

## Chapter 1 : Farthest flight by a paper aircraft | Guinness World Records

*"The World Record Paper Airplane Book" and "The Kid's Paper Airplane book" are wonderful gifts. I have given them away to many people, kids and adults who still marvel at seeing planes fly. I wish that I had had a book like these as a child.*

I found that it flew better than the paper darts I was used to making. Thrown straight up, it reached much higher altitudes. To the dismay of my teachers, I folded many of these planes, experimenting with changes to the original design. One of the beauties of paper airplanes is that they are perfectly suited to trial and error testing. One of my designs would level off at the peak of its climb and then start a slow downward glide. Sometimes, with the help of rising air currents, I achieved flights lasting nearly a minute and covering about 1, feet. Naturally the first thing I turned to was the aviation section. The paper airplane "time aloft" record was 15 seconds, set by William Pryor in . It dawned on me that my planes without help from the wind were flying at close to world record times. On my next outing, I timed the best flights. With this goal in mind, I refined my plane designs and worked on my throw. Many people are surprised to learn that I consider the throw to be almost as important as the plane itself. The faster the throw, the higher the airplane goes and, therefore, the longer the flight. In , when I was a junior in high school, I made an official attempt at the world record. One afternoon, with my teachers as timers and a reporter on hand from the Winston- Salem Journal, I let my favorite square plane fly. With the help of the wind, I made a flight of . Unfortunately, the letter I received back from Guinness Superlatives, Ltd. They informed me that the flight had to be performed indoors. The next year, I worked part-time at Reynolds Coliseum in Winston-Salem, parking cars and moving equipment. In my time off, I had access to the largest indoor paper airplane practice arena I would ever need. My best flights yielded times of over 17 seconds, and I knew the record was mine for the taking, but I got sidetracked by college applications. I lived on the sixth then the eighth floor, perfect airplane launching pads even though throwing objects from dorm windows was strictly prohibited. I made planes from every paper product available-- from pizza boxes to computer punch cards--in many bizarre shapes, and soon infected the dorm with plane-flying fever. I practiced several times at the school coliseum, keeping the best plane from my sessions, nicknamed "Old Bossy," for the record attempt. Old Bossy was regularly achieving times over 17 seconds, well above the second record. A friend arranged for a reporter from the school newspaper to meet us at the coliseum. I made a few warm-up throws, and then reached for Old Bossy. With a mighty heave, I sent the plane hurtling into the upper reaches of the coliseum. My best plane, Old Bossy, gone forever. My roommate handed me a piece of ordinary copier paper and I quickly made another airplane. My second throw with the new plane was the best of the afternoon at . It beat the old record, but I knew I could have done better with Old Bossy. In the summer of , I was finishing a job on the F Hornet, when I got an unexpected call from California. A television production company was putting together a series featuring people attempting to break world records. Would I be interested in trying to reset my record? The filming was only a few weeks away and I usually needed at least a month to get my throwing arm in shape, so I started practicing immediately. Round Three With my best practice airplanes packed in an old shoe box, I set out on my allexpense- paid extravaganza to Milwaukee. Tony went first and, after only a few throws, broke his old record, achieving a distance of nearly feet. Additional filming and interviews with Tony dragged on for hours, leaving me on the sidelines, sweating bullets. Finally, it was my turn. I picked out my best plane from practice, and got the nod from the producer that the cameras were rolling. I heaved the airplane upward, and watched it float down. The official called out a time of . I concentrated harder on my second throw, but was again rewarded with a time of only . Suddenly it struck me that I might not be able to reset the record. Even in good condition, my arm lasts for only a couple of world record throws in any one day. I made my third throw with everything I had. I estimate that these throws leave my hand at a speed close to 60 miles an hour. The launch seemed better, but the stopwatch would be the final judge. As the plane came to a smooth silent landing on the floor, the official yelled out, " I made two more throws, but neither beat the record. Another Chance For a little while after my segment aired I felt like a celebrity. Friends and relatives called me, and kids in my neighborhood wanted me

to autograph paper airplanes. But the excitement soon died down, and I went back to my normal life. Still, I continued modifying and flying my paper airplanes. In , I fine-tuned my planes, built up my arm, and achieved several second flights which, of course, no one was around to see, much less officially record. In , I received another surprise call from a TV program; this time it was from a British show called Record Breakers. I enthusiastically agreed and immediately started working out in preparation. I was fortunate enough to find a trainer who was also the pitcher for a college baseball team and could help me strengthen my year-old arm. I walked up to the plane and looked in awe at the foot-long, million-dollar backdrop for my 5-inch-long folded piece of paper. The cameras began to roll. My first throw bombed as a result of a poor launch. During my second throw, I concentrated on good form, giving it everything I had to offer. The launch felt a lot better. I could tell it was a good flight, but only the timer would know exactly how good. When he called out I had forgotten the thrill of setting a record, and was running on adrenaline for hours afterward. I won the contest with a flight time of The record did not appear in the Guinness Book until the edition. That January, I glanced through a freshly printed copy and discovered to my horror that I had been displaced. I had to get my record back. I knew it would take at least six months of daily preparation to have a chance of resetting the record. My plan was to construct and test between five and ten planes a week. Initially, I tried radical changes to my design, progressively narrowing in on the best paper airplane design for a record attempt. I also started working with a professional athletic trainer, Dorri Buckholtz, focusing on strengthening my arm. She was extremely helpful, giving me detailed instructions for exercises designed to improve my throwing speed. But I did find a few ways to make the plane fly better and more consistently.

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