
Autobiography of DOUGLAS A. DAHLKE

Modeler since 1944

Birth Date: July 21, 1936

AMA Number: 24114

Written & Submitted by DAD (2/03)

Transcribed & Edited by SS (2/03)

Career:

- During eight years of competing in the late 1970s and 1980s won 110 awards
 - Began judging stunt in competition in the early 1990s
 - Has a personal aviation library of about 3,000 books and magazines
 - Has collected over 650 plans and 450 motors
 - Member of various modeling organizations
 - Since the late 1970s has conducted design experiments on the subject of massive, balanced, lateral area for Control Line stunters
 - Served as secretary of the Oshkosh Aeronauts in the early 1950s
 - Co-organized the Mather Air Force Base Globugs during 195 in Sacramento, California
 - Designed and kitted the Card Bird II, a ½-A Control Line kit produced in 1982 and 1983
 - Published in Model Aviation magazine, Stunt News magazine and Air Lines, the newsletter for the Milwaukee Circlemasters
 - Has given demonstrations in local malls and schools
 - A volunteer worker and article writer for EAA Kidventure
 - Has served as a contest judge
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The Making of a Modeler

By Doug Dahlke

The year 1940 had just arrived and for my fourth birthday, Great-Grandmother had spent \$1.98 at Kresege's to buy me a paper Spitfire display model. It was the most beautiful thing I'd seen in my short life. Cousin Bobby was later to show me that paper airplanes could be folded in such a way as to fly – which my beautiful model would not do, despite repeated throws. By that age, I had learned that sometimes things would change with the passage of time and, although I had indeed waited several hours, my display Spitfire still stubbornly refused to fly.

During 1942, while visiting cousin Bobby, who always had neat stuff, I saw my first commercial model fly. This was a Morton's Salt promotional glider – third version, I was later to learn. As a wartime product, of course, it had no balsa. The fuselage was a solid pine, red-dyed affair with a catapult notch under the belly that I didn't understand. The fuselage rear was tapered and slotted on the top for the fin which dictated that the stabilizer (stab) be rubber-banded on the bottom where nicks and dings quickly collected during landings on all but the smoothest surfaces. The estimated eight-inch span wing, like the tail, was colored on one side only and rubber-banded to the fuselage. A black rubber suction cup with cast-in screw turned into the nose. This was both weight and bumper to prevent household damage. This suction cup had another advantage, when licked just prior to flight it would stick to smooth surfaces, depositing exact, clear moisture rings on windows and varnished furniture. This quickly endeared us to the meticulous housekeeper portion of my grandmother. But making the glider stick to a surface, quivering, look so cool! Due to the glider's high wing loading, it had to fly pretty fast – fast enough to knock over a vase and result in prompt, permanent banishment to outdoors for all future flying.

In school I began drawing profile views of aircraft that were posted on the classroom display board. When the class went to drawing other things, I continued to draw airplanes. The Morton's Salt glider eventually folded a wing, becoming unflyable. Our attempts to make a replacement wing were unsuccessful – back to square one.

Cousin Gale built complex models of innumerable sticks that were beyond my comprehension. If he ever flew one, I was unaware of it.

A year or so later, while playing in a vacant lot across from my home, Donny, a neighborhood boy, had what looked like a smaller copy of my now-battered paper display Spitfire. His didn't look as good as mine, but holy cow! It flew! It even out-flew the folded paper ones in school. One problem was, you had to eat three boxes of Wheaties cereal and send 25-cents to get a pair of them. How could I get all of this together? Also, they had to be built using glue! You needed a penny in the nose, either one of those ugly steel pennies from last year or an ordinary one. Donny had a great throwing arm and sometimes it seemed his Fairey Fulmer would never return to earth. Each time he hurtled it up, my imagination went along for the ride; it neither recovered nor returned to earth. After this Wheaties promotion ended and no more gliders were available, my new hunger for models was but partially filled by the cardboard display models from Kellogg's Pep. Problem was, they didn't fly.

One June morning during summer vacation there was this strange buzzing sound coming from the far side of town. Having never heard such a sound, I was curious as to its cause. So off I went, furiously peddling my Monarch bicycle to the local ballpark where this sound came from. Incredibly it was a model airplane contest! I had never seen nor heard of such models before. Some of these models nearly spanned my five-foot height, dwarfing my tiny eight-inch span gliders. Still better, they actually used gas-fueled motors that hurtled them through the air at speeds as fast as a car! Not only could they stay in the air for up to five minutes, they were loud! (Loud is a great device to help kids focus their attention.) Once I understood what "that sound" meant, all activities were instantly dropped to go watch models fly. Typically, I could be on my bicycle and peddling in less than a minute. Any offers of treats, breakfast or other distractions were quickly brushed to one side. As the initial rush of excitement subsided, I began to wonder if it might be possible to acquire one of these wonderful creations. I had heard talk of booster batteries and pitted points and 70-weight oil, all of which were unfathomable mysteries to me. How was I to figure out how to fly one of these models, to say nothing of being able to afford one?

One day I saw Dicky in another, larger, vacant lot take a strange-looking model and do something to the wings that then folded. He hooked up a long rubber catapult into a nose slot, pointed it straight up, stretched the rubber and released it. It rocketed upwards, nearly disappearing from sight. Upon slowing, the wings popped out and then began a skull-numbing glide such as I'd never seen! We all began the chase. Dicky said it was his second such glider, the first one having flown away and been lost! This was easily believable, for as the son of a building contractor, he could spend the needed quarter for a second model without problems from his parents. This magical model carried the name "404 Interceptor" boldly on the wing and

which it truly seemed to be. Although unable to afford the needed quarter for this glider, the same Portland, Oregon, firm also made a cheaper chuck glider, styled after the new P-80 jet fighter; it sold for a dime. This cheaper version was to remain a benchmark and staple for many years later. It carried the number 74 on the right wing and A.J. Manufacturing on the stab.

About that time, a new boy named Walter moved into the neighborhood from a large city in Virginia. He and his father were to change both my modeling life and outlook in general, profoundly and forever, proving over and over that knowledge was indeed power. Walt's father was a CPA, quiet, thoughtful and a reader. It was he who discovered the existence of model airplane magazines! Unlike my stepfather who loved sports and tried mightily to involve me in them, Walt's father encouraged us to experiment, think for ourselves, try new things and read – with the understanding that not everything in print is true. He was perfectly comfortable saying, “I don't know,” but usually he would have an answer in a week or so.

The results of reading were amazing! We learned of companies that sold model kits you could assemble and fly! Then one day, an ad told of a magical motor that could be purchased and run using only a common battery and fuel! Wow!

Hey, Maybe I Can Do That!

With school out again for the summer and my birthday coming, my grandmother helped breach the price gap between my finances and the \$7.95 needed to purchase this new Baby Spitfire. Worse, extra money was needed for fuel! (Reader needs to understand that there were many things that would “spit-fire” – full-sized fighter airplanes, model airplane motors, people with red hair and young, short-tempered females of any age, especially if they also had red hair!)

As finances improved, I was able to purchase an Austin Craft Civy Boy 24 for my Baby Spitfire. Although it has a great glide, it never saw powered flight for two reasons: 1) Recalling Dicky's loss of his glider, I was deathly afraid it would be lost and I would suffer a financial blow which would destroy me for life; but more important 2) I couldn't start the engine! Having no concept of a flooded engine, bloodied fingers, painfully soaked in high nitro fuel and lovely, multi-hued blood blisters became my lot. I assumed they were a normal part of flying models. Unable to convince my friends of how stylish finger pain was, I contented myself with gliding my “gassie” from our garage roof until the inevitable happened, it landed in the street and the fuselage was run over by a car. Although we could build simple chuck gliders, what we really wanted was power models. What to do?

Walt pointed out that the obvious futility and inconsistency of power models having new, unrunable engines. Our efforts were then directed toward learning how to run engines. Back again and again to the hobby shop dealer, trying to learn how to start my Spitfire. During one of these trips, with the motor on a test block held in one hand, I bumped the curb and fell from the bicycle, breaking my first prop in the process. Not very romantic! Ed Libowski, owner of the Hobby House, knowing I was not overly keen to lose my motor in a Free Flight model showed

me a Joy Products Stunt Runt. An incredibly beautiful bi-plane with only 11 parts and costing one buck!

Once able to consistently start and run my motor, there was a good likelihood I might actually experience powered flight! Since Runt plans showed no wingtip counterweight, none was installed as I followed the instructions to the letter.

The endless series of crashes that followed soon had my cute little bi-plane looking like a jigsaw puzzle with a couple of pieces lost. I was frustrated nearly to tears. All had been done according to plans and still I hadn't achieved powered flight. What to do?

Walt and his father had approached things differently, purchasing a beginner's package by mail order from American Hobby Center in New York City. This was an O&R .23 side port motor and Testors Freshman of 36-inch span. Thinking then that probably bigger was better and the key to flying success, I opted for a maximum performance stunt model, a Stuntwagon 30 by deBolt and powered by the then-new and very powerful Veco .31. Although I had learned that wingtip counterweight was a must, one minor detail remained: no one had taught me how to hold the control handle! This resulted in my holding the handle horizontally rather than the correct vertical position! My flights – if one could call them that – were a violent series of climbs and dives punctuated with interesting crashes of greater or lesser damage. Only the lightning reflexes of a young teen prevented my destroying the Wagon. On the other hand, Walt was able to fly consistently flight after flight. Taking pity on me, Walt and his father asked if I wanted to learn to flying using their model, with one condition: I must agree to fly their Freshman while holding the handle vertically, not horizontally. Walt was ready to move on to a more advanced model and was not bothered by the possibility of crash damage. What's to lose? As the cliché says: "the rest is history."

*(signed) Douglas A. Dahlke
February 3, 2003*

Personal History

Born July 21, 1936 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, mother encouraged me to play the piano during 1941 having failed to interest me in tap dancing the year before. During 1942 I flew my first commercial model glider – and still fly them. I began playing drums in 1949 – and still play them. I began shooting air guns in 1950 – and still shoot them. I began drag racing motorcycles and cars in 1951. I enlisted in the Army National Guard in 1953 and went active Air Force in July 1954 after graduating from high school. After I was discharged in 1958, I attended UW-Milwaukee until enlistment in the Army from April 1960 to 1963 for the Berlin Crisis. I was stationed in Nuremberg, Germany until discharge.

I became an "A" rated chess player in the early 1970s and graduated from UW-Oshkosh in December 1979 with a B.B.A. – a depressing waste of time, money and effort. In 1986, I began touring via a BMW motorcycle, eventually covering 49 states, 10 Canadian Provinces, Mexico

and 17 west European countries – I still tour after 240,000 miles to date. In the late 1980s I began teaching 1950s/1960s dancing – and still do. (Believed to have one of the last working pair of blue suede shoes, eat your heart out!) By the early 1990s, I had developed an unquenchable taste for horrid puns and their associated “pun”-ishment. Began with at EAA Kidventure in the late 1990s and retired from work in 1999.

Competition

My first competition was while I was stationed at Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento, California. We were flown down to San Antonio, Texas, to Fort Sam Houston, if memory serves. I placed third in class A speed flying a Megow Flying Cloen with K&B .19 power.

Competition flying resumed in the spring of 1977 after returning to Wisconsin. I attended contests in Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota and Iowa, competing in PAMPA classes of beginner, intermediate and advanced level. Categories of competition were: precision aerobatics, Old-Timer stunt, ½-A stunt, bi-plane stunt, balloon bust and mouse racing. Additional awards were won for collector display in MECA. During these eight years, 110 awards were won.

Purely for experience, I entered the 1979 U.S. Nationals in open stunt as an intermediate level flyer using a much-modified Midwest Magician with OS .40H power. I placed third in Old-Timer stunt (glow) using a Veco Warrior with K&B .19 power. As a sidebar, I loaned this model to a friend, Jim Renkar of Justice, Illinois, who wanted to fly the event but lacked a model. My efforts to help Jim were rewarded by him beating me out of second place with my Warrior by two points! No good deed goes unpunished.

At the 1982 Nationals I again flew open stunt (now as an advanced level flyer) using a Gieske Nobler with OS 35S power. In ½-A stunt I flew a Mathis Pinto with TD .051 power. When the event was over, I forgot I'd shaded the model under the car and drove over the wing. I received third place in Old-Timer stunt (ign) with my Super Duper Zilch using a Super Cyke .60. In Old-Timer stunt (glow) I entered an Andrews Barnstormer with Fox .35. Although I failed to place, this ship became the basis of a feature article in the December 1984 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

Finally, in competition, I began to judge stunt in the early 1990s and still judge as of 2003.

I am a member of AMA, Precision Aero Modeler Pilots' Association (PAMPA), MECA, Kits and Plans Antiquitous (KAPA) and AMCA with a personal aviation library of about 3,000 books and magazines. As a collector, I have over 650 plans and 450 motors as well as various sub-collections of props, handles, accessories, model cars and model boat engines, etc.

Experiments

My first experimental model(s) was a series of six-inch diameter chuck gliders in circular wing format. Split maple clothes pins added as skis degraded the performance by a large amount!

These were built in 1948, the year after the first United States saucer scare. By 1950, I had designed a 12-inch diameter flying saucer Control Line model powered by a Cub .049. After allowing one hour for the final coat of paint to dry, it was then immediately flown, which happened to be 11 p.m. at night during a typical Wisconsin January snowstorm! It flew fine.

By 1955 my building skills, flying ability and general modeling comprehension had much increased. The result was my design of a 30-inch diameter flying saucer powered by an Anderson .65. This was featured on the front page of the second section of the Sacramento Bee during mid to late 1957. As of 2003, a still larger saucer is under design.

During 1981 and 1982 I experimented with indoor CO2 Control Line stunt. This became a feature article for Model Aviation magazine during June 1983.

During the late 1970s up to present (2003), I have conducted design experiments in the subject of massive, balanced, lateral area for Control Line stunters. The intent is to reduce model lap speed while maintaining line tension and to improve overhead line tension of heavy stunters.

In conjunction with this, I have experiments with very long aft moment arms in Control Line stunt models. Final design being my Sandbagger.

In the balloon bust area, experiments were conducted with a forward, inboard, ½-canard assembly to increase control at ultra-low speeds.

Leadership

I was secretary of the now defunct Oshkosh Aeronuts circa 1952.

I co-organized the Mather Air Force Base Globugs during 1957 in Sacramento, California. The base has since been closed.

Hobby Industry

I designed and kitted the Card Bird II. This was a ½-A Control Line kit produced in 1982 to 1983 when production ended.

Publishing Experience

1. Model Aviation magazine (June 1983) "Humm Bug," an indoor, CO2, Control Line stunt/sport model.
2. Model Aviation magazine (December 1983) "Beginners' Boomerang," as covered in the Ed Whitten column of the period.
3. Model Aviation magazine (December 1984) "Andrews Barnstormer," a how-to-build, simplification of Old-Timer stunt winner

4. Model Aviation magazine (August 1977) "Freshman II," an updated redesign of the old Testors Freshman trainer for Control Line
5. Stunt News (January 2000 to present) "Beginner" columnist
6. Stunt News (mid-1980s to present) continual contributor to various departments, e.g., Clubs, Powerplant, etc.
7. Air Lines (mid-1980s to present) continual contributor to this newsletter of the Milwaukee Circlemasters
8. Flying Models (May 2003) "Cap Strips of Other Stripes," a construction article, p. 74-75

Education

1. Display/taught at various local mall exhibits
2. Flew demonstrations at local schools
3. Volunteer worker and article writer for EAA Kidventure – the largest model event in the world, which is also the largest beginner model event in the world. Despite the scope of this educational event, it is totally ignored by all but one of the modeling press.
4. Continue to function as a reference source for other authors doing historical work, e.g., Wynn Paul's upcoming tome on Control Line stunt.

(signed) Douglas A. Dahlke
February 2003

For more material on Douglas A. Dahlke, please see his file in the National Model Aviation Museum Archives. Included are copies of articles by and about Doug as well as a few club items. See the AMA Librarian for assistance.

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