Bubble Boys

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We've all seen modern AMA and FAI contestants at Taft and Lost Hills using different sorts of thermal detection devices, which are, of course, forbidden to we who are members of the Society of Antique Modelers — at least for use in competition purposes. I think Mik Mikkelson tried, more or less successfully, to teach me to detect the presence of a thermal by feeling slight changes in temperature and wind speed with the hairs on the back of my neck. Mik of course, along with other serious rubber competitors, is very good at detecting thermals and launching his model in the "Mother of All Trash Movers" — heck, he can even detect smaller thermals such as the "Little Sister of the Mother of All Trash Movers". If you're flying a balky spark ignition engine, of course you just throw your model up into "whatever" because you're so darned glad you finally got the thing running! But I digress.

Mechanical devices of various sorts are used by those who lack "finely calibrated hair on the back of their neck". One of the perennial favorites is a plastic "bubble machine". They put out lots of bubbles which float around in the air providing visual indication of what the air currents are doing. These are kid's plastic toys. While the design varies, the constants are that they are cheap and battery powered, and that the supply and availability of them is erratic. Hank Nystrom of Texas Timers has come across a limited supply of them in a "dollar store". This current iteration uses two AA cells, and puts out lots of tiny bubbles — which means that the bottle of "bubble solution" will last a long time. Hank has them in Red, Green, Orange and Yellow colored models. He's selling them for $10 for one, including shipping, or $17 for two. His address is 3317 Pine Timbers Drive, Johnson City, TN 37604. He'll also take credit cards for these little beauties if you call him at 423 282-6423.

Since this version is operated by a trigger, you'll have to rig up some way to hold the trigger down, but that's not beyond the capability of any freeflighter. You may also have to come up with some way to make up a bubble solution from dishwashing detergent and water when your initial supply runs out.