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# Biography of DAN B. SANTICH

Modeler since 1947

Birth Date: July 28, 1935

AMA Number: 24739

Transcribed & Edited by SS (3/03)

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## Career:

- While in the U.S. Air Force from 1952 to 1972 earned a place on the Air Force modeling team each time he participated
- Had his first design published – the Radio Controlled (RC) pattern model Rapier – in 1968 in Radio Control Modeler magazine; went on to have numerous plans published in various magazines
- Hosted the first Japanese-American Invitational Model Championship at Tachikawa Air Base in Japan while he was stationed there in 1969
- Worked as chief designer for Top Flite Models from 1974 to 1976 then went on to do free-lance work for other companies such as Andrews Model Aircraft and Fox Manufacturing
- Took over as editor of Model Airplane News magazine in 1984
- Developed the highly successful series called the Hots which was produced by Midwest Models in the 1980s
- Started his own company in 1990 and produced kits including the Ultra Hots
- Participated in the first unlimited scale racing events held in California and Nevada
- Has one of the few U.S. trademarks on a model airplane design – the Hots

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*In January 2003, Art Sabin nominated Dan B. Santich for the AMA's Hall of Fame. This is the biography that Art submitted with the Hall of Fame application.*

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Dan B. Santich is a name that has appeared in virtually thousands of model publications, not only in the United States but also in countries around the world. His designs and articles have inspired hundreds of thousands of modelers from all walks of life and in all geographic locations.

Dan began his career in modeling as a youngster in Grants Pass, Oregon, when his father introduced him to the legendary modeler, Jim Walker. So impressed with Walker's ability and creativity, Dan told his best friend that one day he, too, would become famous. Dan was 12-years-old at the time. In the meantime, he and his friend, Steve Martin, flew and crashed just about everything they could build, from Free Flights to Control Line.

In 1952 Dan joined the Air Force and during basic training he had the chance to attend the California Model Championships as a spectator where he met two more legends, Bob Palmer and John Tatone. Seeing the beauty of Palmer's designs, the Smoothie and Mars Control Line stunters, and Tatone's scale beauty, a Topsy Nipper, gave Dan the appreciation of a well-designed model as well as a model that performed equally.

The Air Force was always supportive of modeling activities and each year sponsored a 10-man team to represent the Air Force in national competition. Area competition was held around the world and the best modelers were sent to Lackland Air Force Base for the Air Force Wide Championships. To make the Air Force team, a modeler had to accumulate points by placing in the top three spots for Free Flight and Control Line events. Radio Control (RC) was but one event and only garnered three points, so Dan devoted himself to mastering not only RC, but all

the other events as well. This provided him with a vast knowledge of all aspects of the hobby. He made the Air Force team every time he participated.

In 1968 Dan had his first design published, a RC pattern model named the Rapier, which appeared in Radio Control Modeler magazine. In 1969 he was assigned to Tachikawa Air Base in Japan and had another RC pattern design published in Model Aviation magazine named the Cardinal. While in Japan Dan hosted the first Japanese-American Invitational Model Championship during open house at Tachikawa Air Base and also acted as contest director. His ability to inspire youngsters through modeling was apparent and he received a special award for his efforts.

In 1972 Dan retired from the Air Force and worked as an aerospace engineer with Martin-Marietta in developing the X-21A lifting body aircraft as well as components for the Sky Lab and space shuttle.

In 1974 he was hired by Top Flite Models as their chief designer. With Top Flite, Dan was able to redesign many of the outdated models as well as upgrade the manufacturing techniques being used. His first design for Top Flite was the P-47 Thunderbolt, which Dan went on to win second place at the 1975 Nationals in the first scheduled event for sport scale, losing out to Dave Platt by one-half point. Dan's other designs at Top Flite were the F-4U Corsair and the F8F Bearcat.

In 1976 Dan left Top Flite and moved to North Carolina. Later that year Radio Control Modeler magazine published his design called the Magnum 40.

Between 1977 and 1983 Dan worked on a contract basis for companies such as Andrews Model Aircraft and Fox Manufacturing. Also during this time he designed and had published several RC models such as the quarter scale P-26A, which he competed with at the U.S. Scalemasters and the Corben Super Ace, both of which were published in Model Airplane News magazine. Dan also covered for the media several events during this period including the Nationals, U.S. Scalemasters and the QSAA.

In 1984 Dan took over as editor of Model Airplane News magazine. Not only did he contribute his skills as a well-rounded modeler to thousands of modelers around the world, he continued his design efforts and developed the Hots series. Midwest Models was so impressed with the Hots design they contracted with Dan to produce kits of it. It sold out on the first run and continued as a top seller for many years. Also during his time as editor, Dan wrote hundreds of articles on all aspects of the modeling scene.

In 1987 he moved to North Carolina and continued his design efforts with the quarter-scale Cobra, Knight Twister and Big Hots. In 1990 Dan started his own company and produced kits of his design including the Ultra Hots, a quarter-scale model. He also participated in the first unlimited scale racing events held in California and Nevada.

His interest in giant scale led him to design the largest design ever published, the half-scale version of the Formula I racer Miss San Bernardino, which appeared in Model Airplane News

magazine. Not stuck in giant scale, Dan later designed the Hot Hots, which came out in the January 2002 issue of Radio Control Modeler magazine and is now (2003) being kitted by Morris Hobbies. Dan also has one of the few U.S. trademarks on a model airplane design, the Hots.

Through all of his modeling career, he has been a willing helper, teacher, advocate and sponsor of all forms of modeling activities with a down-to-earth attitude that enriches all of those who have come in contact with him and he is more than qualified to become a member of the Modelers Hall of Fame.

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*The following newspaper article about Dan ran in the local newspaper in Pilot Mountain, North Carolina.*

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## **Model Airplane Business is Beginning to Take Off**

By Christopher Quinn

The business that Dan Santich began in his basement is flying high on Main Street.

Dan Santich Models makes flying-model-airplane kits for enthusiasts around the country. The Radio Controlled (RC) wood and plastic planes have wingspans of nearly eight-feet and can fly at an estimated speed of 150 mph.

Santich, who designed model airplanes for one of the larger model plane companies in the world, had been out of the business for several years. But the encouragement of a friend nine months ago brought him back into designing and making planes.

His friend Sonny Vickers is a model plane enthusiast from Greensboro.

Santich said: "He came over to the house one day, and he said he had a motor that he did not have an airplane to fit. He asked me if I would design an airplane for this particular motor. I had slacked off and really wasn't doing it much as a hobby any more."

The planes use two-stroke engines a little larger than a softball. But they are high-performance engines. Santich said that the small motor on the plane he had in his business produces five and a half horsepower.

Vickers prodded Santich, who finally got out a few of the tools he had remaining from his earlier days of building model planes. He went to work. He said that he took a design from one of his earlier planes, called the Hots model, and enlarged it. He drew out the blueprints in about one week.

In another two weeks, he had the plane ready to fly.

"And the first flight was perfect," he said. He called the new model the Super Hots. Two other models are the Ultra Hots and the Big Hots.

Other hobbyists began seeing the plane in flight when Vickers flew it at various meets. Santich began getting calls.

“Again, it was Sonny’s prodding,” he said. “I was very cautious about getting back into it, because number one, I didn’t have any tools to start making kits.” Another reason was that he did not have working capital to start a small business.

Another friend and model plane enthusiast loaned Santich a band saw and a table saw. “He wanted me to get started, so I could buy my own equipment,” Santich said. “Another friend bought me a saw in exchange for a model airplane. That’s how I did it for the first three or four months. I built planes in exchange for equipment.”

Santich’s work space in the old Duke Power building on Main Street now includes two drills, two band saws, a sander, two table saws and a jig saw. He now employs two part-time workers to help him cut out the wood pieces for the kits. Each piece has to be cut to precise dimensions for the plane kits to work well, he said.

Santich uses balsa wood for most of the plane. The planes use light plywood on parts that have to be stronger than balsa.

Santich said that it takes about 18 hours to assemble the hundreds of pieces for the framework of the wing and fuselage. The framework is then covered with a plastic film that shrinks when exposed to heat. The plastic forms a tight, flexible skin on the plane.

RC electric motors move the airfoils on the wings and tail, giving the owner the ability to control its flight. Santich said that the controller can stay in touch with the plane for a distance of about two miles.

Santich not only flies the models, he is a licensed pilot as well. He developed a love for flight early, he said. “I probably developed a love for flying and airplanes as a result of my father,” Santich said.

Santich’s father was a milk deliveryman in southern Oregon. His route took him to the Salinas, California, airport. Santich and his older brother used to go to the airport with their father.

“And one time, he paid 50-cents, this was back in the 1930s, to let my brother and me ride in an old Ford Tri-Motor. I remember that like it was yesterday. I never got over it.”

Santich said he joined the Air Force in 1952, hoping to become a pilot. His vision kept him out of pilot training, however, and he decided to go into avionics – design and repair of flight instruments. All during those years, Santich said, he was flying model airplanes.

He retired from the Air Force in 1972 and went to work for NASA helping develop missiles.

In 1974, he got a call from Top Flite Models in Chicago, one of the larger model plane companies in the world. The company wanted him to head up its design staff. Santich took the job and worked there for four years. He later worked as a free-lance design engineer in North Carolina and as editor for a model airplane magazine in Massachusetts, before finally settling in Pinnacle in 1986.

When he started his design and building again in April 1990, it was in the basement of his Pinnacle house, he said. He advertises his kits in enthusiasts' magazines and sells kits to hobby shops. Working by himself, Santich said, he can make about 20 kits a week.

By summer, he moved his shop into an empty building in downtown Pilot Mountain. He moved to the larger building on Main Street in December.

Santich is happy about getting back into the business, but he has mixed feelings about being too successful, he said. "I don't want this to become so successful that I work myself to death," he said. "I don't want my work to become something that is more a burden than enjoyable."

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*To read some of the editorials that Dan wrote from Model Airplane News magazine, please see his file in the National Model Aviation Archives. See the AMA librarian for assistance.*

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