Issue 665 / November 18th, 2025

PEAK OF FLIGHT NEWSLETTER

Apogee Components, Inc. / ApogeeRockets.com / Colorado Springs, CO

Building the Fort Sill Alpha Rocket



Book Review
Rocket Manual for Amateurs

Also in this issue:
A Rocket, A Father, My Future

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COVER PHOTO



Launch of the Fort Sill Alpha

Build a near 1-to-1 scale model of the rocket that started an industry.

FEATURED ARTICLES



A Rocket, A Father, My Future

Inspired by the *Rocket Manual for Amatuers*, a young boy, with the help of his father begins the exploration of rocketry.



Build the Fort Sill Alpha

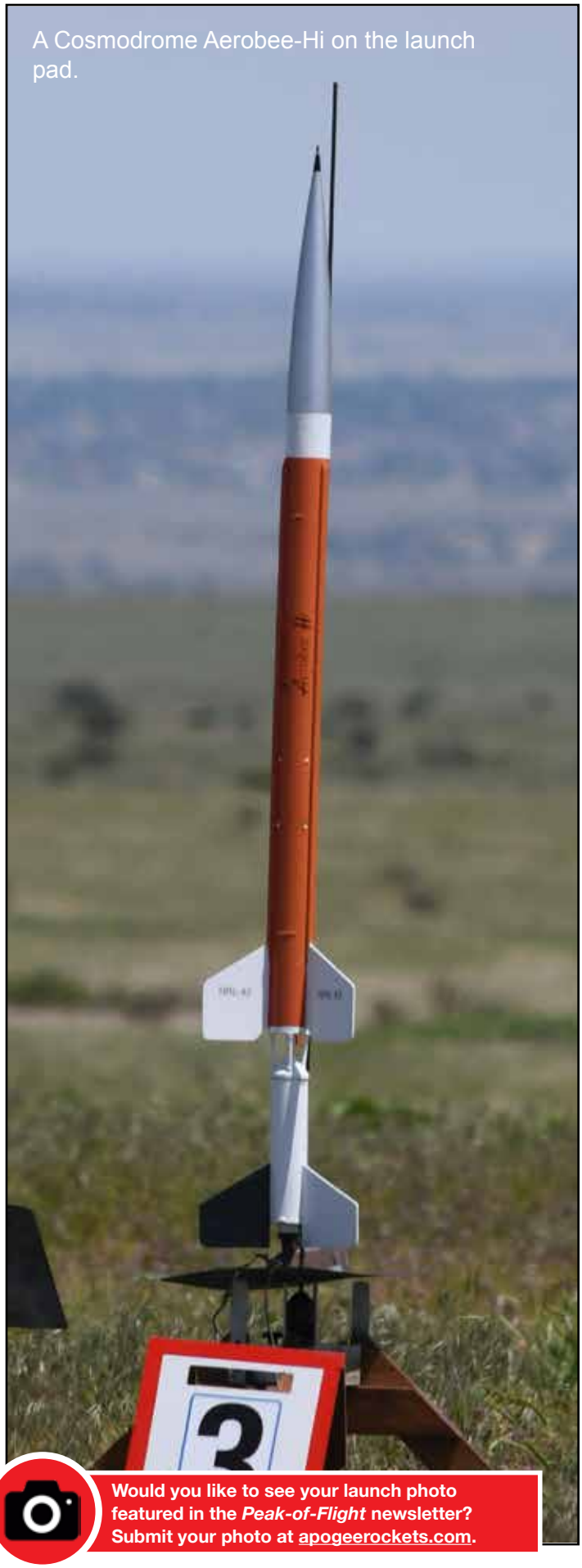
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A Cosmodrome Aerobee-Hi on the launch pad.

Would you like to see your launch photo featured in the *Peak-of-Flight* newsletter? Submit your photo at apogeerockets.com.

PEAK OF FLIGHT NEWSLETTER

A Rocket, A Father, My Future
by David Newell

Issue 665 / November 18th, 2025

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A Rocket, A Father, My Future

By David Newell

It is the early 1960s, and ROCKETS are The Thing - I had purchased the *"Rocket Manual for Amateurs",* Capt. Bertrand Brinley [Ballantine Books, 1960] as part of a 5th or 6th grade Scholastic Book Fair. I devoured that book - wore out the pages!

Soon, my best buddy and I had found the raw materials for a Ft. Sill Alpha - Illustration No.31 below from the book – hardwood nose cone, nozzle, and sheet metal fins looked like something two pre-teens could easily accomplish!

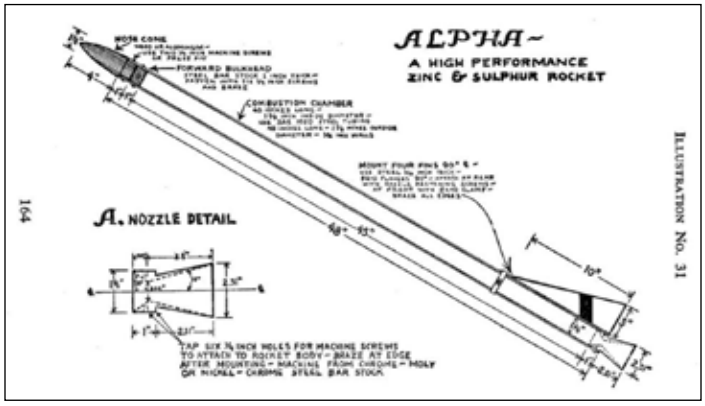
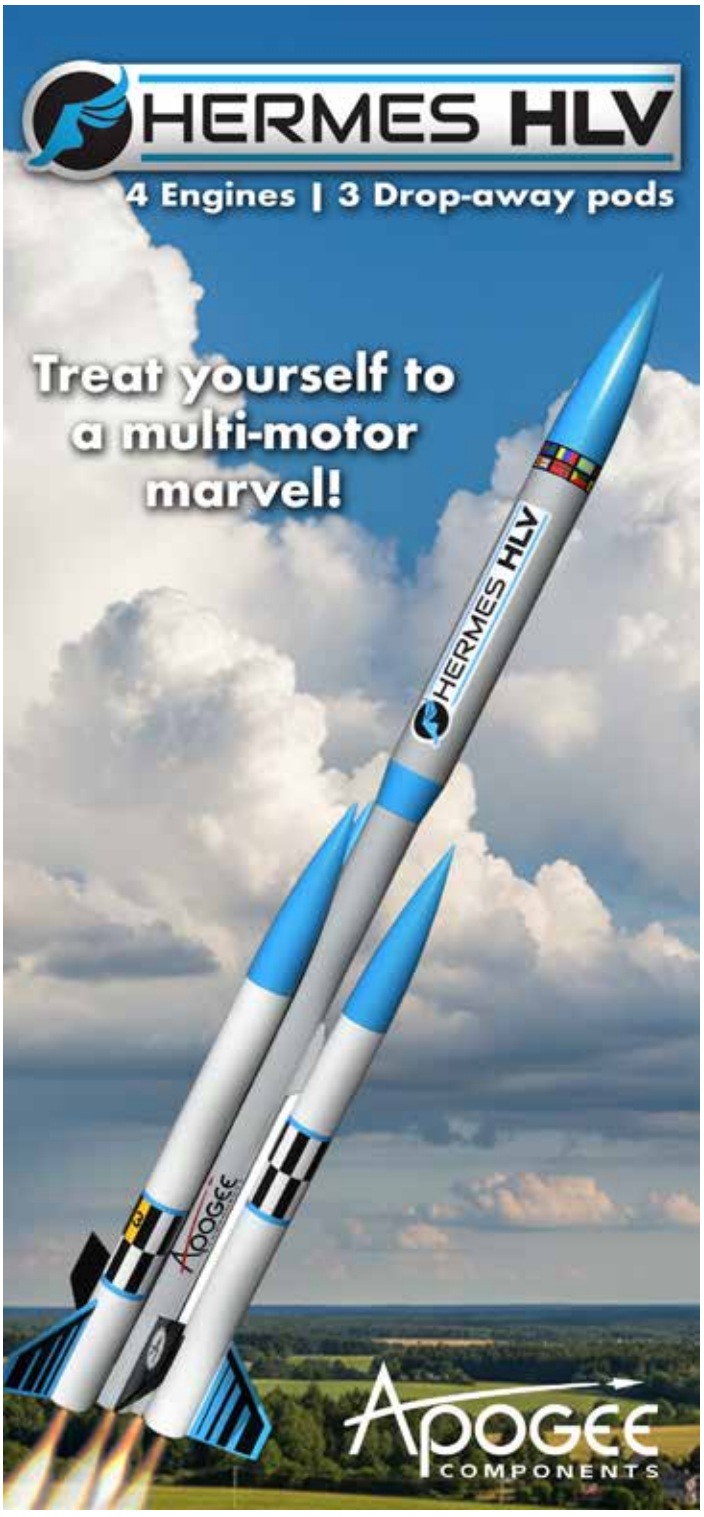


Fig. 1 - The Alpha Rocket - See page 11 for the free plan!

Note the following about the Alpha - "A High Performing 4-Foot Rocket: The rocket shown in Illustration 31 is one of two designed by the staff of the Army Artillery and Missile School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for amateur experimenters. This rocket, properly constructed and properly loaded, should achieve a **cutoff velocity of 650 to 700 miles per hour and rise to an altitude in the neighborhood of 15,000 feet**" **My emphasis - amazing in the early 1960's! [see attached build plan of a full "scale" E / F version)**

We had a good woodshop in the basement, I had learned basics of a lathe by the age of 12 and could cut steel and sheet metal as well, albeit I did cut my hand badly on this build! The shop first aid kit came to the rescue. All the hardware was soon fabricated – as best we could - and awaiting assembly.

Next we needed a launch site - fortunately, we lived out in the country, and I thought nothing of digging a launching pit in our backyard. See "Illustration No. 54" from the handbook. Only the water trough got completed. We did find the bags of cement and wood for forming the launcher base, but as you will see, wise adults intervened and later I filled the trench and learned how to re-seed the damaged lawn.



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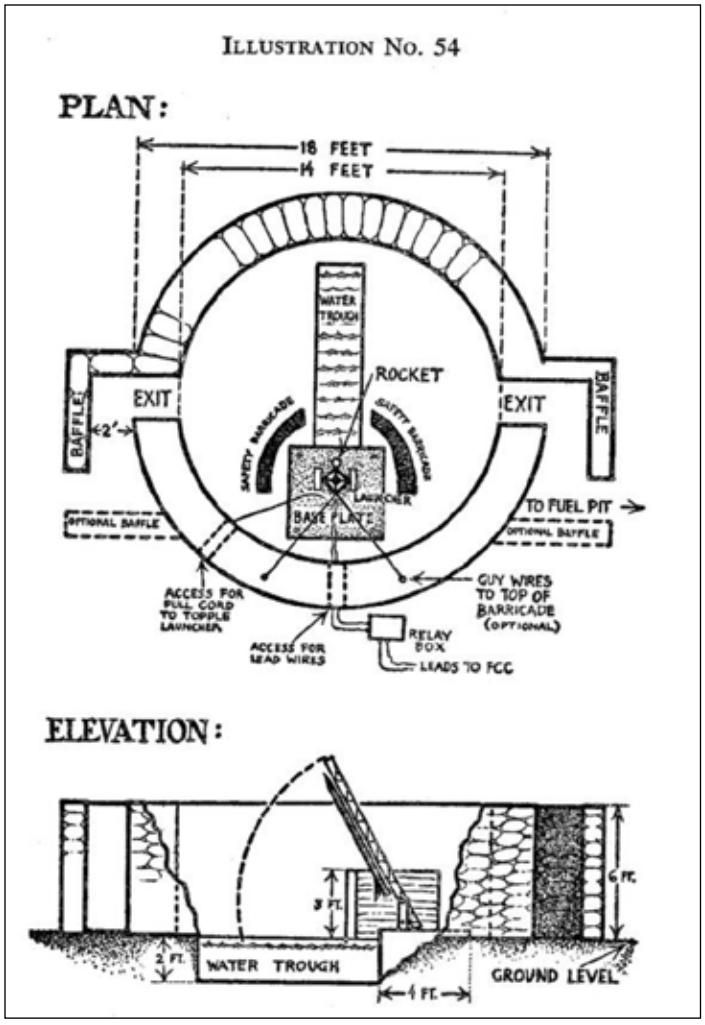


Fig. 1 - The recommended launching bunker.

Now up to this point, Mom was merely curious as to our activity - even the backyard digging didn't seem unusual (hole to China maybe?), and we were not yet obviously dangerous, until I asked, "What is a double boiler and do you have one?". Now she had interest! "Why?" - me " to melt the carmel candy and use it to mix with the fertilizer in the garage for our rocket fuel - see!" Whereupon, she was shown a four-foot stainless tube with a nose cone, fins, and a nozzle to be installed. "Let's discuss this with Dad when he gets home."

I proudly showed him all of our work, how we had followed the plans in the book, to include the big pit in his lawn, a well-turned nose cone – while keeping the large band-aid on my hand as out of sight as much as possible.

OK… Dad was a senior engineering supervisor for GM DEL-





CO - lead designer on electric motors. More on that later. Within a week, two simultaneous things happened - A high school senior only 20 miles away had his amateur rocket explode while setting it up, killing him and making local headlines; and Dad found an advertisement for Estes in *Popular Mechanics* or *Boy's Life* or such. The stainless tube went back into the basement, the yard was repaired, the hand healed, but the burning desire to launch was ignited!

The Estes catalog was ordered and I WAITED! It took F O R E V E R! It was the hand-sewn version! Wish I still had it!

Next, did a LOT of chores, saved the nickels and dimes, sent off for an Astron Scout and three motors. Two blue tubes arrived, I had to clean my dinner plate two nights in a row - even the dreaded vegetables - and show my completed homework before beginning the build.

He helped me build a launch controller and launch pad. Taught me to solder alligator clips and a small light bulb for a power check. The igniter was a nichrome wire wound around a ballpoint pen tip with a little piece of Jetex fuse in the coil. Back to the former launch area, attached a car battery, saw the safety light on, Count Down!, Flipped the switch after the countdown and WOOSH! Amazing see that smoke trail! Wow! I was a rocketeer!

NOW the real "Dad" story begins. Up it went, down it tumbled,

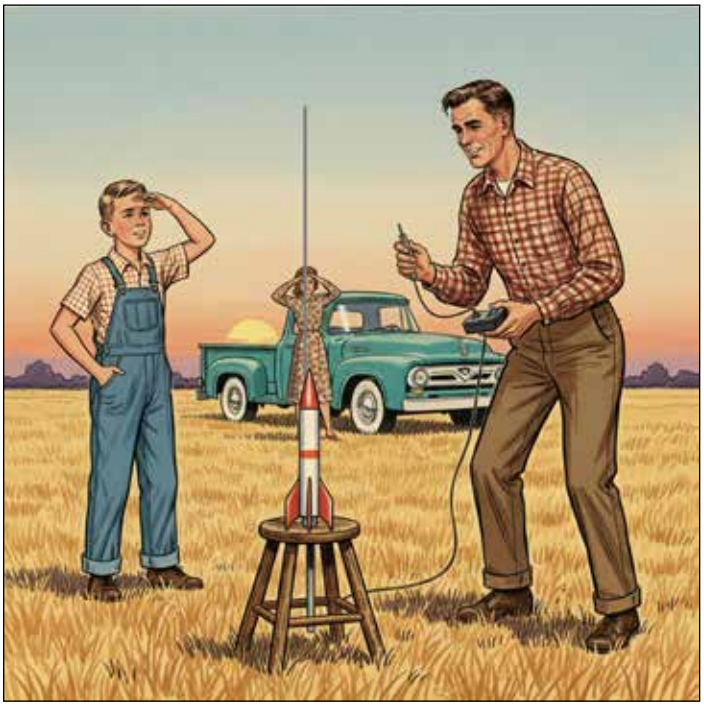


Fig. 3 - Launch of a boy's first rocket.

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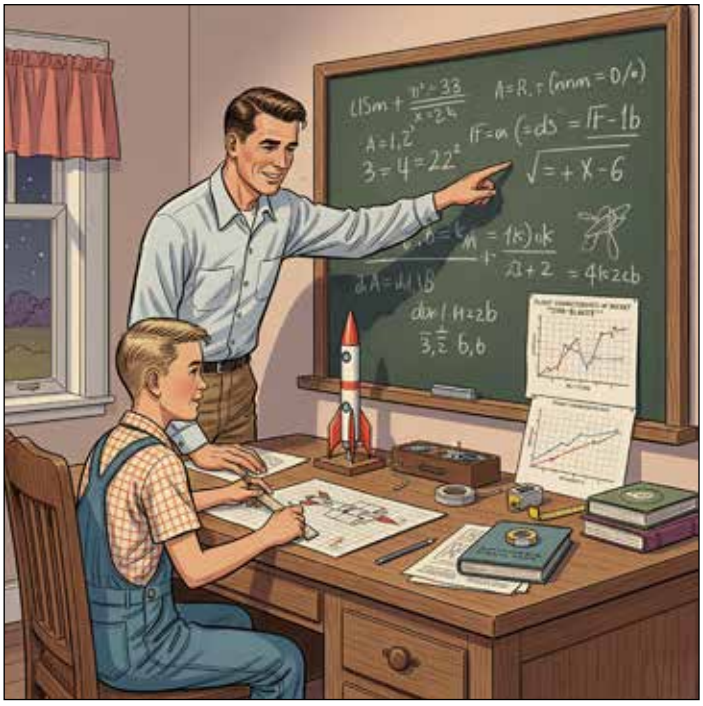


Figure 4- Dad becomes the teacher.

WE recovered it and he inquisitively asked…"So, how high did it go?" That evening, he helped me build a simple protractor, a gravity angle detector, and a paper towel tube. WE measured a 100-foot baseline, and launch #2 took place the next day. The excitement was the same and that second evening, I was working out the right triangles to calculate the altitude! Hmmm, what is the sin of an angle? How do I find that? Sliderule and a book of tables came into my life. Now, you need to understand, I "hated" math - much to his displeasure. [It turned out I did not like the Math teacher.] But he, coached me through that bit of geometry, helping me discover the answer! I recall working out an altitude of about 200+ feet. He was very proud of my work! And I could not wait to tell my friends the next day!

And then Dad asked, knowing where this might lead, "So… how fast did it go?" Huh? How do we do that?

A gentle lesson with engineering sketches – he was a master at drafting - in velocity, acceleration (and deceleration) time and distance followed. He really worked on having me think about what information I would need and how to get it.

Day 3 and we prepped again, stopwatch in hand - the first time he had let me hold that precious device - and flight #3 headed skyward. More calculations and questions that led me to the solution (sort of - a simple piece of calculus), and I was amazed! Soon he





lead me into the wonderful areas of geometry, understand nose cones as conic sections - and center of gravity versus center of pressure - COOL!

I was now DESIGNING rockets using numbers and not just sketching lines. My Math scores went up like the little model rockets I was building. If I could turn the math problem into a rocket issue, away I went! When Estes Technical Report TR-10 and the Barrowman charts were published, I bought a set and learned to work through them page by page. Dad was highly satisfied.

Mom could not find enough chores for me to do - I had to earn the money for motors and materials. I even began re-packaging Estes kits, turning my cones, fins, tubes, etc. then selling them to friends in school! Had to pay for the habit! I became the local "pusher" for motors - buy three, sell one at a time!

Let's end this with two final points: My rocketry hobby helped me get into the USAF Academy, graduate, and go to pilot training. I started the USAFA NAR Section.

My father designed and help assemble the electric power system and motors for the NASA Lunar Rovers. Twelve of his motor drives are still there on the moon. Very Proud to write that last line.

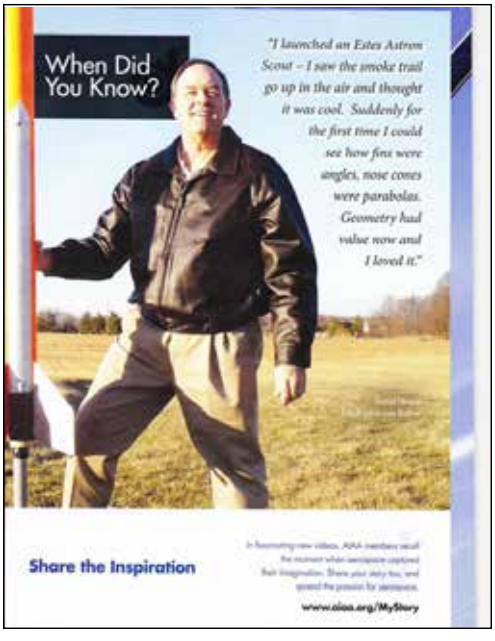
I still use his two basic questions to this day with beginning rocketeers. We work thru the altitude problem, decide what basic information we need to calculate velocity "What is the velocity on the launch pad? What is the velocity at the top of the flight? Hmmm – so how do we get the velocity in flight?" And another young person discovers the connection between model rocketry and engineering sciences.

Thank You W.J.Newill (Dad), for getting me on the way to my aerospace future.

About the Author

David Newill NAR 6139 - an OLD rocketeer - NAR since 1964 (and had to pay for that myself as well!)

Right: An AIAA recruiting advertisement with a very short version of this story.



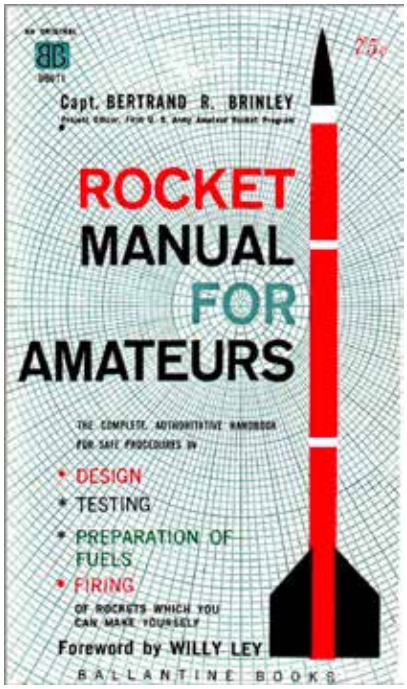
PEAK OF FLIGHT NEWSLETTER

About the Rocket Manual for Amateurs

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Rocket Manual for Amateurs (1960)



Rocket Manual for Amateurs is a 382-page handbook by Capt. Bertrand R. Brinley, published by Ballantine Books in 1960 (You can download a pdf version of the book at: https://www.scribd.com/document/40020834/Rocket-Manual-for-Amateurs-C). It was issued in the early Space Age (Sputnik 1957), when teenage interest in rocketry exploded. The book's foreword by noted rocketry writer Willy Ley acknowledges this context: before Sputnik there were already "dedicated groups of amateur rocket experimenters" with good safety records, but post-Sputnik "every youngster wanted to build rockets". Ballantine's back-cover copy emphasizes exactly what Brinley – as *"Director of the 1st Army Amateur Rocket Liaison Program"* – set out to do: teach amateurs to build high-performance rockets safely on a shoestring budget. In Brinley's words (as quoted on the book), for "a few dollars" any group can build rockets "that will surpass the best performance of rockets built by pioneer scientists," using his *"step-by-step directions"* and safety procedures .

The manual is unusually comprehensive for its time. Its chapters cover everything from organizing a club (including recruiting adult sponsors and drafting a model constitution) to basic rocket design, propellant chemistry, motor construction, static testing, flight procedures and tracking. For example, Brinley guides readers through choosing fuels, designing nozzles, constructing a firing range with bunkers, and even first-aid and emergency procedures. The appendices ("Appendix B–F") include diagnostic tables and computations, "Rocket Symbols," "Rocket Formulas," and a vocabulary glossary – alongside a full *First-Aid Advice* section for rocket groups. Illustrated by Barbara Remington, the manuscript balances technical detail with a conversational, almost "fatherly" tone (one author later noted) that aimed to keep excited teens grounded in safety and science. In short, *Rocket Manual for Amateurs* became a kind of encyclopedia for serious hobbyists – far

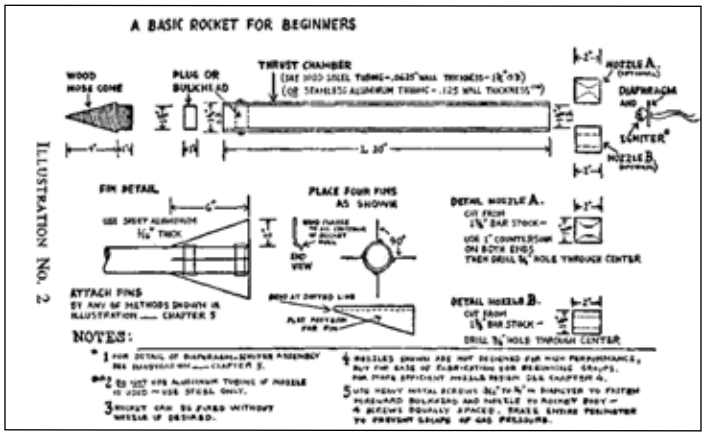




more ambitious than typical model-rocket kits – covering mental math (nozzles, trajectories) through practical setup (launch codes, permits).

Captain Bertrand R. Brinley

Bertrand R. Brinley (1917–1994) was a U.S. Army officer who specialized in outreach to youth rocket enthusiasts. In the 1950s he was made the head of the Army's amateur rocketry program (often called the "Amateur Rocket Liaison Program" or "First U.S. Army Amateur Rocket Program"). In that role he advised and assisted countless clubs and school groups. The book's biographical blurb notes that Brinley "has advised thousands of amateur rocketeers in hundreds of rocket clubs in the United States and in foreign countries," and that the Army distributed his safety brochure (*Rocket Safety Tips for Teen-Age Rocketeers*) to over 5,000 clubs. Brinley organized public exhibits and symposiums (for example at New York University and Brooklyn Poly), gave lectures at schools and planetariums, and wrote monthly columns on youth rocketry for magazines like *American Modeler* and *Speed Age*. In short,



beyond authoring the manual, Brinley was a one-man ambassador for model rocketry – connecting amateurs, the military, and professional organizations.

Outside of rocketry, Brinley is best remembered as a writer of youth science fiction (the Mad Scientists' Club stories appeared in Boys' Life and in book form in the early 1960s) (www.liquisearch.com). But in 1960 he was very much an Army public relations officer turned rocketry counselor. The *Rocket Manual* itself was copyrighted to him, an original work (not a reprint). In the manual Brinley stresses organization and discipline. He insists that safety come "first and last and every quarter inch in between", and he counsels clubs to acquire responsible adult sponsors ("horse sense" advisors) and even to reach out to engineering societies

(e.g. local ASME/American Rocket Society chapters) for support, emphasizing that amateurs must earn credibility with proper safety procedures. His combination of technical advice and advocacy made him a linchpin figure for rocketry hobbyists of the era.

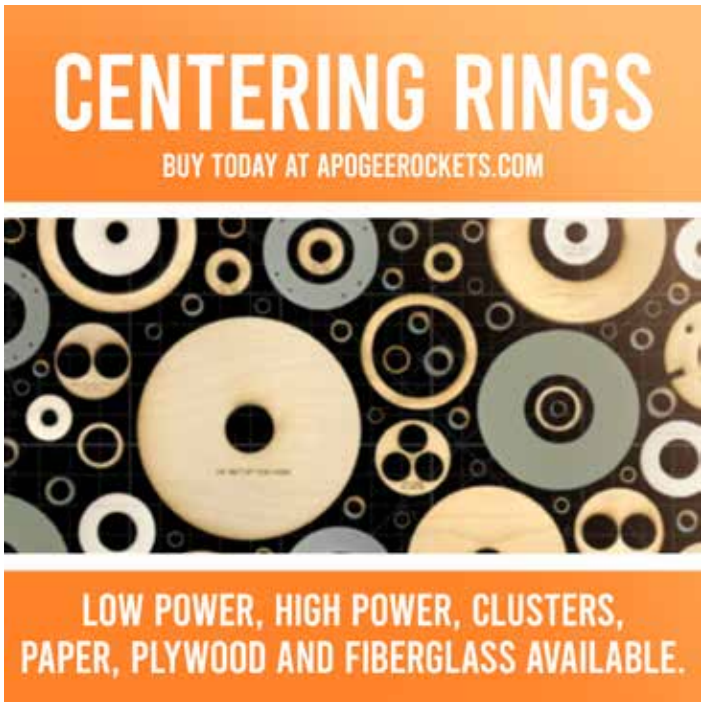
Influence on Model Rocketeers

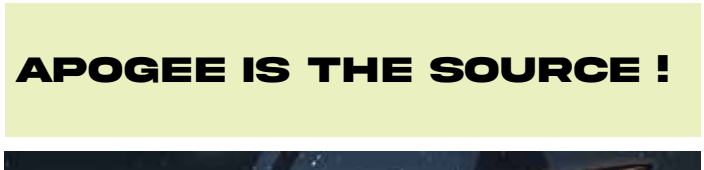
Brinley's *Rocket Manual* and his Army role had a lasting impact on amateur rocketry. First, his official endorsement gave the hobby legitimacy and support at a time when some authorities were cracking down. For instance, Willy Ley's foreword notes that while companies and the military were beginning to promote amateur rocketry, the established American Rocket Society was still "repeatedly against any and all amateur experimentation". Brinley's efforts countered that stigma by offering structured guidance and safety training. By schooling young rocketeers in proper procedures, he helped communities avoid accidents (Ley quotes Brinley arguing that most mishaps are from "carelessness or simple lack of workmanship", driving home strict safety rules).

In practical terms, Brinley provided resources that model rocket groups eagerly adopted. He includes in his book a sample rocket society constitution and safety code to serve as templates; he urged groups to organize formally (typically 5–20 members with varied skills) and to coordinate launches with local authorities. He even distributed tens of thousands of advisory pamphlets through Army channels. His monthly articles in hobby magazines reached thousands of readers, reinforcing the manual's lessons. One early rocketeer recalls that the **Amateur Rocketeers of America** (a nationwide club in 1958–63) named "Captain Bertrand R. Brinley" as their official Army liaison, and treated *Rocket Manual for Amateurs* as their group's "bible" (aviationarchives.blogspot.com). In short, Brinley's leadership helped knit together the loose federation of 1960s rocketry clubs into a safer, better-informed community.

Finally, Brinley's manual itself became an influential text. While today it is seen as dated, veterans note that it covered far more advanced topics than the basic model-rocket kits of the era. One reader put it bluntly: this book was not about Estes-style paper rockets, but "real small-scale rockets of metal and steel" requiring serious math and chemistry (www.amazon.com). In that sense, Brinley's work bridged the gap between casual hobby and the emerging field of aerospace engineering. Many of those early experimenters — fueled by his book, safety tips, and mentorship — went on to careers in science and technology. In summary, Rocket Manual for Amateurs embodied Brinley's influence: it galvanized and educated a generation of model rocketeers under a banner of safety and technical rigor, laying groundwork that later hobbyist organizations (like the National Association of Rocketry) would build upon.

References: The details above are drawn from Brinley's own *Rocket Manual for Amateurs* (Ballantine 1960) and related documentation. For example, the publisher's blurb and foreword highlight Brinley's Army role and goals (pdfcoffee.com) (pdfcoffee.com). The book's "About the Author" section lists his thousands of club contacts and safety outreach (es.scribd.com). Anecdotal histories (e.g. Ron Downey's Amateur Rocketeers blog) confirm his liaison role in youth clubs (aviationarchives.blogspot.com) (aviationarchives.blogspot.com). Brinley's own text (and reviews) attest to the book's technical breadth and emphasis on safety (pdfcoffee.com) (pdfcoffee.com). All quotes and facts above are cited from these sources.







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www.ApogeeRockets.com

Build the Fort Sill Alpha

by David Newell

Alpha

Ft. Sill High Performance Rocket - 1960

My very first rocket – beyond water rockets and the 1960's AFCO baking soda-vinegar plastic red "Alpha-1 Ballistic Rocket" was a 1961 attempt to build the amateur rocket shown in the *Rocket Manual for Amateurs*. [See article – "A rocket, A Father, My Future] Fortunately, that led me to Model Rockets.

After looking up details on the "Ft. Sill Alpha", it was obvious this would be a simple "scale" build…and then I got obsessed. After all, replicating your "first" rocket [never fueled or flown] is sort of emotional.

Background-The Ft. Sill Alpha is an AMATEUR experimental-level rocket designed by engineers at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma Field Artillery School in the early 1960s and detailed in Capt. Bertrand R. Brinley's *Rocket Manual for Amateurs* (Ballantine Books, 1960). At 385 pages (paperback), it covers nearly everything AMATEUR rocketeers in the 1960s would likely want to know - from propellant composition to first aid needed with various fuels and materials to even digging a latrine at the launch site! Well worth finding and reading.

The AMATEUR Alpha burned 8.6 pounds of micro-grain solid fuel in ½ second! BANG! This generated a calculated 800 lb of thrust as it accelerated to over 500 mph and nearly 15,000 feet of altitude. [Roughly an N4000] The actual "Alpha" was pure ballistic "recovery" -not what we do with our aerospace hobby sport! Imagine an 11-year-old thinking he could do this!

The "Scale" Alpha is designed to fly on 24 mm E motors and reach 500- 600 feet of altitude, making it much more likely to be recovered in Model Rocket flying areas!

The real Alpha had a 1 ¾ " diameter 48" tube, so a BT-60 version would be 1:0.93 scale – very close to full size! I happen to like to carry data-collecting altimeters, so I added a payload area but kept the overall length the same.

Looking at the Apogee parts catalog, and running RockSim, the following parts list was generated;



Name	Part Number	Dimension	Comment
Body tube BT-60	10141	18"	
Body tube BT-60	10141	8"	Note- easy cut from 18" Yields next piece
Body tube BT-60	10141	10"	Recovery system area
Body tube BT-60	10141	6"	Payload
Body tube BT-50	10100	18"	Becomes engine mount – stuffer tube
BT-60 / 50 Centering rings X 4	13420		
BT-60 Couplers X3	13019		
Estes Nose Cone 3 pack	20021	Use short cone and simulated nozzle	
BT-60 Bulkhead	12261		
Kevlar Cord 300#	30326	Five feet	
Fin Material 1/32 Balsa	14125 (2 pack)	See plans	

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Build the Fort Sill Alpha

by David Newell

Name	Part Number	Dimension	Comment
OR Fin Material Basswood	14092 (X4)		
Parachute – 18”	29092		
Bond Paper for fin cover and fin attach scale			
Rail Buttons or guides	13531		
Paint			

Construction is straightforward. I like a mid-body external recovery cord so that the tube and fins are usually horizontal under the parachute. Hence, my version mounts the Kevlar cord with the lower tube coupler and is external at that point.



Fig 1 - Dry fit the Alpha



Fig 2 - Mid Body coupler with Kevlar

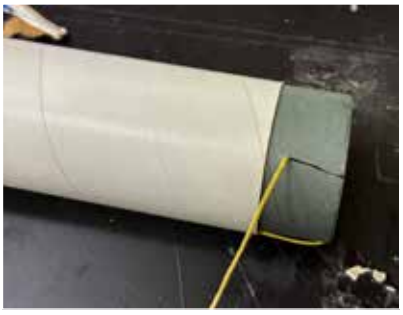


Fig 3 - Mid Body coupler installed and then slit

The BT-50 engine mount is a full 18” length of BT-50, with 1 ½” protruding from the aft end to be flush with the end of the simulated nozzle. This becomes a stuffer tube as well – after all, 36” of empty BT-60 is a lot of volume! Note the TTWF with two tabs sets spacing for centering rings.



Fig 4 - Motor Mount and Stuffer



Fig 5 - Engine Mount Details

I like through-the-wall fins, and having access to a laser cutter made the fin layout / cut very easy. As these are long fins, I had a TTW tab at the front and a second one an inch forward of the aft end. This makes a properly aligned long fin very easy. A bit of rounding on the leading and trailing edges, then finishing to get to a metal-like surface, gets that part ready.



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Fig 6 - Layout for two tab TTWF

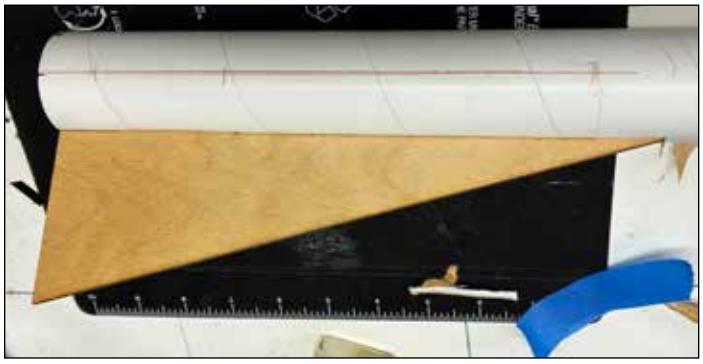


Fig 7 - Dry fit the two tab TTWF



Fig 8 - Nose Cone and Nozzle

My larger diameter rockets often have a "shelf" to keep the recovery system from shifting aft and changing the center of gravity on launch. The additional BT-60/50 centering ring on the forward tube coupler between the 18" and 10" BT-60 does that job on this build.

Finally, the nose cone is a bit of an issue, for "scale". The Estes Three Pack includes a 5 ¼ ogive cone, and happily a 1 ¼ simulated nozzle! If you are into 3D printing, you can create an exact cone and nozzle, and make slight adjustments to the payload build lengths for precise scale production. I simply took the 5 ¼ cone and marked off two ¾" bands for paint to look like the stainless



Fig 9 - Nose cone painted and "stained."

tube and black paint dots as screws for the original bulkhead and nose cone attachments. Coloring the remainder of the cone brown with streaks of black and brown felt-tip permanent markers so as to look like the original hardwood part, completed that part of the "scale" effort.

The original fins were sheet metal with a 90-degree bent "tab" the full length of the root edge. That tab extends beyond the intersection of the leading edge to the body tube point so that a band clamp could be used to hold the fin in place. The design then had that tab and fin length strip brazed, and a screw attached through the rear fin-tab edge and into the nozzle. All of that is for show on this "scale" model. Which means one can either paper the fins, but keep the "tab" free of adhesive until after fin install or make a separate tab to install after fins are in place.

If you do NOT paper the fins, then cut a strip of heavy-duty paper ½ wide and ¾" longer than the fin root. Glue this to the body tube along ONE side of the fin to simulate the "tab" used to secure the real Alpha's sheet metal fins.



Fig 10 - Papered and Metal Painted Fins

A small bead of white glue along the tab edge replicates the braze connection. Finish off this part of the build detailing simulating a band clamp at the leading edge with a ½" wide strip of bond

paper or metallic tape that wraps the full diameter just ahead of the fins.

Attaching the Kevlar cord to some elastic shock cord and then to the parachute and payload section completes the build.

I did expend more than the usual time filling joints between body tube sections to try and get a “stainless steel” smooth finish. Fill, sand, wipe, repeat…

A careful bit of priming, twice with 1000 grit wet sand between coats, then aluminum or silver spray paint, was followed by adding a Black angular tape stripe to the fins.

My model uses the rail guides as they more closely simulate the original versions. As I do not want paint in the rail guides, my technique is to install after all painting is done, peeling away a razor knife scored “patch” on the tube to match the rail guide attachment surface, then roughing the curved side of the guide with a large rat-tail file. Epoxy together to keep things strong. A little Rub-N-Buff silver on the top of the rail guide finishes the proper look without getting into the guide slots.

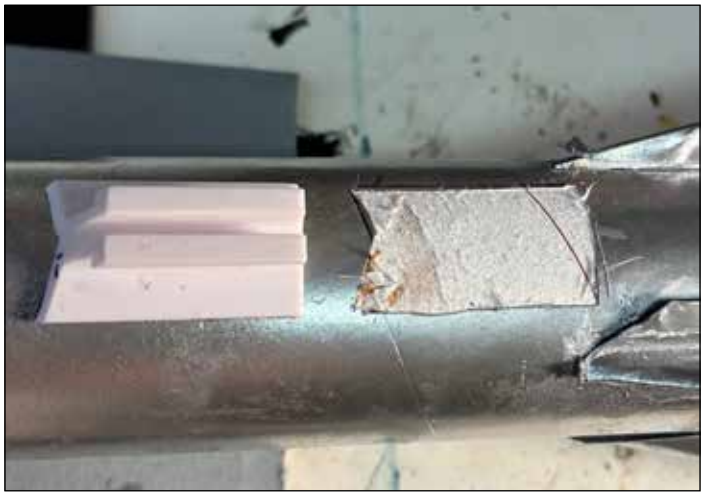


Fig 11 - Patch cut and peeled out for the rail guide



Fig 12 - Rub n' Buff for the rail guide.



Fig 13 - Alpha on the launch rail.

Flights have been on an Aerotech E-30-4. Clearly an F motor can be installed if your recovery field is large enough.

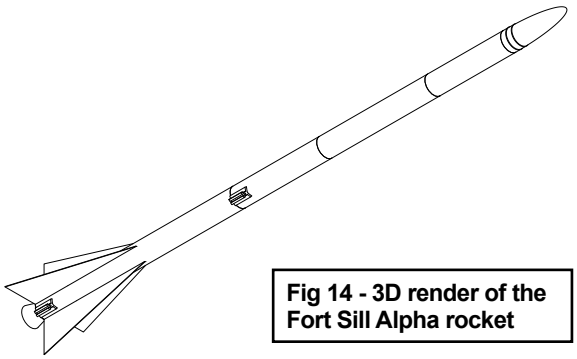


Fig 14 - 3D render of the Fort Sill Alpha rocket

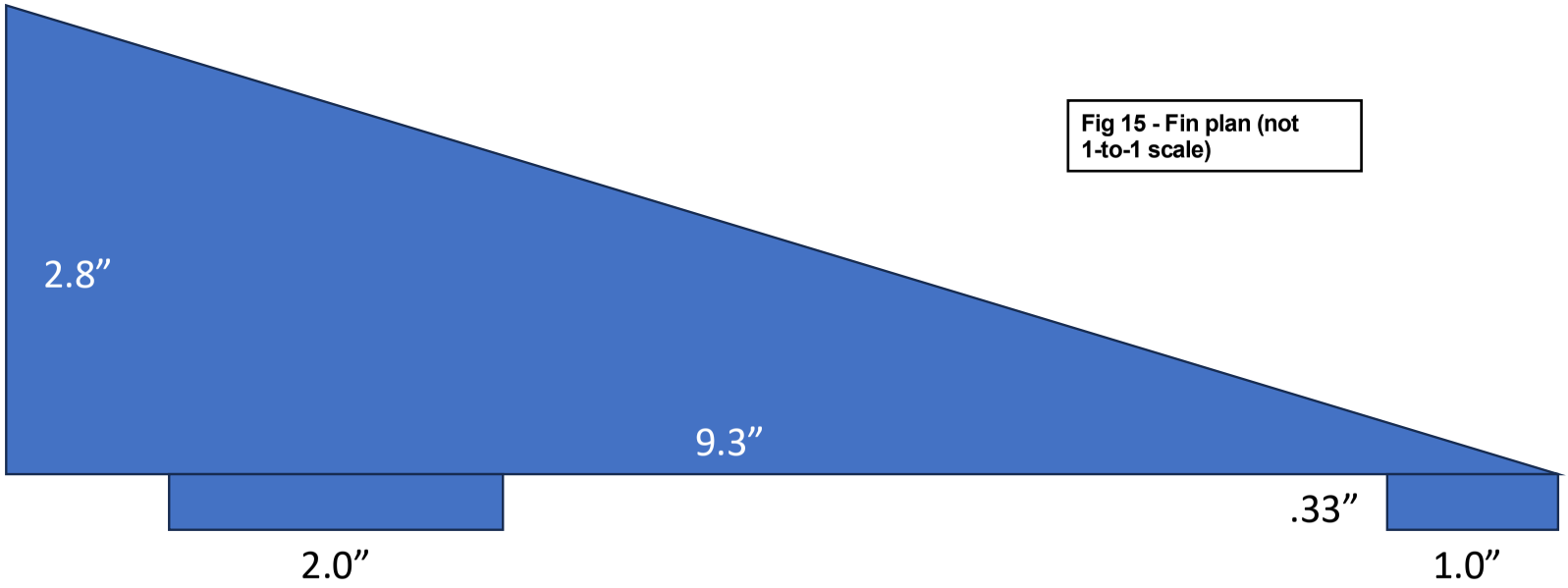
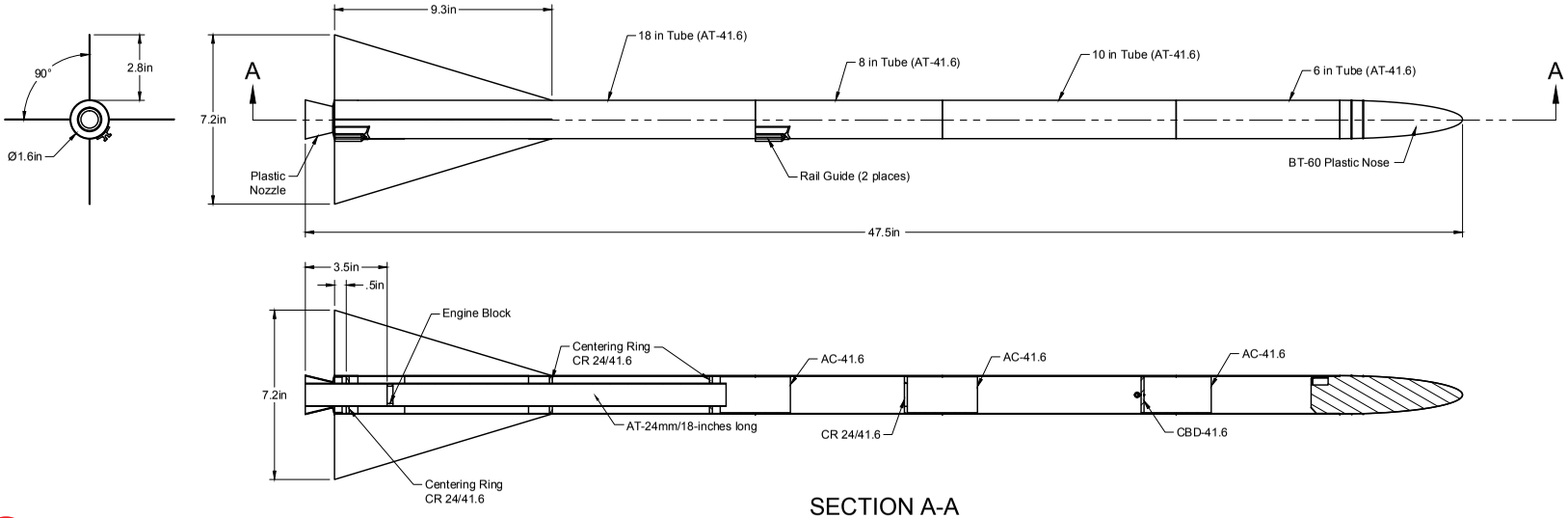


Fig 15 - Fin plan (not 1-to-1 scale)

Download the RockSim file for the Fort Sill Alpha rocket at:
https://www.apogeerockets.com/Peak-of-Flight-Rocket-Plans



SECTION A-A

PEAK OF FLIGHT NEWSLETTER
Issue 665 / November 18th, 2025
www.ApogeeRockets.com

Build the Fort Sill Alpha
by David Newell

PEAK OF FLIGHT NEWSLETTER

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Article Submission Guidelines

SUBMITTING ARTICLES TO APOGEE

We are always looking for quality articles to publish in the *Peak-of-Flight* newsletter. Please submit the "idea" first before you write your article. It will need to be approved first.

When you have an idea for an article you'd like to submit, please use our contact form at **https://www.apogeerockets.com/Contact**. After review, we will be able to tell you if your article idea will be appropriate for our publication.

Always include your name, address, and contact information with all submissions. Including best contact information allows us to conduct correspondence faster. If you have questions about the current disposition of a submission, contact the editor via email or phone.

CONTENT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

We prefer articles that have at least one photo or diagram for every 500 words of text. Total article length should be between 2000-4000 words and no shorter than 1750 words. Articles of a "how-to" nature are preferred (though other types of articles will be considered) and can be on any rocketry topic: design, construction, manufacture, decoration, contest organization, etc. Both model rocket and high-power rocket articles are accepted.

CONTENT WE ARE NOT LOOKING FOR

We don't publish articles like "launch reports." They are nice to read, but if you don't learn anything new from them, then they can get boring pretty quick... Example: "Bob flew a blue rocket on a H120 motor for his certification flight." As mentioned above, we're looking for articles that have an educational component to them, which is why we like "how-to" articles.

You can see what articles and topics we've published before at: **https://www.apogeerockets.com/Peak-of-Flight?pof_list=archives&m=education**. You might use this list to give you an idea or two for your topic.

Here are some of the common articles that we reject all the time, because we've published on these topics before:

- How to get a L1, L2, or L3 Cert
- Building cheap rockets and equipment (pads & controllers)
- How to 3D print parts, or a Rocket Kit
- How to Build a cheap Rocket Kit
- Getting Back Into Rocketry After a Long Hiatus

ARTICLE & IMAGES SUBMISSION

Articles may be submitted by emailing them to the editor. Article text can be provided in any standard word processor format, or as plain-text. Graphics should be sent in either a vector format (Adobe Illustrator, SVG, etc.) or a raster format (such as jpg or png) with a width of at least 600 pixels for single column images or 1200 pixels for two-column images. It is preferable for images to be simple enough to be readable in a two-column layout, but special layouts can be used.

Send the images separately via email as well as show where they go by placing them in the word processor document.

ACCEPTANCE

Submitted articles will be evaluated against a rubric (available here on our website). All articles will be evaluated and the results will be sent to the author. In the evaluation process, our goal is to ensure the quality of the content in *Peak-of-Flight*, but we want to publish your article! Resubmission of articles that do not meet the required standard are heavily encouraged.

ORIGINALITY

All articles submitted to Peak-of-Flight must not run in another publication before inclusion in the *POF* newsletter, but it may be based on another work such as a prior article, R&D report, etc. After we have published and paid for an article, you are free to submit them to other publications.

RATES

Apogee Components offers **$300** for a quality-written article over 2,000 words in length. Payment is pro-rated for shorter articles.

WHERE WILL IT APPEAR?

These articles will mainly be published in our free newsletter, *Peak-of-Flight*. Occasionally some of the higher-quality articles could potentially appear in one of Tim Van Milligan's books that he publishes from time to time.





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