



The AMA History Project Presents: History of the MODEL ENGINE COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION (MECA) Founded in the late 1950s



Written and submitted by BB (05/2006); Formatted and Edited by JS (05/2006), Reformatted by JS (07/2010); updated by JS (03/2014)

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Model Engine Collectors Association A Brief History



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April 2006

Small internal combustion engines have been around for a long time. In the United States, they date back to at least the early 1900s. The first ones were fairly crude and best suited for use as marine or stationary power plants. They were often built by their owners or by one of hundreds of small companies, many of whose advertisements were often on the optimistic side of reality. Prior to this, the only other real choices for power were rubber bands, steam, or hot air (Stirling Cycle) engines, although there were mechanisms that used materials like carbide or even gunpowder for fuel.

In the 1930s, William Likens (Bill) Brown, IV of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, developed the first small engine suited for powering model airplanes. Several models of this .60 cubic inch displacement Brown Jr. engine were produced over the next ten years or so, with over 50,000 made. These engines used an ignition system similar to that found on automobiles of the era, which meant that a model must carry a spark coil, condenser, and batteries, along with a fuel supply for its engine. Many of the original Brown engines are still in use and are sought after by engine collectors and modelers who still use them to power their models. Since then, there have been model engine companies with production figures running into the millions of units.

The little power plants that we collect, for the most part, were intended to power model airplanes, cars, or boats. They came in many sizes and configurations, most of them two-cycle one-cylinder engines ranging in size from less than .01 to several cubic inches in displacement. The majority of them, at least in the U.S., use a spark plug or a glow plug for ignition, but there are also diesels, various types of jet engines and some little power plants that are powered by

compressed air or carbon dioxide carried in a small storage tank.

MECA had its beginnings in the mid-1950s, when Bruce Underwood, who many know better for his Yellow Jacket engines, started circulating a newsletter among a few friends interested in preserving spark plug ignition engines. These engines were rapidly disappearing due to the introduction of the glow plug by Ray Arden.



Bruce acted as the focal point for gathering information for the engine collectors at the time. He kept track of what each collector wanted and offered in exchange. He also suggested systems for marking and cataloging engine collections. The group grew to about 17 members.

In January of 1960, the group's members were asked to submit names for the organization. Bruce suggested the winning name. Model Engine Collectors Association (MECA) was adopted as the group's name the following month.

Starting in 1960, Joe Wagner took over MECA when Bruce had to step down due to his workload. Between 1960 and 1961, Joe produced four model engine collector newsletters. They were *The Official Journal of the Model Engine Collectors Association* and *The Index of American Model Engines*, which listed over 700 engines known at the time. This material is considered the first volume of what is now the *Engine Collectors' Journal* (ECJ), which was to begin publication in 1963 and is still published by Tim Dannels. The first MECA officers were named during this period. The membership at this time probably reached 25 to 30 people.

In 1963, Allen Shively took over and started reviving MECA, which had become nearly inactive. During 1963 and the first half of 1964, the first issues of the ECJ became the voice of MECA through Allen's *MECA Notes* column. By May of 1964, MECA membership reached 115, the country divided into 11 MECA regions and the first regional directors were selected.

Allen published the first MECA Bulletin in March of 1964. This publication contained MECA club-related information and a schedule of upcoming events, as well as reports on past events and information that would be useful to those wanting to repair and/or restore their engines. The earliest *MECA Bulletins* also contained lists of items wanted and available for sale or trade by

MECA members. In 1964, this list moved to a separate publication.

National Coordinator Karl Carlson published the first MECA Swap Sheet in March of 1968. It listed engines and parts wanted and/or available for sale/trade by MECA members, as well as other hobby-related information.

In late 1968, a design for the MECA logo, selected from an entry submitted by Ben Fox, appeared on the cover of *MECA Bulletin* #23.

In February of 1969, Jim Dunkin coined the name “Collectogether” (usually shortened to “Collecto”) at an engine swap meet taking place at his home.

Over the years, MECA members discovered that socializing became an important part of the engine-collecting experience. In mid-1972, Tim Dannels had a line of MECA logo jewelry made up, offered for sale to MECA members.



The first National Collectogether, arranged by the Society of Antique Modelers (SAM), was held at the 1971 SAM Champs in Denver, Colorado. Later, this was called the “Grand National Collectogether,” which was promptly shortened to “Grando.” SAM continued to help arrange the Grando event for many years.

In 2000, MECA decided to take over all aspects of holding the National Collectogether. The new event, which is named “Expo,” is currently held the weekend just prior to, and usually close [in location], to the SAM Champs.

Expo is not just a collecto. It expanded over several days and includes symposiums, guest speakers, a banquet with entertainment and functions for the ladies.

In July 2000, the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) adopted MECA as a Special Interest Group (SIG).

In late 2002, the *MECA Bulletin* and the *MECA Swap Sheet* combined into a single bi-monthly publication that is typically about 60 pages in length.

Today, MECA is worldwide with members in the U.S. and over 20 foreign countries, some of

which became MECA regions. Over 5000 people have joined MECA to date, and nearly 1000 of them are currently active. Our website is located at <http://modelengine.org>

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