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# Biography of ELBERT J. (JOE) WEATHERS

Began modeling in 1930    Born in the 1920s; Deceased 1984

Transcribed & Edited by SS (3/03)

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## Career:

- Won the Pacific Coast Gas Model Championship sometime before it was discontinued in September of 1939
- Won the Richfield Oil Company scale model contest held in 1935; was successful in many contests
- Developed shock-absorbing single-strut landing gear
- Co-founded the San Diego Aeroners in 1935 and served as its corresponding secretary until 1940
- Was a member of the Model Airplane News magazine's Air Ways Club
- Designed more than 90 of his own models ranging from racers to scale models to camera-carrying airplanes to endurance models
- Had designs published in all the major modeling magazines
- Started Rite-Flite Specialties in 1946 and manufactured modeling accessories of his own design, including engine mounts, tank mounts and tailskid assemblies

## Honors:

- 1988 – AMA Hall of Fame
- 1988 – National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1990 – Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
- 1999 – Kits and Plans Antiquitous Hall of Fame

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*Though the following biography is compiled based upon magazine and newspaper articles, G. James Alaback compiled lists and copies of the articles relating to Elbert J. Weathers that made such a biography possible. The following article ran in the January 1940 issue of Model Airplane News magazine.*

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## We'd Like You to Meet Elbert J. Weathers

Every reader of Model Airplane News is familiar with the activities of Elbert J. Weathers of San Diego, California. His plans for the Westerner gas model appeared last May and June and his many very excellent flying scale craft have been a tribute to his designing and building skills.

But few folks know, however, that this West Coast expert was responsible for a lengthy discussion and investigation of aeromodeling rules by the Academy of Model Aeronautics at its November conference at the Hotel New Yorker.

Open-class-man Weathers, it seems, had astonished expert circles by bringing out a novel 6-1/2-foot gas model aptly named Mystery Man and distinguished by the use of take-off gear, which is dropped from the craft when it attains enough lift to rise off the ground.

The Academy ruled finally that the take-off gear must be a permanent part of the ship and cannot be dropped in flight. But largely because of Weathers' experimentation in this field, the administrative group agreed that a one-wheeler, which can take off unassisted and land without nosing over is permissible in sanctioned contests.

This anecdote serves admirably to illustrate our aerobiography with the contention that this San Diego chap is quite a fellow and one not to be dismissed lightly by merely quoting a couple of rules.

Weathers started building models when one of his friends interested him in the hobby just 10 years ago. Elbert (or Joe to his intimate friends) has built all types of outdoor gliders, stick and fuselage craft, flying scale models and gas jobs. Just now what little extra time he can devote to his model work is usually in the gas and flying scale fields.

His work with the Adco-Neon Signal and the Weather Electric Motor Companies, both of San Diego, doesn't give him an over abundance of leisure time, especially since he's engaged in various experimental activities, including the distribution of a new and radical automobile spark plug.

However, E.J.W. manages to design, build and compete in California meets with a certain amount of regularity and success. Here's a brief cross-sectional of his work:

First we might take the Pacific Coast Gas Model Championship (the title to be held until September 1939). This was won over a field of 400 entries with the Westerner. Another might be a first place in the Richfield Oil Company scale model contest held back in 1935; with a Kinner Envoy model the Aeroneer entrant netted prized totaling \$185.

A recent victory was scored in the Reginald Denny Industries design contest by E.J.W. Two places were good for \$80 and it was in conjunction with this competition that Weathers developed a new type shock-absorbing single-strut landing gear.

We could continue indefinitely with the listing of similar awards, but feel sure you've an inkling of this chap's skill on the field of battle. Right now, E.J.W. is serving as the corresponding secretary of the San Diego Aeroneers (composed of 47 outstanding gasoleers) and also hold membership in the N.A.A., Model Airplane News' Air Ways Club and the International Gas Model Airplane Association (I.G.M.A.A.).

When the subject of contest rules is raised, Weathers is strong for the abolishment of the cross-sectional fuselage requirement for gas craft, since, says he: "Any gas job of the fuselage type, if several square inches under the minimum, has no more chance than any entry which passes it. Moreover, a stick-type gas model has no advantage whatever over a fuselage-type (less efficient, if anything) and as it has, few are built."

Gas model competitions should judge entries for design, construction and finish as well as duration, he feels. And the 12-ounce wing loading with larger bore engines, which is popular on the West Coast, will eventually be taken up by most all groups.

One of E.J.W.'s fondest hopes is to get east to a Nationals in the near future so, among other things, he may participate in a Berryloid Finish competition and meet some of the aeromodelers

from the eastern section of the country. He'd like to see a precision event for gas models at the Nationals as well as the continuance and encouragement of flying scale models.

Queried as to the future of model aviation in this country, Weathers points out that the surface hasn't even been scratched, yet.

“The opportunities presenting themselves to the more aggressive builders are too numerous to mention. The next few years will see those having all the time necessary at their disposal, working on a specific overgrowth of gas models – Radio Control. Herein lies the really golden opportunity, together with other matters, which may develop after the Radio Control itself is worked out correctly. In the meantime, the youngster or oldster, for that matter, can continue to produce experimental aircraft in model form based on new and unproven theories. Among the less popular categories, tow-line gliders should be encouraged, especially.”

E.J.W.'s advice to the novice enthusiast, which sums up his experiences of the past 10 years, is that “a beginner should watch another more experienced builder for some time, if possible, before he begins the actual construction of a model airplane or glider; thus getting the underlying points of building even a simple job well in mind. He should start with a simple hand-launched all-balsa glider or Rise-off-Ground model, advancing rapidly as he can although no one should ever build models in a hurry.

“No really young boy should be allowed to ‘make the plunge’ by starting with a gas model for the very first project, both for his own good and that of others where he may be attempting to operate it.”

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*The following piece about Elbert J. Weathers ran in the December 1988 issue of Model Aviation magazine after he was inducted posthumously into the AMA Hall of Fame.*

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Elbert J. (Joe) Weathers, for many years a flyer, designer, club leader, writer and manufacturer, left us in 1984. His legacy of creativity, energy, success and friendships will keep him with us for generations. Joe was a teenager in the early 1930s when aeromodeling really took off. Growing up in San Diego, California, he loved model aviation right from the start and seemed to prefer his own designs to anything that was available through magazines or stores.

The earliest extant drawing, his #W-5G, is dated October 5, 1931. Later that year his towline glider #W-8G was published. This same model is included in Vic Smeed's book, Model Flying – The First Fifty Years. Joe followed these early aircraft with more than 90 originals. These ranged in scope from racers to scale models, from camera-carrying airplanes to endurance models. In the AMA museum there is a beautiful example of his Winged Victory, built to the original drawings. There is also Joe's original Pacificoaster that was restored by Jim McNeill.

Thus did Joe Weathers fulfill a prediction made by Charles Hampson Grant in 1932, that “Mr. E.J. Weathers shows promise of being one of our future well-known airplane designers.”

Flying Aces, Model Airplane News and Air Trails magazines all published Weather's designs. In recent months, Model Builder magazine republished the Winged Victory details. Joe had a reputation for excellence, and many hundreds of his own designs were built and flown.

In 1935 Weathers co-founded the San Diego Aeroners. This club is still an active AMA club. Joe served as corresponding secretary for five years until 1940.

When World War II began, Joe worked for North American Aviation in engineering. In 1945 he again found time for model design, and then in 1946 he started Rite-Flite Specialties. He manufactured a line of modeling accessories of his own design, including engine mounts, tank mounts and tailskid assemblies.

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*For additional information on Elbert J. Weathers, including plan drawings, a list of articles and copies of newspaper clipping, please see his file in the National Model Aviation Museum Archives. See the AMA librarian for assistance.*

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