



The AMA History Program Presents: Autobiography of ROBERT F. ABERLE



Modeler since 1950

Birth Date: March 22, 1938

AMA Number: 215

Written/Submitted by RFA (3/03), MAN (11/06)

Edited & Formatted by SS (5/03), updated by JS/NR (11/06, 10/07)

Career:

- 1950s: Attended all his local and regional Free Flight contests as a teenager
- 1973: Began writing for Flying Models magazine and became a regular contributor to the magazine. Served first as contributing editor of Flying Models magazine for a while then served as technical editor of Flying Models for 20 years
- 1975: Began serving on the AMA Radio Control (RC) Frequency Committee and continues to the present (c. 2003); also served as committee chair
- 1989-1995: Regularly flew in Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) contests Placed first with the only perfect score in the ½-A Texaco event at the 1994 SAM-77 Winter-Fly Contest
- 1994-1996: Helped form and worked at Modelair-Tech Company
- 1995-1996: Placed well at the Nationals, winning first in the class A Old Timer event in 1996
- 1995: Published book, Clean and Quiet: A Guide to Electric-Powered Flight
- 2002: Published book, Getting Started in Backyard Flying
- 2003: Contributing editor for Model Airplane News and Backyard Flyer magazines, an editor-at-large for RC Microflight Newsletter and a beginner editor for Model Aviation magazine

Honors:

- 1981: AMA Distinguished Service Award
 - 1982: AMA Fellow
 - 1982: Vintage Radio Control Society Hall of Fame
 - 1982: Howard McEntee Award
 - 1998: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
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The Beginning

I got started in the model aviation hobby at the age of 12 in 1950. I almost immediately applied for AMA membership after reading several model magazines like Air Trails and Flying Models in that timeframe. My initial AMA license number was 8409.

At my starting point in the hobby, I lived in the town of Rosedale, Queens, New York, on the very outskirts of New York City. The location qualified me to attend the Brooklyn Technical High School in Brooklyn, New York, where I graduated in 1955. My location in the town of Rosedale put me within a mile or easy walking distance of the old abandoned Curtiss Airport in Valley Stream, New York. Because I could walk to the field I followed some friends out one

day, took a liking to the model aircraft I saw (all Free Flights or Control Line at the time) and that was my start. I couldn't wait to get home from school each day to run out to the field.

My first model in 1950 was the Joe Wagner design and Henry Engineering kit called the Dakota. It was an all-balsa bi-plane weighing about seven ounces and powered by an Andersen Spitzzy Junior .045 glow fueled engine. After a full summer of flying the Dakota, I lost it in the tall swamp grass on the edge of the Curtiss Airport. But I went on to build more and more Free Flights. It was in 1951 that a large Free Flight model airplane club, called the Long Island Gas Monkeys, began inviting junior members into their ranks sponsored by a big brother. I joined that club along with many time Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) Radio Controlled (RC) and Free Flight champion, Larry Davidson, back in 1951.

By about 1952, I began to realize that there was something other than Free Flights. It was called RC. A group of modelers would show up at the Curtiss Airport every weekend to fly with the then primitive single-channel escapement-operated RC models. The leader of this group of early RC experimenter was none other than our present day (2003) AMA historian, Norm Rosenstock. Since I just turned 65, Norm doesn't like me saying today, "I used to watch Norm fly – when I was a kid" – ha!

By 1953, in my second year at Brooklyn Tech, a fellow Gas Monkey and New York Telephone Company employee, Dan Logue, took me under his wing as he constructed his first RC system. I actually constructed my own system along with Dan from surplus military parts we bought down on what was called "radio row" on Canal Street in downtown New York City. Dan taught me how to read an electrical schematic diagram and how to cut and bend a metal chassis, wind coils, and the like. We were able to construct a pair of 27.255 MHz single-channel transmitters from plans published by Howard McEntee in the old Air Trails magazine. The receiver was the Miller hard tube circuit using a surplus heating blanket relay.

My first RC model was a Guillow's Trixter Beam designed by the late Lou Andrews. By 1957, I was really into all kinds of RC flying. The Lorenz two-tube receiver (published in Model Airplane News magazine) made life much easier and the system became more reliable. It was in 1957 that I passed my amateur radio license and became station W2QPP, which I have maintained to this day (2003).

Competition

As a teenager I was lucky to be carted out to all the local and regional (Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., Rhode Island, Connecticut and upstate New York) Free Flight contests. We also had annual interclub contests between five Long Island clubs, including the Prop Spinners and the Skyscrapers.

Back in 1957, the AMA scheduled a weeklong national competition to be held at the Willow Grove Naval Air Station in Pennsylvania. That was my first taste of flying in a national competition. I did not win back then, but kept trying. Then 38 years later, flying at the 1995

AMA electric national meet in Muncie I won my first two places. Actually, I won a third place in both class A and class B Old-Timer category. The following year was my very best ever while attending the 1996 AMA electric national in Muncie. I won my first and only first place in class B Old-Timer, second place in class A Old-Timer and a third place in class B sailplane. This was my best effort. I continued to fly in the Nationals until the year 2000, marking my first 50 years in modeling.

I also flew very actively in SAM contests from roughly 1989 until 1995. During that period, I traveled to many states (Florida, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Louisiana and more) with a car full of models. I won many trophies and plaques, but my finest moment came in January 1994 while flying at Fred Mulholland's SAM-77 Winter-Fly Contest. Out of 35 contestants in the popular 1/2-A Texaco event, I was the only person to obtain two perfect 15-minute flights for first place. This is a difficult event to participate in which made this win that much more special.

Leadership

Back in the mid-1970s when my children were in their early teens, they expressed little interest in model aviation, but they were, as was (is) my wife Irene, very supportive of my hobby interests. I decided back then it was payback time for my wonderful hobby. So in 1975 I joined the AMA RC Frequency Committee. This committee had successfully fought off attempts to take our 27 MHz RC channel away from us. Then they helped gain seven new RC channels on 72 and 75 MHz.

By 1975, the feeling was that RC was growing rapidly and that it needed many more RC channels to cope with this expansion. By the late 1970s, we were dealing actively with the FCC on obtaining these new channels. Because I was an engineering manager at the Grumman Corporation on Long Island, AMA executive director, John Worth, invited me to become the committee chair. On my committee in those days was, Dr. Walter Good, Dave Brown, George Steiner, George Myers, Fred Marks, Butch Lanterman, Lee Renaud and many others.

Everyone had a job to do and as a result, we were able to obtain 50 new channels on 72 MHz expressly for the RC of model aircraft and 30 more channels up on 75 MHz for the use of surface vehicles, like RC cars and boats. Since these new channels were right in the middle of our old seven channels, an exacting phase-out/phase in plan had to be carefully developed so that equipment obsolescence was held to a minimum.

We got those channels officially back in January 1983. We have enjoyed them very successfully for the past 20 years. It has also helped the overall RC technology since narrowband equipment became the norm.

Awards

Because of my accomplishments as AMA RC Frequency Committee chair (I'm still a member of that committee to this day) I was fortunate enough to receive just about every award a modeler could hope for in a lifetime. These awards to me include:

- AMA Distinguished Service Award – 1982
- AMA Fellow – 1982
- Howard McEntee Memorial Award – 1982
- Walt Billett Memorial Award (last to person to receive it) – 1983
- Vintage R/C Society Hall of Fame – 1990
- Charlie Spears Memorial Award for Advancing Electric Powered Flight – 2002

And the best of all:

- Model Aviation Hall of Fame – 1998

Publishing Experience

In early 1970, I had developed a fun-fly event for our local RC club on Long Island. The event was unique and I was asked to write it up as a brief article for publication in Flying Models magazine. My fellow club member in those days was Nick Ziroli Senior (also a member of the Model Aviation Hall of Fame). Nick had already been publishing RC original designs in Flying Models. He introduced me to the Flying Models editor, the late Don McGovern. Don invited me to write for Flying Models and that is what started a hobby-writing career that is active to this day.

My first article, the Long Islander RC sailplane appeared in the December 1973 issue of Flying Models. I continued to design and publish original design for Flying Models up until 1998 when I decided to take a rest. In addition to all of my design work, I wrote several thousand pages of product reviews, how-to articles, and a quarterly digest series of small products. I was first granted the title of contributing editor. Later while working for Flying Models editor, Bob Hunt, I was conferred the title of technical editor which I maintained for almost a 20-year period. Attached to this biography is a detailed list of my 38 published designs.

Today I am a contributing editor for the Air Age publications, Model Airplane News and Backyard Flyer, editor-at-large for the Air Age, RC Microflight Newsletter, and beginner editor at Model Aviation (the AMA magazine).

I also published my first book, Clean and Quiet: a Guide to Electric-Powered Flight back in 1995. Then this past year (May 2002) Air Age published my second book titled Getting Started in Backyard Flying.

Hobby Industry Involvement

After retiring from my full-time job at Grumman in 1994 after 30 years service, I joined with active Long Island electric modeler, Tom Hunt, to form the company Modelair-Tech. Our product line included such things as belt drives for electric motors, electric-powered designs (plans) and kits. After two years helping Tom set up this business, I bowed out to go back to my

writing and design work. Tom continues to run the business to this day. We are still the closest of friends and travel all over the country together to attend fly-ins, contests, and trade shows.

Summary

At age 65, I still love model aviation in any form. On occasion, I still will fly a Free Flight model or throw a hand-launched glider. I continue to fly in competitions, but have cut back a lot simply to have fun with the hobby. My writing continues. It is my way of extending the hobby for future generations. I hope I will be remembered the most for my writing.

*(signed) Bob Aberle
March 6, 2003*

List of Articles (total of 37)

Magazine Names:

FM = Flying Models magazine

MB = Model Builder magazine

RCM = Radio Control Modeler magazine

S&EM = Sailplane and Electric magazine (changed to Quiet Flyer magazine circa 2002)

MAN = Model Airplane News magazine

RCMF = RC Microflight newsletter

BYF = Backyard Flyer

MA = Model Aviation magazine

Name	Plan No.	Magazine	Issue
Long Islander RC sailplane	CF-317	FM	December 1973
Dayton Wright Racer ½-A pylon	CF-334	FM	June 1974
Field Kits	CF-352	FM	November 1974
Guillow's Trixter Beam – Revisited		MB	1974
Seaweed .60-powered with floats (cover)	CF-361	FM	April 1975
Nothin' Special ½-A pylon racer	CF-367	FM	May 1975
Bede VI .20-powered Stand-Off (cover)	CF-380	FM	September 1975
76 Special Quarter Midget Trainer	CF-405	FM	May 1976
Cannonball .020 tiny acrobatic (cover)	CF-410	FM	July 1976
Grumman Kitten .40 Stand-Off (cover)	CF-431	FM	February 1977
Lil' Eaglet .010 micro sport	CF-442	FM	June 1977
ACE 310 .09 RC sport acrobatic	CF-456	FM	December 1977
Blanik L-13 Stand-Off scale sailplane	CF-481	FM	August 1978
Aqui-Duct .40 ducted fan boat	CB-11	FM	January 1979
New Angle ½-A acrobatic sport (cover)	CF-505	FM	May 1979
GP-700 .60 glider tow plane	CF-527	FM	January 1980
Next Step .09 basic trainer (cover)	CF-352	FM	March 1981
Long Islander 2-meter sailplane (cover)	CF-589	FM	February 1982

Mini-Moni ½-A Stand-Off scale	CF-611	FM	October 1982
Fastball ½-A sport acrobatic	CF-645	FM	October 1983
Image .80 four-cycle sport pattern	CF-692	FM	April 1985
Kerswap .40-powered Old-Timer (cover)	CF-736	FM	November 1986
EMF electric pylon racer	CF-745	FM	April 1987
FMQ-250 .09 pylon racer	CF-769	FM	February 1988
Frisco Kid .15 RC Free Flight nostalgia (cover)	CF-809	FM	August 1989
Infant Sportster micro RC electric	CF-827	FM	May 1990
Atomizer ½-A Texaco	CF-866	FM	October 1991
Schmaedig Stick for electric Old-Timer	CF-873	FM	January 1992
Live Wire Kitten nostalgia electric (cover)	CF-994	FM	June 1996
Playboy Senior 425		RCM	June 2000
Watt-Fun		S&EM	August 1999
Pro-Pod		MAN	October 1999
Thurston/Patchen Explorer		MAN	October 2000
Profile Powerhouse, micro electric		RCMF	January 2001
Guillow's Trixter Beam (reduced-size electric)		BYF	2002
Microball (reduced-size Cannonball) electric		MA	Publication Pending
Kiwi – 3.4-ounce indoor electric – Li-Poly batteries		RCMF	January 2003
Lil Dakota – 1.3-ounce indoor RC electric		RCMF	Publication Pending

The following biographical interview was written by Debra Cleghorn, published in the Final Approach section of Model Airplane News' online edition (modelairplanenews.com).

Final Approach

by Debra Cleghorn

Inspired by RC

For more than half a century, **Bob Aberle** has been inspired by model aircraft. He has shared his enthusiasm for RC by serving on the AMA frequency committee, writing countless articles for *Model Airplane News* and other RC publications and designing more than 50 planes. What keeps him interested and involved in the hobby? Read on.

MODEL AIRPLANE NEWS: *How did you get started in RC?*

BOB ABERLE: When I was 12 or 13, I joined a popular free-flight club, the Long Island Gas Monkeys. One of the members took me to New York City's old Canal Street, which was then known as "radio row," to buy surplus military parts. We had only one channel in those early citizens' band days. I put together a transmitter and used it to fly a Guillow's Trixter Beam rudder-only escapement job. It didn't have throttle; you started the engine, launched the plane, and said a prayer. I still have a picture of me with that big transmitter. It must have weighed 25 pounds!

MAN: *Tell us about your first plane.*

BA: Believe it or not, it was a Veco Dakota biplane designed by Joe Wagner. I still have one like it hanging up in my basement. It was a free flight, all-balsa model that used a .049 engine. That was in 1951.

MAN: *What's your favorite plane?*

BA: Well, that's a good question. That Dakota biplane that got me started so long ago was a marvelous plane. But I'd have to say my favorite is the last one I built: a redesign of Bill Johnke's Impulse, which was featured in *Model Airplane News* 52 years ago. It was an excellent plane in its day, and it's still a great flyer with electric power.

MAN: *What did you see in the future for our hobby?*

BA: I think we'll always have a need for fuel-powered planes, but every day, new improvements in electric power make it a less costly, more effective way of flying. With e-power, we can fly both extremes: indoors with micro planes and outdoors with .40- to 1.20-size planes. In the near future, we'll enjoy affordable battery packs that can be recharged in the time it takes to fuel.

MAN: *What do you like most about RC?*

BA: For me, it's a combination of things. I enjoy the ability to fly a model like a real plane. I enjoy being creative. There isn't a bigger thrill than to design, construct and then fly a plane. It's the ultimate test!

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