth of that strong blow. "Voodoo" suffered minor damage but was repaired in the confines of my caravan, the next morning, in time for the Vintage competitions that day. It flew, undaunted by prior events.

Ubiquitous at meetings all over southern England, I particularly remember some exhilarating "Chobham Trophy" events at Old Warden Vintage Day. This perpetual competition was for four and eight ounce Vintage Wakefield models all launched together with the highest model after forty-five seconds being the winner. Mike Kemp was the founding spark for these contests and the judges were usually Dick Hardwick and Don ("The Bulk") Knight who positioned themselves at a good distance across wind and made their judgment accordingly. It was always spectacular, with sometimes as many as twenty Wakefield flyers competing for the spoils. And of course the rules encouraged fliers to crank on the turns usually with a couple of extra strands too. Despite some occasional carnage I can never remember a mid-air collision.



Gradually popularity waned, probably due to a succession of Old Warden meetings with poor weather, or wind direction and a diminishing base of hardy souls. These two images depict me squeezing on the final few turns with spectators and competitors already gathering in the background and, next, letting go in the mass launch with all the models vying to be the highest after 45 secs. Note that “Voodoo” has been re-covered by this time, with my trademark black silk fuselage and new white tissue surfaces trimmed with orange dayglo tips. It is, however the same model.



“Voodoo” soon had a sister when I built Warring’s earlier “Zombie V”, seen here alongside the slimmer “Voodoo”. As a point of interest, this model was even more capable in windy conditions and although “Voodoo” seemed to have the edge on performance, it is a very subjective call. Within the technical arguments put forward by Warring for his slim-line fuselage sporting the recognizable mid-section bumps was his calculation that it had thirty percent less wetted area than his earlier designs and therefore less parasitic drag. Perhaps this is the reason why “Voodoo” seems marginally better.

In an effort to improve my contest performance I built a new “Voodoo”, which came out one ounce lighter than my original but within a year it was gone, not to a flyaway but to possible theft. It was trimmed in no time at all and definitely flew better than my original. I took it to Warwick Racecourse for a low key competition organized by local flying celebrity, Peter Martin and it landed on the local golf courses’ practice putting green. The green keeper was less than pleased despite there being no patrons using the facility. After much apology it again landed in the self same spot (or so I thought) and when I arrived at the crime scene, it was gone! The green keeper was adamant, he had not seen it. Apart from calling him a liar and busting into his tin hut there was very little to be done. On reflection, I might have called the local cop shop but the moment passed and I retreated, sans “Voodoo”. I often wonder, was it was trashed in a fit of pique or maybe he took it home and presented to his kids? It would be nice to think it was the latter but I doubt it?

About this time I was flying regularly at Chobham Common and it was here that I had the following singular encounter. Early-birdish, I was first to arrive one flat calm day for an extended trimming session and had already made one check flight. As I prepared for a full powered check of flight pattern an elderly gentleman wandered up and watched reverently during the whole process from prep, winding, checking rigging angles, lighting the fuse, launch, DT and landing. At launch the plane screamed silently aloft under the influence of one hundred grams of newly acquired TAN I plaited into sixteen strands of irresistible force. It was also in lift so after fifty seconds of spiraling power she settled into a perfect pattern sitting on top of a typical “Chobham Bubble” of buoyant air until the DT popped at five minutes to bring the model down no more than fifty feet away.

Without doubt a perfect flight. At this point we talked for the first time and I learned that he had traveled the world and seen many things in his lifetime. He had even fought a war and spent time in a prison camp but in all his life he had never seen anything so elegantly silent and yet so spectacular as he had this day. I explained that this was a flight made without radio control and I asked him if he was an Aeromodeller himself. The answer was no, but the fact that it was a free flight model driven by a rubber motor convinced him that, from this single observation, he regretted that he had missed out on such an obviously rewarding experience. He then wandered off and I never saw him again.

However I have often pondered this encounter. He had never experienced the thrill of a perfect Wakefield flight yet despite the fact that he had knowledge of so much else in his life, he still thought he had missed out on something special. We “Crazy Rubberbanders” have always known this to be true, of course, but it is rare indeed, that a member of “Joe Public” takes such an adoring view of our dying art and expresses it so well.

Ramon

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