
Autobiography of EDWARD J. "MIKE" BANKE

Modeler since 1936

AMA Number: 540671

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The following was written by Edward J. Banke and submitted to the History Program in September of 2005. It was edited by Jackie Shalberg.

Ed Banke biography to AMA

It must have been back when a Comet dime-kit cost a dime, about 1936. My first model was a solid Comet *P-26* "Peashooter". It was destroyed when I tried to carve it with Mom's paring knife. She wiped my frustrated tears away and bought another one (these were depression years) and, being a nurse, "liberated" a scalpel to use. After many a drill on how not to cut my finger off, we carved, sanded and painted (with fingernail polish) the only pink peashooter in the Army. And, as they say, I was off and running. When I got around to flying models, I was lucky to have a father who was a traveling salesman (mortuary supplies). Our town was small (Gainesville, GA), and Dad brought home some models none of the locals had heard of: Berkley, Cleveland. Megow, Ideal, and Joe Ott.

I flew alone for about five years, rubber and gliders mostly. The word got around finally, and I teamed up with some older boys who flew Lanzo Bombers and Super Buccaneers on Brown 60s. My first engine was a DeLong 30, I think, flown in a Coronet. The first model scratch-built was a shop project in high school. I said I designed it myself, but the moments were from a friend's Trenton Terror.

It has been said in recent years that I build off-beat models so that if they don't fly, I have an out, but I'm going to make that Vought "Flying Pancake" fly yet.

Competition

I competed in the Rebel Rally held in Jacksonville, Florida for many years, occasionally taking home a trophy in Old Timer (New Ruler + OK 60 Sp) or Coupe de Hiver. I never could beat Harry Grogan in Towline F1. Occasionally, I would challenge George Perryman in Unlimited Rubber, but never came closer than second (once). I have been to a few Nats but never competed there or at FAI.

Experimentation

I once bought a Unimat lathe and tried my hand at creating high performing engines. I now wished I hadn't wasted so many engines (mostly Cox .09s). I have made a few replacement parts for my old timer engines, spark advances and such. Once I installed the OS pulse jet in a hydroplane boat on a bet. No one could keep up with it, but it was banned due to noise pollution. Auto gyros have fascinated me, but flying one still eludes me.

Leadership

I have been a member of a number of model clubs, but I am most proud to have had a hand in founding the Conley Flyers of South Atlanta. It is still a viable club after some twenty years. I was also President of the Flying Eight Balls of Decatur, Georgia for one term, during which time we changed the name to the Metro Atlanta Free Flight and Indoor Association (MAFFIA). That club is now the Metro Atlanta Thermal Thumbers. I have no leadership qualities; the MAFFIA almost died while I was in office.

Publishing

The nearest I have come to publishing is an occasional “For What It’s Worth” tip.

Industry

I clerked at *The Hobby Stop* in Peachtree City for a few years and was caught up in a “bait and switch” operation out of Florida as a store manager, which removed any naivety I ever had. I had thought all hobbyists were the “good guys”.

Education

I was a mentor in the White County, Georgia education system for seven years, working with the science classes in the middle school. In early May, the middle school holds “Rocket Week” in which the eighth grade kids build and decorate generic Estes rockets. All day Friday we have at least three launch sites going. We go as fast as we can get all three ready to launch. Last year, by the end of Friday, our “safety bucket” had three hundred and thirty-seven spent rocket motors in it.

My latest love is a micro-electric R/C that I can take out in the pasture and fly alone (which I never, never do with gassies). I am a member of NIRAC and have been to one of their NATS where I finally met John Worth. It was Worth the trip.

I would feel remiss not mentioning those who have flown with me as friends over the years. The ones mentioned are the few I can still remember:

Grayson Anderson
David Barfield
Gene Curtiss
Steve Felker
Joe Gordon
Neal Kilby
John Krikold
Jim Neuman
George Perryman
A. W. Pruitt
Bill Rogers

The AMA has meant a lot to me over the years and I appreciate the invitation to write this biography. Thank you.

-Edward J. "Mike" Banke

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