

Gordon Burford (1919 - 2010)

Material with thanks from [Model Engine News](#)



Gordon Burford was Australia's premier model engine designer and manufacturer. The thousands and thousands of engines he produced and sold under the GB, GeeBee, Sabre, GloChief and Taipan names encouraged and sustained aeromodelling in this country for over 50 years.

Gordon was a modeler too, starting with rubber in the early 1930s and progressing to become a very competitive Indoor and Wakefield flyer prior to the Second World War, along with his lifelong friend, Boyd Felstead. Following the war, Gordon (VH-155) pioneered control-line flying in South Australia, alongside other luminaries such as Bill Evans, Jack Black, and Mal Sharpe.



He was a well-known and respected free-flight contestant for many years, before turning his interest to old-timer flying in the mid '70s. He built specialist engines for old-timers and was always on hand to offer advice and assistance to other modelers. Gordon was known around the world for his engines and modeling expertise, having made several overseas trips to England, France, Italy, and the United States.

Gordon Burford was born in Adelaide on the 3rd August 1919. He grew-up during the Depression years, aiding his father who was a beekeeper. Prior to the outbreak of WW2, he then trained as an aircraft instrument fitter. Enlisted in the 2/27th Brigade, Gordon was pulled out just prior to its embarkation for New Guinea and instructed to continue his instrument work. This order was to be of anguish to him for the rest of his life, though it undoubtedly saved him from the fate which befell so many of his compatriots.

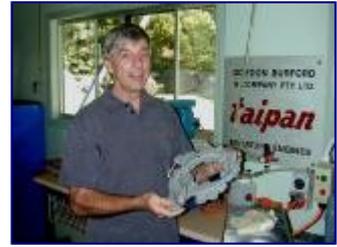


In 1942, Gordon married Josie Harding and, into the stable family which ensued, four sons were born. Following the cessation of hostilities, Gordon could see an opportunity to manufacture model aircraft engines in Australia. Convincing Josie that he could support the family in this manner, he purchased a lathe, a tool and cutter grinder, and a hone. He initially made just three 5cc diesels based on the [Sparey design](#) which had recently been published in England. Two further 5cc diesel designs

based on the very successful American Drone engines, were then produced in quantity to provide a living for the Burford family. By the mid '50s, Gordon Burford had built thousands of Sabre diesel and glow engines, most being sold on the local market. These engines

introduced so many young and old Australians to the joys of aeromodelling and elevated Gordon's small firm to International attention.

In 1957 he adopted the Taipan and GloChief names for his engines. [His son Peter](#) was now working full-time with his father and was to contribute his own design and manufacturing ideas. Production of Burford engines increased dramatically in the '60s and '70s, with well over 100,000 engines being built at the Gordon Burford and Co Pty Ltd factory at Belfast Street in Grange, South Australia.



In 1973, Gordon passed the Taipan business to Peter's control and directed his energies to the interests of Australian aeromodellers, taking the position of Federal Secretary and Treasurer to the Model Aircraft Association of Australia (MAAA). In this, he was very ably assisted by his wife Josie, and they remained in this capacity until 1984. During their tenure, the MAAA was progressed from a relatively small organization to one with access to the Australian Government and an enhanced presence at the annual CIAM Meeting of the FAI in Paris. Gordon loved these overseas trips and forged a long-lasting, personal association with many prominent people in the international aeromodelling scene. Influential people such as Ron Moulton, Peter Chinn, Ron Irvine, Henry Nicholls, John Brodbeck, Duke Fox, Sandy Pimenoff, John Pond and others were now brought up-to-date with the Australian modelling scene. As a result of these introductions, Australian modellers started to move out into the world. That is one of Gordon Burford's greatest legacies.

In 1983, Gordon and Josie were granted MAAA Life Membership for their work with the organization. In 1985, Gordon was awarded the prestigious Paul Tissandier Diploma by the FAI for services to aeromodelling. He was inducted into the MAAA Hall of Fame twice. First in 1983 for services to aeromodelling, and again in 2000 for being a 'Competitor at the 1938 Nationals', the first such national event held in Australia.

Around 1980, Gordon and Josie moved from Adelaide to Currumbin in QLD and built a unique house to Gordon's design. In the large attached workshop, he built many of the specialist and replica engines for which he was so well-known in later years. He also provided unstinting assistance and advice to Aling Li, of the Thunder Tiger company in Taiwan and to smaller engine builders such as the writer. Josie passed away in 1998, ending for Gordon a marvelous marriage which had lasted for nearly 56 years. Finally, Gordon embraced CO2, compressed air and electric power and in his latter years flew small models in a local reserve. He never lost his interest in model engines though, and was always ready to discuss and quietly advise people with a similar interest.



Gordon Burford passed away on the 12th March, 2010, following a fall at his home in Currumbin. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him, who knew of him, or who merely flew models with his engines. We extend our condolences to his sons, Peter, Don, Richard and Mark, to their wives and partners and to Gordon's grandchildren and their families.

David Owen (VH2198), Wollongong NSW 2500, 14th March 2010.