



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of FRANK ROALES

Born June 1, 1940 Started modeling in 1950
AMA #3201



Written & Submitted by FR (03/2003); Transcribed & Edited by SS (03/2003), Reformatted by JS (01/2010)

Career:

- Won first place in the first local flying contest he entered in the stunt beginner's class
 - Flew in his first Nationals (Nats) in 1991 and finished sixth in fun scale
 - First worked at the Nats in 1980; was a static judge for Radio Control events that year
 - Contest director of the 1992 Nats cross-country sailplane event
 - Was the official timer for the Indoor World Championships in 1980
 - Has designed and had published the Simple Simon, Fake Ford, Wagner Twin Cub and a Junkers Ju52-3m
 - Has served in every office of the Tri County Aero club since 1976; was club president when the club hosted the Lawrenceville (Illinois) Nats in 1991, 1992 and 1994
 - Presently (2003) an associate vice president for AMA District VI and an AMA sanctioned contest director
 - Has been editor of his club's newsletter for almost 15 years
 - Has had articles published in RADIO CONTROL Sportsman, Model Aviation and Skyways magazines
 - Has taught model aviation to Boy Scout troops and for summer education programs
 - Has taught Adult Continuing Education classes in model aviation at Vincennes University
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The Beginning

I have been active in modeling for over 40 years starting at age 10 and continuing to present with just two periods out. One was when I discovered girls and was out for about three years before I went to serve in the Air Force where I again returned to the fold. The other was for a period of about 10 years when after returning from the service and first married I was involved in raising my children. It was in fact my son who got me back into modeling when he was about seven (1969) and I have remained active ever since.

I really don't remember the specific reason I started but the most likely the reason was because I have always liked airplanes and building model airplanes was the thing for boys to do in those times (the late 1940s to early 1950s). I first joined a club in 1951. It was the Vincennes (Indiana) Prop Busters and I was a member for only about one or two years before I went my own way to find modelers around my same age.

The first airplane I built (excluding Jim Walker gliders and American Junior Hornets) as far as I remember was a Comet 10-cent Fokker D VII that I bought at the neighborhood grocery store. I was entirely on my own because at the time, I knew of no other modelers and my father didn't involve himself with my projects. Therefore, it was a real challenge. I remember the hardest part was cutting out all those small pieces from the very poor quality printwood sheet with a double

edge razor blade. I wasn't even smart enough to break it in half or put something on the other side so most of the parts were bloodstained from cut fingers. The part I thought was the easiest and most fun was the actual assembly of the parts and sticks into what became an airplane.

Covering was also quite a hassle and I had no one to tell me about warps so it was quite a few Comet 10-cent'ers before I had read enough in Air Trails and Model Airplane News magazines to get any of them to actually fly. A neighbor boy also became interested in modeling about the same time and we became great friends and fed on each other for information. We both shared our "learn by doing" experiences and spent time building together.

The airplane that really cemented me as a modeler, however, was not one I built but one I assembled. For Christmas in 1951, I received an American Junior (AJ) Firebaby and OK Cub .074. I was able to get in many flights with this combination and progressed very quickly to gas Control Line models in both building and flying.

Competition

The first contest I entered was not a flying one but one of building. I believe it was 1952 and the Monogram Company held contests at local hobby shops all over the country for building their Speedy Built models. I won a third place with an Ercoupe at Robbies Hobbies in Vincennes, Indiana. The first flying contest I entered was one sponsored by the local Exchange Club, also in Vincennes. This was in 1954 and I flew a Flying Clown powered by a Fox 35 to first place in what was called stunt beginner's class. Other contests have been an assortment of fun-flys, Scale Radio Control, and Soaring events with various placing.

It was many years later in 1991 before I ever got to fly in the Nationals (Nats). By that time, I was 51 and flying just to say I flew in the Nats. I entered fun scale and standard class sailplane. I finished sixth in fun scale and way down the list in soaring after a "pop off" in the second round dropped me way down the list from my third place finish in round one. I had, however, worked at the Nats for the first time in 1980 when I was a static judge for the Radio Control events. I worked other Nats also and was contest director (CD) for the cross-country sailplane event in 1992. I also flew in the 1980 Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) Champs and have achieved LSF level IV but I never competed in FAI. However, in 1980 I was an official timer for the Indoor World Champs held in West Baden, Indiana.

Design and Experimentation

My experimentation with model airplanes began way back in the early 1950s. As a kid I was told by someone "you can fly anything Control Line with enough power" so I put an Anderson Baby Spitfire inside a large orange juice can added an elevator and tabs. I named it the Fan Can and it did fly in a matter of fashion on short lines, an early ducted fan model. In that same period, I built a profile B25 of my own design.

While in the Air Force in 1960, I designed and built a flying wing combat aircraft for Fox .35. Designs I have had published include Simple Simon, a 1/2-A sport plane in Model Builder magazine in March 1982; Fake Ford, a trimotor 1/2-A fun scale Radio Control in Model Aviation magazine in July 1986 along with a cover picture; and a Junkers Ju52-3m fun scale Radio

Control that was the feature article in RC Modeler magazine in November 1990. My Wagner Twin Cub was the cover picture on the July 1994 issue of RC Report.

Leadership

I have been president of Tri County Aero (AMA# 300) a number of times since 1976 and also have held all other officer positions in this club over the years. I held that position from 1989 to 1993 when Tri County Aero put together the presentation and packages that made us the host club for all the Lawrenceville (Illinois) Nats (1991, 1992 and 1994). Presently, I am an associate vice president for AMA District VI and have been a CD for numerous fun-flys and scale contests sponsored by Tri County Aero as well as long time CD of the prestigious Mid America Free Flight Champs that are now in their 27th year. As stated above I also directed the 1992 Nats cross-country sailplane event.

I have been the editor of the Tri County Aero club's newsletter, "Flypaper," for almost 15 years. Other articles I have written have been for RC Sportsman (September 1979), Model Aviation (February 1999 and April 2001) and a research listing for full size Trimotor aircraft that was in the July 1991 issue of Skyways.

Industry Involvement

I have worked part-time in five hobby shops – Blan Hardware, Campbell's Hobby and Craft, Risley's Hobbies, Off the Ground Models and Westport Hobbies. Off the Ground Models was in Lawrenceville, Illinois, and the rest were in Vincennes, Indiana.

Education

I have taught building classes for Boy Scout troops and dens along with some for summer education programs sponsored and held by local libraries. Also I have taught some Adult Continuing Education classes in "Building and Flying Model Aircraft" for Vincennes University.

*(signed) Frank Roales
March 2003*

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