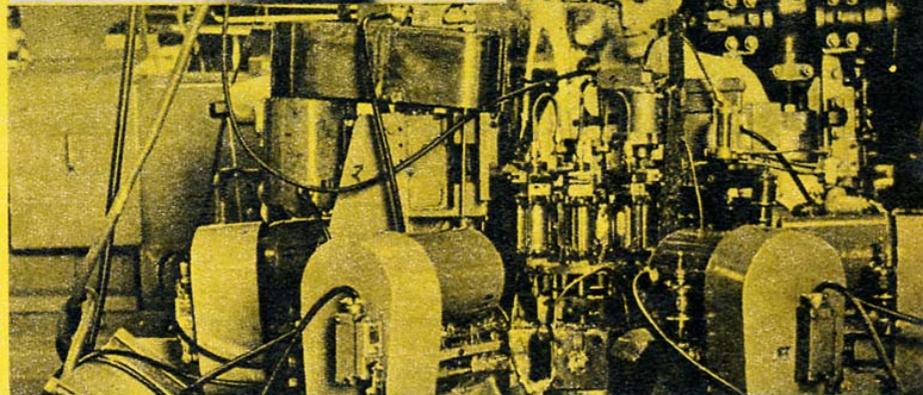
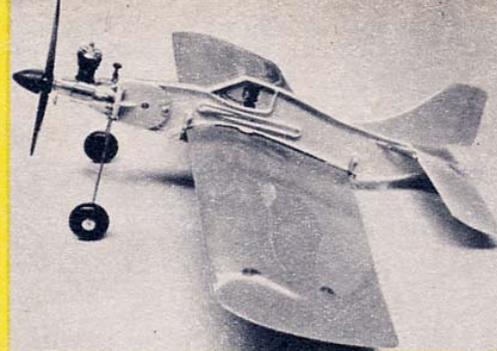
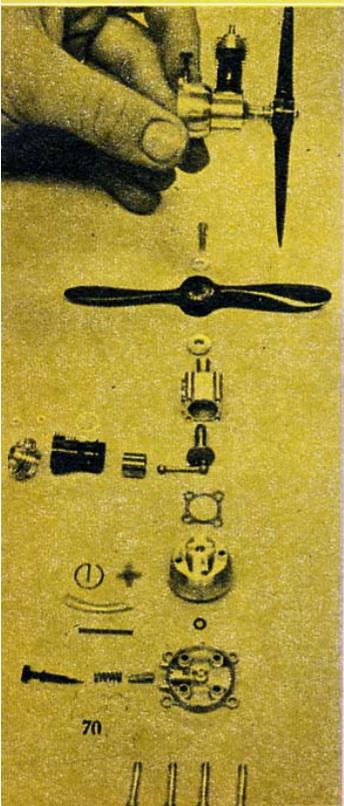




MODEL MAN Cox with planes, race car, hydroplane.



FLIGHT TRAINER, \$7.95, inset, und automatic nine-operation machine at the Cox plant.



HE RUNS A MODEL BUSINESS

By Louis Hoehman

THE world's largest manufacturer of miniature gas engines is the L. M. Cox Co. of Santa Ana, Calif. President Leroy M. Cox's line of powered model airplanes and engines, the Thimble Drome Power models, has revolutionized the gaspowered model and served as a powerful and beneficial stimulus to the rest of the industry.

As a leader in the Tom Thumb aircraft industry, grossing some \$2,500,000 in 1957 and well on the way to topping \$3,000,000 in 1958, Cox's tiny gas engines have earned a Rolls-Royce reputation in their field.

It all began in 1945 when Cox got into the toy business by making wooden pop guns in his home. By 1946 he had promoted a small 4,000 sq. ft. quonset hut factory and was solidly launched in his career,

BABE BEE .049 gasoline engine with all its precision machined component parts. Tiny engine retails for \$3.95.

thanks to the success of a new product, a small, all-metal toy race car which he had originally built for his then five-year-old son.

In August of 1946, Cox had 20 people on the payroll and was turning out 1,500 cars per day. Christmas orders were in and production had gone into high gear. Suddenly, without warning, disaster struck. Some accidentally-spilled paint thinner caught fire and within 12 minutes the entire factory was reduced to an ash heap. Nothing was saved except some office machines-and the precious orders.

Cox, caught without insurance and no plant or machinery to fill his orders, refused to throw in the sponge. He appealed to his creditors and received an extension of credit to allow him to use

some incoming money to re-establish himself.

Cox then bought a small lot and in four days time had a quonset-type building thrown up on it. By October 15th, just two months after the big fire, the Cox organization was back in business, fully tooled and geared for double the production of the pre-fire days. He managed to fill every Christmas order, plus many others received during the reconstruction period, without missing a single deadline. He paid off all his creditors and grossed a phenomenal \$200,000 volume that first hectic year!

The following year, he improved on his race car by coming out with a larger and better one-about 12 inches long - looked so much like a scaled-down track racer

that hobbyists began putting miniature gas engines in them and racing them. Cox followed up by buying engines and putting them in the race cars himself. Until that time, there was no comparable metal car on the market. The only other one available sold for \$104. Cox's car sold for \$19.95. It was an immediate success.

The next logical step for Cox was to build his own small 1/20th cu. in. displacement engine which he called the 1-A engine.

Realizing that there would be a terrific future for powered models if engines could be built of dependably uniform quality Cox and his crew went to work. It took almost a full year of research and \$75,000 worth of engineering to find the answers and iron out the bugs.

The first of the current line of Thimble Drome engines, the Space Bug, was developed in 1951. About half the size of contemporary engines (.049 cu. in. compared to .099 cu. in.) and selling for \$6.95 as against the average \$20 cost of the larger engines, the Space Bug was an immediate success and still holds many of the speed and weight-lifting records in model aircraft competition.

Today, the L. M. Cox Company puts out an extensive line of ready-to-fly gas-powered model airplanes, a propeller-driven toy race car called a Prop-Rod, a gas-powered toy hydroplane, a line of six different miniature gas engines and accessories. With the exception of the all-aluminum Thimble Drome Skymaster which sells for \$19.95, all the planes are made of plastic and range in price from \$6.95 to \$9.95 complete.

The quick-starting engines range in size from the .020 Pee Wee the smallest glow engine in the world, weighing only 21 grams-to the larger .049 engines. They sell for from \$3.95 to \$6.95 each. They all use glow plugs which fire somewhat on the hot-head diesel principle, though they are actually not considered diesels.

The glow plug contains a tiny platinum filament which is heated by a battery for starting purposes. Once the engine is started, the filament gets heated by compression and the battery can be removed.

The fuselage and wings sections of the planes are molded in huge plastic presses, the dies for which are made in the Cox machine shop. In all, about \$500,000 worth of machinery is used. The Cox company, which now occupies 30,000 sq. ft. consisting of two quonset huts and a two-story concrete building, employs an average of 250 people, some working two and three shifts a day, and is geared to turn out 6,000 planes a day.

Cox's Thimble Drome planes have been very consistent sellers. His best seller is the \$7.95 Piper Super Cub which outsells all his other planes put together. However, that record may be broken by his latest introduction, a tiny \$8.95 biplane dubbed the Li'l Stinker, which was brought out in January 1958.

For beginners, there's a specially designed trainer plane, the \$7.95 Flight Trainer, which gives the novice a chance to develop his flying skills without fear of damaging the plane. Built completely of plastic, it is assembled with rubber bands in such a manner that upon crashing, it comes apart without breaking.

Quality and quantity have made Leroy M. Cox the flying giant of the Tom Thumb aircraft industry.

Text extracted from:

MECHANIX ILLUSTRATED
Volume 54, Number 11
November 1958
