



# The AMA History Project Presents: History of HIGHER PLANE PRODUCTIONS



Written by JS (03/2010); Reformatted by JS (01/2013)

---

*Jay Smith wrote the following, published in the About Us section of Model Aviation magazine, March 2010 issue.*

---

## **About Us: Higher Plane Productions**

Higher Plane Productions and its popular slogan, “Fly Low, Roll Tape,” is the brainchild of Fred Midgett, who is most often found behind the camera, catching all the action. His passion for flight, which is evident in his videos, started in his childhood.

Fred had an interest, at an early age, in model rocketry and caught the flying bug from his father, who flew CL. Unfortunately for Fred, the lines were passed to his two older brothers first; by the time it was Fred’s turn, there was nothing left to fly!

His interest in flight, unfulfilled in his childhood, compelled Fred to purchase his first RC aircraft more than 20 years ago. It was an electric-powered, 50-inch-wingspan trainer from a hobby shop.

Fred spent approximately six months on self-instruction – fly, crash, repair, and repeat – before he became comfortable piloting his model and moving up to a CAP 232. When Fred started flying in 1986, electrics were not the norm and reliability was questionable. However, AstroFlight motors and speed controls quickly evolved and found their way into his aircraft.

From his RC beginnings in the mid-1980s until just before the inception of Higher Plane Productions, Fred estimates he had owned close to 15 aircraft, including his first scratch-built model. During that time, he shared his hobby with his son, Thomas, as his father had done with him. It was a good thing that Thomas did not have two older brothers in line in front of him!

Fred began dabbling in shooting video and editing for family projects and a talent show at his work. He drew from his college education, which was a degree in printing technology with a minor in photography.

Before long, filming models was a focus and Fred put together a heavily edited video with music, showcasing an electric-powered Christen Eagle. It was well received by the manufacturer, but it didn’t fit into the company’s video strategy at the time because it was so unique.

Although the video wasn’t used as Fred had hoped, it caught the attention of 3D Hobby Shop’s Ben Fisher and, shortly thereafter, Chris Hinson of Extreme Flight RC. Both saw the value in promoting their models, and Higher Plane Productions was born.

According to Fred, the aircraft that he shot artistic promotional videos of were disposable. It was most important to get them flying low, hard, and fast, and at times that required as many as three models to get a complete video.

Event coverage was the next goal in Fred's sights. His approach was to showcase an event and tell a story, while answering questions that he had and that other modelers might have. Pilots who would watch the videos wanted more information about the aircraft, what kind of turnout was at the event, and what vendors were in attendance.

My first experience with Higher Plane Productions was at the Southeast Electric Flight Festival (SEFF) in 2007, when Fred entertained the pilots with a film festival. I was impressed not only by the quality of the footage, but also by the creative presentation that went beyond catching the action.

The show lived up to Fred's philosophy – "We don't make RC videos; we make RC entertainment" – and left me wanting more. I would later learn that some of the music used in the video was from Fred's band, called "The Distractions."

Fred realized early on that releasing event coverage on DVD a couple months after it took place resulted in a loss of some of the excitement, especially with competitions such as the Tucson Aerobatic Shootout and the Extreme Flight Championships. His vision was to provide professionally shot and edited videos from the events via "FlightPass" on his Web site. FlightPass is a paid membership that allows people to access more than 100 hours of content, with more than 4,000 films, all in HD [High Definition]. That list continues to grow as Fred covers several events each year.

FlightPass is funded completely by membership, not advertising, so members don't have to deal with pop-up ads and similar annoyances. FlightPass is enjoyed around the world; 40% of its membership comes from outside the US.

I asked Fred where he gets the ideas for the interesting angles he uses when covering an event. Does he decide on them beforehand or at an event? He said:

"It's a bit like writing a song. Sometimes the lyrics come first; other times the music is first to mind. For example, driving to SEFF 2007, I was listening to the song 'In These Shoes' by Kirsty MacColl. I decided to make it the 'theme' song for SEFF 2007.

"I filmed the whole event with that song in mind. Lots of shoes and feet. The guys from the Netherlands happened to show up in wooden shoes; that was perfect! The piece was a little quirky but a big hit.

"Unfortunately, the cost for music rights was out of my reach. So I had to change the music on the DVD.

"Editing to popular music is really fun, but typically out of my financial grasp for use on a DVD. So more often I show up with only a plan to have fun with this sport I'm so passionate about, and trust that something entertaining will happen along the way. And so far, so good."

During our interview, Fred told me about a new series called “Andrew Jesky Takes RC to a Higher Plane.” It was an announcement I hadn’t expected.

The company is partnering with Andrew to release a set of instructional videos. Their plan is to produce eight installments, and the first, covering foamie aircraft, will debut at E-Fest at the end of this month.

Fred explained:

“We are going to back up and start at the point when someone just has upright flying covered. These videos are not just going to show maneuvers with stick movements. They are going to take it to the fundamental level with Andrew Jesky’s vast knowledge of building, aircraft setup, and flying.

“Future titles will cover subjects like small electrics, large electrics, gas-powered models, IMAC [International Miniature Aerobatic Club], and 3-D.”

We finished our conversation with Fred’s goal for Higher Plane Productions, which is:

“To continue to push RC film-making to the limit and to remain self-sustaining; that’s always a goal. Ha!

“So let me say the official thank you to all the people that have purchased Higher Plane DVDs and products or joined FlightPass. Your support has allowed me to fulfill a dream.”

-Jay Smith  
jays@modelaircraft.org

Source:

Higher Plane Productions  
1525 Acadia St.  
Durham, NC 27701

<http://higherplane productions.com>

---

**This PDF is property of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Permission must be granted by the AMA History Project for any reprint or duplication for public use.**

**AMA History Project**  
National Model Aviation Museum  
5151 E. Memorial Dr.  
Muncie IN 47302  
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511  
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

