



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of LEE RENAUD

Started modeling in 1942



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*The following information is from Model Aviation magazine, April 1984. The National Model Aviation Museum's Library is named after him.*

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Lee Renaud, in a lifetime that was far too short, built for himself and the companies he worked with an enviable record of excellence in so many areas of this hobby. Starting in 1942, with a dull razor blade and a Joe Ott kit, Lee was to become a leader in the model aviation field. As a competitor from 1947 on, he set himself a pace and a high standard that lasted until his untimely passing in January of 1983.

As a designer, Lee left many fine airplanes for so many people to enjoy. The “Olympic,” “Aquila,” “Grand Esprit,” “Sagitta,” and many others, either published as plans and construction articles in national magazines, or manufactured as kits, will be flying for the foreseeable future. His “Aquila” was the airplane that Skip Miller used to win the World Soaring Championship in 1977 – we are fortunate to have the model on display in the AMA Museum.

A prolific writer, designer, builder and supporter of the sport, Lee held many offices in several organizations that benefited modelers. Particularly interested in Soaring, he raised more money for the U.S. International Soaring teams than any other person. On the contest scene, Lee directed many local and regional meets from 1951 to 1959, while in the same period of time he conducted local elimination events for the selection of FAI teams.

The founder of Airtronics, Inc., in 1971, Lee Renaud continued his search for excellence in all areas of his chosen field. The “Olympic 99” was the first large sailplane to be manufactured in this country and was the airplane responsible for teaching many people to thermal fly. Lee was the producer of the first “winch-in-a-can,” the surgical tubing Hi-start. His “Grand Esprit” was the first multi-task sailplane to be kitted, introducing spoilers, and a V-tail to the Soaring scene. The “Aquila,” “Aquila Grande” and the “Aquila XL” are among his other fine products that have earned a name for Airtronics and Renaud from coast-to-coast as well as beyond our borders.

In 1980, Lee introduced the XL series Airtronics radio and had another “overnight” success. Servo reversing, exponential controls and other useful features soon made this radio a standard piece of equipment for the Radio Control modeler.

The world of model aviation lost a fine member when Lee died in 1983, but his name will live on through his designs and his friends. It is most fitting that the Hall of Fame honor has been bestowed on behalf of Lee so soon after he left us.

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*The following was written by John Worth, published in Model Aviation magazine, April 1983 issue, in the AMA News section.*

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## **Lee Renaud – Too Fast, Too Soon**

He was on a roll. Things were really going right. He was beginning to see the light at the end of a tunnel. Then, suddenly, the light went out; not only for him, but for many others – everyone he touched.

Lee was a doer. He made things happen. Not someday, but right now. He pushed, he pressed, he moved, night and day. Maybe he knew his time was limited. It would help explain his drive and persistence.

Many of us became aware of Lee only a few years ago, when he became part of the Cox-Leisure Dynamics conglomerate. We began to hear a lot about Airtronics, at first due to the quality of the kits that Lee Renaud produced. It quickly became known that he was a perfectionist his stuff had to be the best. Then we heard much the same about the radio control equipment he marketed.

But what really brought Lee to the fore-front of the model industry was his fierce attention to the fight for new RC frequencies. He began to work with AMA's Frequency Committee on its effort with the FCC. He brought together RC industry leaders to support the effort and he became Chairman of the Hobby Industry Association's Radio Control Division.

The effort paid off last fall when the FCC gave us the RC frequencies we asked for. Lee crowned that success by separating from the Leisure complex to do his own thing – to produce more and better RC products. He was deep into it when he suddenly suffered a stroke that resulted in his passing away in mid-January.

The shock for those of us who know and worked with him is traumatic. Nobody was ready for it. There was too much going on that Lee was deeply involved in. It was like suddenly losing an arm or a leg – the universal reaction was that everyone had lost something they couldn't afford.

What really hurt was that we all know that many great things were going to happen because of Lee. He was the one person, many acknowledged, that could unify the model industry and bring people together. He had this potential despite being aggressive, tough, and plain spoken. While he might offend by a gruff remark, he was also pleased by being a good listener with a sincere interest in others.

He was also generous, not only with money as a sponsor of many activities, but also with himself – as a helper of U.S. teams to World Championships and other events. His typical question when told of a problem was "What do you need?" Also typically, his response to a request was "You got it!"

Lee Renaud, from Free Flight roots in New England to a giant in the RC world in California, was a great model designer. His personality meant he couldn't be ignored. Many will miss him, but

especially me. We had long talks, on the phone and in person, about every aspect of modeling and the AMA. He cared deeply about AMA and was thrilled by the new AMA building. It's fitting, therefore that his name will be prominently remembered in that building, which is to be known as our National Center for Aeromodeling.

He came and went too fast, too soon.

-John Worth

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