



Photo by Tom Prater

### BART PRATER

**AGE:** 29

**EDUCATION:** attended Marion College and Wytheville Community College.

**PROFESSION:** WROV program director and air personality.

**PERSONAL:** wife, Teresa, and son, Jason

**INTERESTS:** flying, model airplanes, UFOs, electronics.

**LATEST BOOK:** "The Encyclopedia of Ancient and Forbidden Knowledge" by Zolar.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** *Billboard's* Top 40 Personality of Year in 1975, state and local awards.

Try to fit Bart Prater together.

To start, there's the obvious: the disc jockey par excellence with the on-air act that's part actor, part philosopher, and part wild-man.

Then there's the electronics whiz kid who builds radio and television transmitters and receivers just for fun. Not to mention the believer in the odd and bizarre, the skeptic who is convinced most sightings are fakes but that HE once saw a Flying Saucer, and who is also the owner of a strange bobby pin that is a family portent

of trouble.

But don't overlook the private recluse or the self-proclaimed "sissy" or the model plane maker or the licensed pilot. Or even, the young buck who fell in love at first sight or the terrified driver who gets car-sick regularly.

In other words, the man is a mass of contrasting facets that somehow come together in a flamboyant but ordinary, private but public personality for a colorful, fascinating composite.

Professionally, he is a star. In the sense that he has the fans, the fame, the national recognition, he could make his way to the Big Time. He's had the offers, and he's got the talent and total joy in what he does.

What he lacks is desire.

"I don't want an apartment in New York City," he says. "I'm a country boy and I have to be able to get out in the woods to hike and fish or just sit on a log for hours and think."

That is one heritage from his Marion upbringing. There are others, including his "almost sacred" respect for ham radio as an international hobby and his pleasure in the fact that he now holds the fifth (and highest) level license.

Ham radio and the other interests are part of today's adult, which Prater puts down to a matter of mere geography.

"When you grow up in Marion," he says, "you have to learn to amuse yourself."

He began early. "I've been interested in electronics since I could walk," he says. "When I was about four, I stuck my finger in my grandmother's radio and that started it all."

As a kid, he and a "kleptomaniac" friend built a radio station that could be heard 20 miles away. Later they hooked up to the town's TV cable and held their own comic show which consisted largely of "turning the page once in a while."

Then, when WOLD burned, 15-year-old Prater answered an ad to help clean up the mess, stayed on to rebuild the transmitter and control board, and finally, when a DJ got stranded in North Carolina, had his big chance to go on the air. That was in July 1964 and from that time to this, it's been one long romance that spanned high school and college years (he quit in 1968) and his nine-year-old job with WROV, where he became program director in 1972.

"I love being on the air," he says. "Behind the microphone I can be anything I want to be... a great lover or a little boy. There's that freedom, and I enjoy the idea that they give me money for what I love."

"If I could pick anything in the world, I'd still do what I'm doing, and the day I stop loving it, I'll quit."

He is satisfied with his material progress. He has all the slide-rule measures of success: "a nice house (in Windsor West), two cars, a color TV and lots more money than I thought I'd make in my life." But he is not sure that sort of thing matters, or that he will not someday chuck it to raise hogs in Grayson County with the good ole boys.

Even national recognition like his *Billboard* TOP 40 Award does not turn his head. "It's fun," he says, "but that and 25 cents will buy me a cup of coffee."

What is important to him is the life he's living here and now in Roanoke and being able to say honestly "I'm happy."

In his leisure time, he still builds and flies the model airplanes he got hooked on as a child. But today he is a pilot with hopes of someday building a real plane.

"I don't like sports and I've never been interested in cars — as a matter of fact, I'm the world's worst driver," he says. "But at flying, I'm an ace. I know about airplanes."

He was 23 when he took his first lesson, which also happened to

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