

**A. J. SMITH (1968)**  
**(1924-2004)**

**(adapted from postings in airtalk.org, AviationBanter.com and SSA's *Final Glide* by Jack Wyman and other sources)**

AJ Smith (Andrew James Smith) began soaring in the 1950s with his friend Dick Schreder in the Adrian, Michigan and Toledo, Ohio area. He quickly focused on competition soaring and proceeded to modify each of his sailplanes for enhanced performance, beginning with the LO-150 and continuing through the Sisu 1A, ASW 12 and Glasflügel 604.



He won the Open Class Nationals flying these sailplanes in 1961, 1967, 1971 and 1978. AJ represented the USA on four international teams: England 1965, Poland 1968, Marfa, Texas 1970 and Yugoslavia in 1972. In the 1968 contest in Poland (flying a borrowed Elfe S-3 in the Standard Class), AJ became only the second American to win a World Gliding Championship.

AJ grew up in Tecumseh, Michigan graduating from Tecumseh High School in 1942. After high school, he worked for NACA (now NASA) at Langley Field, Virginia. He then served in the Navy during WW II flying Corsairs off aircraft carriers for two years in the Atlantic Theater of Operations. He attended the University of Michigan from 1946 to 1951 earning a degree in architectural engineering.

AJ was a very successful architect in the Detroit area, owning his own major firm (Smith and Gardner) that designed many award-winning structures from airport terminals to major office complexes across the United States.

AJ's artistic flare from his architecture background, combined with his engineering knowledge of aerodynamics, enabled him to design an extremely efficient racing airplane in the early 1980s which rocked the racing world of the Experimental Aircraft Association. The airplane, AJ-2, was designed to compete in a new EAA sponsored efficiency race, the Oshkosh 500. AJ competed successfully, winning seven years in a row. On August 6, 1982 he flew the AJ-2 to a 500 km closed course speed record – 253.3 mph (407.7 km).

AJ's intense competition personality made him a controversial figure dominated by an intensity and extreme will to win. It has been said that *“The longest list in soaring is those who crewed for AJ; the shortest list is those who have crewed for A.J. twice.”* (This scorer of national and world competitions never saw this side of AJ.)

AJ served the soaring community as an SSA Director and an NSM Trustee. Not only did he fly National and World Competitions, he was also a Smirnoff Derby competitor. He won the FAI Challenge Cup in 1968 and was awarded the Louis Blériot Medal in 1982. He received the SSA Exceptional Achievement Award in 1970 and gave the Barnaby Lecture in 1975. He won the du Pont Trophy in 1961, 1967, 1971, 1978 and the Stroukoff Trophy in 1967, 1971, 1976, 1978. He earned Silver #283 (1957), Gold #140 (1962) and Diamond #446, Intl #2688 (1979).

AJ used his artistic talent to design the medallion for the 1970 World Contest in Marfa, Texas. Which was made in both silver and bronze and two sizes.

He told a long time wearer of this medallion that he was pleased with the weathering effect due to time and usage.



AJ was a fierce competitor. His famous quote about competition: *“If you haven't made a decision in the last minute, you're loafing.”*

Away from soaring competition, AJ was the perfect gentleman. A quote echoed by many – A.J. Smith was *“a giant in the history of competitive soaring. Our sport is richer today because of his sojourn in it for so many years and is a little poorer now that he is gone.”*

*AJ – doing what he did so often – working to improve his sailplane's efficiency. (Feeding a ballast tank into the Glasflügel 604 wing)*

