



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of MEL W. SANTMYERS

Born February 7, 1932 Began modeling in 1940  
AMA #3190



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

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## Career:

- 1962: Entered his first competition; has spent over 40 consecutive years in Radio Control competition alone
- Served as president of the Detroit Radio Control Club
- Helped run the Detroit invitational for a few years
- Started the Association of Radio Control Clubs in Michigan that included Canada
- Started a novice class for competition events two years before the AMA adopted the same thing
- Early 1960s: Won best of show for class one planes at the Toledo, Ohio, show
- Placed third in rudder-only at the 1964 Nationals
- 1968: Moved to California and joined the Birds Radio Control Club
- Raced formula and quarter midgets for 10 years combined and another 10 years in giant scale air racing
- Received the Waldo Award for forming a QSAA chapter and helped with QSAA frequency control
- Joined the Scale Squadron of Southern California and competed in several Scalemasters and two Top Gun events
- 1986: His Beach Staggerwing won the Scalemasters high static award; it was the first civilian aircraft to do so
- 1995: Won the gold in Thompson trophy in giant scale racing
- Has served as an adviser to the Scalemasters board for many years

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Although I began to fly Radio Control models in early 1957, I was involved from the age of eight or nine building stick and solid models. My stint in the U.S. Air Force at age 18 until 23 put a big gap in my model activities, however. When I did return I began to look up the activity in my area on the outskirts of Detroit, Michigan, which happened to be the Detroit Radio Control Club. I crashed my first Radio Control plane glide testing it. Fortunately for me, fellow club member Ken Taylor taught me to fly. We were fortunate also to have Tom Brett in our club, who, at the time, was a national pattern champion. I watched his every move and that would pay off for me in future years by paying attention to detail just as he did. I would say he was responsible for my interest in competition as well.

I quickly became more involved in flying and in club affairs. During that time, I entered my first competition in what was called “rudder-only” in 1962. In the following years I was also club president for a term – maybe two, I cannot remember. I helped run what was then the Detroit invitational for a couple years or more and it eventually became my job to scout for the next year’s new flyers, help organize the meet, etc. I also started the Association of Radio Control

Clubs in Michigan that included Canada to coordinate the contests during the flying season, which, by the way, I am told is still active today (2003) but has another name. During that early period, I also started the novice class for competition events two years before the AMA adopted the same thing. That is recorded in an early Model Airplane News magazine article.

I was so active in those early years that I designed several rudder-only and what were called multi-aircraft planes. Because of that, I became good friends with Carl Goldberg. I also won best of show for class one planes (rudder-only) at the Toledo, Ohio show in the early 1960s.

In 1964, after being in first place for the entire five days in the rudder-only class at the Dallas Nationals (Nats), I ended up being third in the last round. We flew all five days in those years. Following that at some point, I went from escapements to Orbit reeds and flew competition in the Midwest with reeds in pattern planes and scale before moving to southern California in 1968. In California, I joined the Birds Club, a well-known Radio Control club, right away and continued competition in California and Arizona with my own design pattern plane called the Chipmunk.

In the early 1970s, I started racing the 40 size formula one racers. Again, I became very involved. I also flew an event called “quarter midgets,” and there I won one of the overall championships. During that time, I also helped start the quarter midget-racing club. At one time, our club put on a race a month for 36 consecutive months. Overall I raced the formulas and midgets for 10 years combined.

While this was taking place giant scale started and I designed and built the giant Piper Tomahawk for that event and flew in most of the QSAA events. I also helped to form a chapter and helped with the frequency control among other things at the QSAA for several years. I was presented the Waldo Award for those activities.

During this period, I joined the Scale Squadron of Southern California (I don't know what year) and began to fly and build for scale contests like I did in the East. Since that time, I have flown in numerous masters qualifiers, in several Scalemasters and two Top Gun events. In 1986, my Byron highly modified Beach Staggerwing won the high static award – the first time in Scalemasters history for a civilian aircraft to do so.

Giant scale racing began in 1991 and I worked as an official the first year and have raced every year since until the present time (2003). I have flown in Thompson trophy, Formula One, and the bi-plane class. In 1995, I won the gold in Thompson trophy in Galveston, Texas. Although I have many second, third and other trophies, the Thompson has been my only gold win in giant scale racing. Shortly after that, I created Area 51 racing. A race team that at its high point had four pilots and several crewmembers. Along the way, I co-wrote the first official set of bi-plane racing rules and I am currently the USRA's representative for the bi-plane class. I have just completed racing for another 10 years, but this time, of course, in giant scale racing.

That not being enough, I guess, I decided that I would concentrate on scale again in 2002. I flew in three qualifiers and then, having qualified, I flew in the U.S. Scalemasters held in Mesa, Arizona, again with my highly modified Top Flight Stinson SR9. I placed 13<sup>th</sup> out of 45 experts

and my plane scored in the top four static point category. At age 71, I was very pleased with those results. I have also been an adviser to the Scalemasters board for many years.

I have traveled all over the country to fly in events for some 40 years as a result of my interest in competition and attending fly-ins. I suppose that would add up to many thousands of miles. At one point in giant scale racing, my racing buddy Holly Hollingworth and I drove 10,000 miles for at three to four years running just to races.

So, here I am. I am the field director for my local club, the Gilman Springs Flyers. I don't know if these past years are something to question my sanity about, but I am about to start my 47<sup>th</sup> year in Radio Control. That in itself is not uncommon; however, competing consecutively for 40 of those 46 years tells a story about me. If I did it to win all the time, I would have quit many years ago. Along the way, I have met numerous types of modelers. Mostly very, very good. I have had the opportunity to meet and make friends with people from all over the world. I cannot even guess how many. I have also had the privilege to meet just about every who's who to date. I consider that to be one of the virtues of what competition really is. To be able to surround yourself with so many talented people – some of it is sure to rub off now and then. I was able to win, although I credit my longevity to not having to win. Early on, I learned what it takes to be a winner. If I was interested enough to win, then I usually did at some point, but I was mostly satisfied to place somewhere when I just wanted to put in enough effort to do as good as I could with what I could manage comfortably. I lost far more events than I ever won, but I was usually able to place high enough to satisfy myself enough to try again and again.

Currently I am getting ready for 2003 with races planned, some more scale activity and, of course, the fly-ins for the season. I am now finishing a 1/3-scale Extra 330L.

I have been an AMA member for all of the years. 3190 is my original number and last year I purchased a brick to be displayed at headquarters. I visited the site in Muncie, Indiana, in 2000.

I have enjoyed this sport/hobby immensely.

*(signed) Mel Santmyers  
January 2003*

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