



The AMA History Program Presents: Autobiography of DAVE G. BROWN

Modeler since 1951 Birth Date: October 16, 1945

AMA Number: 22

Recorded by NR (4/03)



Written & Submitted by DGB (4/03)

Formatted & Edited by SS (4/03),
Updated by JS (12/08)

Career:

- Mid-1950s: Started competing in Control Line
- 1969: Won the Baden-Württemberg (Germany) State Championships
- 1970: Won class D novice at the Nationals, his first Nationals flying Radio Control
- Early to mid-1970s: Started to regularly win contests in the Midwest and also placed well at the Nationals
- 1974: Among the first to be invited to the Tournament of Champions held in Las Vegas; flew in a total of 10 Tournament of Champions placing in the top three at eight of them
- 1974: Placed third in his first real international event
- 1975: Made the U.S. World Championship team; placed third individually at the World Championships
- 1975: Won the Masters
- Flew in a total of five World Championships winning many team gold medals, three individual silver medals and an individual bronze medal
- 1987: Served as team manager for the U.S. World Championship team
- Has flown in approximately 250 contest and probably won half of them
- 1979: Started Dave Brown Products, supplying modeling goods
- 1985: Introduced the first RC flight simulator at the WRAM Show
- 1978: Elected AMA District III vice president in 1979 after having been appointed contest director for his district
- Developed and promoted the idea of the AMA having a finance committee; after the Executive Council instated it he served as the committee's first chairman
- Elected the AMA's executive vice president during which time the decision was made to purchase a large tract of land as an investment; the purchase of land in Muncie, Indiana resulted, though he was the only one to vote against choosing that location
- 1995: Elected AMA president; in the position until 2008

Honors:

- 1987: AMA Meritorious Service Award
- 2000: AMA Meritorious Service Award
- 2000: AMA Fellow
- 2008: Model Aviation Hall of Fame

I was born on October 16, 1945 to parents George S. and Jeanne F. (Penniman) Brown in Brockton, Massachusetts, and was inoculated with aviation at a very early age. I was told that I flew in an airplane for the first time at one-week-old and flew cross-country to Maryland at three weeks. My father ran a small airport and flying school in my early days, so this was natural.

Infatuated with airplanes, I got my first gas model in about 1951, a Wen Mac Control Line model, which did not last long (one flight) and was replaced with the first of many Scientific models. I also got, from the boyfriend of one of my older sisters, a Brown Junior engine and, most significantly, a large stack of model magazines (about a one and a half foot pile). That stack of model magazines would have a big effect on my life, and I poured over them to the point I knew almost every word in each and every one of them. To this day, I remember things that occurred in aeromodeling before I was born as a result of those magazines. I also was inspired to try to emulate the heroes I “met” through those magazines.

I found a club through one of those magazines, and it was a bunch of kids in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, which I joined up with immediately. In looking back, it had all the ear-markings of the “Spanky and our Gang” show – complete with the clubhouse. This was an amazing group, as it was only a bunch of kids; the oldest was about 12, yet we had the aforementioned clubhouse and maintained our own flying circle along with flying in town-sponsored events at Legion Field.

Within a short time, and with the help of my grandmother who bought me a Fox 35, I was flying a Sterling Yak 9 for hours on end and virtually all of the money I made on my paper route went to purchasing model airplane fuel. I still remember being in heaven when I got a whole gallon of Testors fuel for a birthday gift. I also remember being worried about the increase in the price of a Ringmaster from \$2.95 to \$3.50!

In about 1953, I went to my first model meet and, while I'm not sure I ever actually flew my model, got hooked on the idea of model airplane contests. During that Yankee Championships at South Weymouth, Massachusetts, I met Dave Cook who told me he was starting a Control Line club in Brockton and invited me to join them. That fall I went up to Brockton to the first meeting of the club, and I flew with that club until entering the service in 1966.

Although I did build and fly a single-channel, 465 MHz Radio Control model during this time, I principally flew Control Line and flew in a lot of contests. New Bedford, Bridgeport, Topsfield, Needham, and many other locations became regular trips, and, although I was a very enthusiastic competitor, I wasn't a very good one. Trophies were few and far between. I still remember my first trophy in, of all classes, Control Line scale at Topsfield, followed the next day with one in Control Line stunt. During these years, I was generally working on learning to sharpen the axe with which I built my models that were notoriously crude but abundant in number. To this day, I marvel at just how many model airplanes I built, and, when I go into the AMA Museum and look at the hundreds of kits on display in the hobby shop display, I realize that I built the majority of them at one time.

In 1966, while still flying Control Line, I married Sally, and we moved into a house on Pleasant Street in West Bridgewater. The coincidence of the neighbors across the street would alter my aeromodeling life forever. Sally still says I planned it this way, but diagonally across the street to the right lived the president of the local RC club, and next door to him, diagonally to the left, was the local basement RC shop. Needless to say, it was only a matter of weeks until I was back into RC with a little Schoolgirl bi-plane and a single-channel Controlaire Mule with a Babcock escapement.

Just a few weeks after that I was drafted and ultimately enlisted in the Army. I soon left for basic training. That over, I was stationed in Danvers, Massachusetts, at the Nike missile site, and soon I was building a Digitrio-4 from plans in Radio Control Modeler magazine from parts I scrounged from the base combined with some purchases from World Engines. I finished that radio, built my first multi airplane (a Goldberg Skylark), and flew it without any experienced help at Bridgewater during the first week of June 1967. How do I remember the date? Easy, my son was born on May 31, 1967, and I first flew that model while Sally was still in the hospital. That didn't get me into too much trouble, but the fact that I took Sally and the newborn David Junior to the flying site to demonstrate my newfound skill on the way home from the hospital took a little explaining!

I continued to hone my skills, but money was real tight (I was only a private first class at the time), so it was slow going. In December I got orders to go to go overseas, so we packed up everything we owned (it was a small box), including the Digitrio, and I went off to Germany alone with Sally to follow. Once in Germany, I found a club, built an airplane, and was flying by the time Sally came over, seven months pregnant with our daughter, Connie, and with Davy in tow. Having not learned my lesson, we stopped at the flying site on the way home from the airport when I picked them up to catch a couple of flights.

It was obvious that I was hooked on this new RC bit, and contests were the next logical step. Somewhere along this route, I learned how to build a pretty good airplane, probably as a result of being broke, and spending more time building the models while I saved up to buy the fuel to fly them! The Swetzingen Aeroclub had quite a few people who flew in contests, so, naturally, I started to enter some myself. I couldn't afford much fuel for practice, so I spent, literally, hour, "hand flying" a metal toy airplane, envisioning what controls were necessary to perform each maneuver as well as "dry flying" the TX box to get the sequence of controls engrained into my mind. Doing this also brought a much better understanding of the aerodynamics of flight, as well as such details as differential ailerons.

Having flown Control Line speed I was pretty good with engines, so my stuff worked, and, in spite of having little capability to actually practice, I started to do well at the contests in RC aerobatics eventually winning the Baden-Württemberg State Championships in 1969 – my first real championship. In the late fall of 1969, I got orders home to Fort Hood, Texas, and upon arrival found a base flying site. There was no real club but a great bunch of guys. I started flying again and flew my first RC contest in the United States in San Antonio where, against the advice of the contest director (George Aldrich) I entered class D novice (now the expert class) as it used the maneuvers from the FAI schedule I had been flying, and I didn't know the maneuvers for any of the lower classes. I finished second, and I don't think anyone on the field was more surprised than I was. A couple of weeks later I flew in the contest at Marshal, Texas, again finishing second, and went off to the Nationals (Nats) with a new friend to camp out and fly. I was actually technically AWOL for this trip, but that is another story!

At the Nats in 1970, I won class D novice! This was my first Nats in RC and I was elated, but also concerned because I couldn't afford a ticket to the awards banquet! Jimmy Grier came to the rescue when he bought my backup model, which he had flown at that Nats after his model had

crashed. Back to Texas and the guys wouldn't allow me to fly D novice any more, so I was fed to the proverbial wolves in the top class where I didn't win for quite a while.

Discharge from the Army came on September 21, 1970, and three days later, I was working at World Engines as a toolmaker. Moving to the Midwest into Ohio was quite a shock as the level of competition here was much higher than I had seen with guys like Don Lowe, Norm Page, Alan Dupler, Dean Koger, Ivan Christensen and, later, Mark Radcliff and Tony Frackowiak, being weekly competitors. In Ohio, at that time, you could be proud of finishing fifth in nearly any contest! I trudged along with Don Lowe becoming my mentor and, finally, won my first contest in West Virginia at the contest where, ironically, I first met Mark Radcliff, who was later a teammate on a number of World Championships teams.

Many competitors spend a lot of their time designing their secret weapon airplane, and I always thought hours spent on that, particularly in the early days of my competition career, were better spent on refining flying skills, and, particularly, on fine-tuning the trim of whatever design you were flying. I was among the first to put so much emphasis on properly trimming the models with a typical model taking nearly 100 flights to get it into proper trim before it would be used in a contest. I developed a system of differential adjustment with which the differential could be adjusted incrementally without affecting the neutral or the overall throw in addition to being able to go back to a previous setting, accurately and reliably. I would cut a finished wing in two in order to change the dihedral 1/16 of an inch. Balance was adjusted with very small amounts of lead or clay and I was instrumental in recognizing the absolute need for sealing control surfaces. This was in the days long before we had throw adjustments on the TX and all of these adjustments were made mechanically or through cataloging the throws of individual servos. I always wanted the control surface throws to be as little as would do the job to enhance smoothness of flight, and thus was born the dual rate idea.

The Phoenix would fly all of the maneuvers beautifully with much less elevator throw than was required to reliably spin the model, so I tried to create a way to add more up elevator for the spin without affecting the rest of the maneuvers. First, I tried a button to simply move the elevator up, but that was too jerky and hard to use. Then the idea of a rate switch was considered, and working with Butch Lanterman, the electronic engineer at World Engines, we came up with a workable unit. Ironically, we wanted to keep it secret and even more wanted my radio to appear stock for advertising purposes, which it pretty much was except for this feature, so we simply replaced the buddy box switch on my radio to perform this function. It looked perfectly stock, but the buddy box switch on my Blue Max did something different. This lasted for about two years before we incorporated dual rates into the expert series transmitters. By that time, some others had figured out the advantage of dual rate, so it was not so unusual to see TX's with additional switches.

Ironically, most people use dual rate on ailerons, but they were first used for elevator! By the early to mid-1970s, I had started to win regularly in the Midwest and had started to make a name for myself on the national scene, winning pattern at the winter Nats in 1972 and finishing in the top five at various Nats. In 1974, I got a call from Walt Schroder, asking my opinion about a big money meet at Las Vegas, and I was among the first to be invited to the Tournament of Champions (TOC).

The Masters tournament of 1974 was a disappointment when it was canceled with me leading due to extremely high winds (hurricane force?), so I looked forward to the TOC that fall. I finished third in my first real international event and that got the attention of a lot of folks. It was obvious to many that I was ready to compete at the world level. The next spring I was able to fulfill a lifelong dream of making a U.S. World Championship team. When I won the Masters tournament in spring of 1975, it was the biggest feeling of accomplishment you could imagine. I had dreamed of making a World Championship team since I was a child, and to now be a team member was overwhelming. I went to the World Championships in Berne and was a part of the winning U.S. team. I placed third individually in my first World Championships and I will never forget the emotions of standing on that podium while they played "The Star Spangled Banner." I could live to be 100, and that moment will never be forgotten.

I went on to fly in five more World Championships, winning many team gold medals and three individual silver's as well as another bronze, but that first one will always be special. In 1987, I hung up my spurs as a competitor in World Championships, and I served as the team manager.

Back on the home front, I had a pretty good run at the Nats for a number of years. After finishing right behind Rhett Miller for a few years while he tore up the circuit, I finally won in 1977 and followed that with wins in 1978, 1979, 1980, and 1982. During that time, I averaged flying in 20 contests per year and won an awful lot of them. So I'd guess I have flown in somewhere in the vicinity of 250 contests and probably won half of them. I never had a perfect season (undefeated), but I came close once when I won every one I entered except for the TOC where I was second or third. I ended up flying in 10 Tournament of Champions events, and, although I never won one, I was in the top three in eight of them.

All in all, I had a pretty good run at the competition arena, yet for all of the success I had, I never considered myself to be that good as a pilot. People who would watch me practice would think twice about allowing me to fly their airplanes, but if they saw me fly in a contest, they would clamor to see me fly their airplanes and tell them what to trim! I was much more of a tactician than a pilot, and I was successful in competition as a result of being a tactician, and a psychologist more so than a good pilot. I was a fair pilot, but an extremely good competitor, and that combination led to a pretty successful career. I still haven't found anyone else who built special airplanes to serve the role as backup airplanes, which were intentionally equipped different than the number one, but I did.

The role of the backup airplane was to be reliable and easy to just pick up, fly on a moment's notice, and perform respectfully. To be successful at that role, it needed to be a very easy and true airplane to fly rather than the ultimate performance characteristics of a number one airplane, which took some practice to get used to. An example of the difference was the use of airborne needle valve adjustment on the backup model but not on the number one. The reason was simple, I flew the number one enough to know the right setting for any condition, but that backup model may have not been flown in a month, and the fuel would congeal in the pump, so it would run inconsistently for the first flight and, therefore, the remote needle.

I truly enjoyed competing, and I honestly believe the reason I won so much was that winning was not the prime reason I competed. I competed because I enjoyed competing, and I won, in part, because I didn't worry about winning. To some degree, I brought that same approach to my next aeromodeling endeavor, being a part of the AMA.

More about that later, because in 1979 I started Dave Brown Products in the basement of our house and started to devote a lot of time to developing that. We started with a group of products acquired when I purchased the accessories lines from Southern RC. The first thing I added was the Glass Filled motor mount line followed by the pushrods. During this time, I was renting the molding equipment at World Engines, and I continued to do some engineering work for John Maloney. As Dave Brown Products grew, it became necessary to look into bigger quarters, so we moved to our current address using a room in the house as an office and the garage as the manufacturing facility.

In 1985, we built our current building and introduced the first ever Radio Control flight simulator. It premiered at the 1985 WRAMS show and was an instant hit, although not many people took it seriously as a training device. That took a few years to establish, but the idea of using a simulator as training device is now accepted by most as a good way to speed the process of learning to fly Radio Control. We continued to grow with the introduction of wheels and better and better flight simulators along with other accessory items, the latest of which is aluminum spinners that dominate our business today.

My interest in the inner workings of AMA began with that canceled Masters Tournament back in 1974. I couldn't figure out why the hierarchy of AMA could have scheduled the Masters at a place that was so traditionally windy. I was not happy with AMA and decided that the best way to ensure change was to get involved. Ironically, Don Lowe and I were on opposite sides of the arguments during the event. He supported cancellation while I argued for continuing on the basis of the fact that the wind at this location was something that any good competitor should have foreseen and prepared for. I knew I had prepared for the wind and that was a major point with which I led. I lost the argument, but Don and I agreed that we needed to do something to avoid this in the future. After considering all of the options, we decided that Don would run for District III vice president, and he would appoint me to the contest board, and when he got tired of being vice president, I would run for that position. Don won that election and appointed me as planned. Don stayed on as vice president through 1979 when I ran for and was elected to the position of AMA District III vice president.

Although I had sat in during Don's absence at a couple of executive council meetings, this first meeting as the official vice president was the most memorable. In those days, we shared rooms with other vice presidents in order to economize, and I happened to room with Bill Mathews from Alabama who was serving as the District V vice president. After meeting all day, I phoned home upon retiring to the room and spent a significant amount of time telling Sally about my experiences at the meeting. After I hung up, Bill casually asked if that was Don I was talking to and expressed amazement when I said it was Sally. Bill was amazed that Sally would be so interested in what had gone on. Therein lays a very significant part of my success in all aspects of aeromodeling. The support I have received from Sally has been phenomenal in employment, in business, in flying and in my work with AMA.

After a couple of years as vice president, I became interested more in the financial aspects of AMA's management. It started when I found that AMA's assets, what there were of them, were invested in passbook savings accounts drawing about 4% in a time when prime rate was in the teens. I was shocked and set out to get involved. My first step was to instill in the executive council the idea of a finance committee, which I ended up chairing. Working with the treasurer and the controller, this committee started the process of updating the management of AMA's finances and was instrumental in the ability of AMA to purchase its first (owned) headquarters building in Reston, Virginia. That purchase and its inflation in value allowed us to fund a self-funded insurance program when the insurance market turned hard.

I was later elected as executive vice president, which put me in the position as AMA's chief financial officer. While in that position, I recommended that AMA purchase a large tract of property as a way to protect the large pot of cash we had built up, which collateralized the insurance plan, but which had become a very lucrative target for lawsuits. While I was the only one to vote against the selection this recommendation led to the purchase of Muncie, Indiana, and the eventual move of the headquarters to that location.

In 1995, I was elected as AMA president, and I remain in that post. When I complete this term of office, I will have been on the AMA Executive Council for 25 years, and in that time I have witnessed and been a part of the growth of the organization from an organization with few assets, living in rented quarters in Washington, D.C., to the multi-million dollar organization it is today. Along the way, I watched the organization evolve as the character of the membership changed from being largely competitive in nature to being largely comprised of sport modelers.

During my time of involvement in the hobby/sport, I have been privileged to witness the incredible advancements in technology. While I came to the hobby shortly after the invention of the glow plug, I have watched with awe each step in the evolution of the modern model airplane and can only imagine what the future will bring. Whatever that is, it will involve people, which is the most important element of all. It is people, after all, who create the advancements in technology that we all enjoy, and it is the people and the friendships made during their journey through this wonderful hobby that are ever lasting. When all is said and done, it is the people who become the attraction as well as the most vivid memories of ones background in aeromodeling, and I am certainly no exception.

In my case, a list of those who had a remarkable effect on my life in aeromodeling would be endless, but those who established my early roots include Dave Cook, Bruce Collins, Roy Tucker, Bob Roscoe and Santo Rizzotto and later Don Lowe, Ivan Christensen, Mark Radcliff, John Maloney and, of course, all of the officers and staff of the AMA over the last 25 years. Each and every one of them has had a great influence.

Above all, I would have to say that the single most important factor in my success as an aeromodeler started in 1966 when I married Sally Ann Foster. She has been a major part of any success I have had in all aspects of my life, and without her support and encouragement I could have never gone very far. None of what I have accomplished could have been done without her as an equal partner in the effort. She, above all, is my rock.

*(signed) David G. Brown
April 2003*

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

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

