



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of TERRY DUNN



Written by JS (2019); Transcribed and reformatted by JS (03/2020)



Watch Terry's *I Am the AMA* interview at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ylBBhjYOiSE>.

Jay Smith interviewed Terry Dunn for the I Am the AMA column, published in the September 2019 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

I Am the AMA Terry Dunn: Model Aviation contributor

By Jay Smith jays@lmodelaircraft.org

Jay Smith: *How did you get involved with model aviation?*

Terry Dunn: When I was a kid, my uncles flew Control Line [CL] models. My dad and I started with a Cox PT-19 then stepped up to .35-size CL airplanes like the Sterling Ringmaster and Goldberg Cosmic Wind. Those experiences paved the way for me to transition to RC airplanes, cars, and boats.

JS: *How has model aviation impacted your life and/or career?*

TD: During part of my time as an aerospace engineer, I worked on the spacesuits and tools used by astronauts during space walks. Even on my first day, I felt totally comfortable with the small fasteners and delicate components found on much of this equipment. There is no question that my childhood spent wrenching on 1/2A engines, servos, and bell cranks prepared me well for my future career.

JS: What disciplines of modeling do you currently participate in?

TD: I like to dabble in many things, but most of my aircraft are electric-powered RC models. Within that, I have very few filters. On any given trip to the field I might have a big warbird, an electric sailplane, a speedy EDF [electric ducted fan], and an ultramicro model or two. It's all interesting and fun to me.

My biggest joy in the hobby comes from designing oddly shaped airplanes. I enjoy the technical challenges involved in developing a silly idea into an actual airworthy model. Of course, things rarely work right the first time. It is satisfying for me to sort through those issues and end up with an airplane that looks weird but flies normally. A fun bonus for me is that my strange airplanes are great conversation starters at the flying field.

JS: What other hobbies do you have?

TD: There is no question that RC is my biggest hobby by far, but the modeling bug has not yet bitten my wife or kids. Free time with my family often includes nature hikes or kayaking.

JS: Who or what has influenced you the most?

TD: I have to credit my dad and my uncles again. They are all very hands-on, resourceful people. Whenever the car broke down, they fixed it. If they needed a special tool for something, they made it. Several of them are also car painters, so they are skilled at making things look good too. With those men as examples, I grew up with a firm belief that there were no limitations to the things I could build with my own hands. It's just a matter of rolling up my sleeves and figuring out how to get it done.

JS: Can you share a little about what you did at NASA?

TD: I worked for 16 years at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. For the first seven years, I dealt with computer systems at Mission Control and the space shuttle flight simulators. When I started in 1997, they were still using many of the mainframe computers from the Apollo days. I was able to participate in transitioning those legacy computers to more modern equipment. It was an exciting time, and I was able to work on many interesting projects.

In 2004, I transitioned to the huge pool where astronauts train for spacewalks. This is where I worked on spacesuits and tools.

The pool environment is very harsh for equipment designed to be used in space, so there were

always new problems to tackle. It was a challenging, fast-paced environment, but it fit me well, and I enjoyed coming home with a little grease under my fingernails.

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