



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of DAVE SHADEL



Written by BS (2016); Reformatted by JS (04/2019)

The following was submitted by Bryan Shadel to nominate his father, Dave Shadel, for the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame. Dave Shadel was inducted into the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 2017.

Dave's first exposure to model aviation was in 1957, when a neighbor boy was flying a Control Line airplane in a vacant field near Dave's home in Lennox, California. Southern California was a hotbed of modeling activity in the late fifties, and a hobby shop just a couple of blocks from his home provided an outlet for Dave's early modeling activities.

Dave's parents bought him a Wen-Mac ready-to-fly Control Line "Yellow Jacket" airplane for Christmas in 1958, which never flew. Even the assistance of the neighbor boy proved fruitless, and the airplane was broken beyond the point of being able to fly. Nonetheless, what remained of the airplane's fuselage and engine allowed Dave to become familiar with running the engine for countless hours in the garage, much to the delight of his parents and the neighbors! For the next couple of years Dave's father helped him construct several Control Line models, which had short but eventful flights.

By 1960, Dave had discovered a park that was several miles away from home, populated by dozens of Control Line fliers. As luck would have it, the airport that his dad was flying full-scale from was close by, and dad would drop him at the park while flying in the area. By this time, Dave had managed his first successful flight with a Baby Clown powered by a Fox .09 engine. Since no one had helped Dave in learning to fly Control Line up to this point, the grossly heavy engine made the airplane so nose heavy that it would fly only with full up elevator, making it possible to have a successful but hardly aerobatic flight. After two years of failures, Dave's first real flights set the stage for a lifetime of aeromodeling. Many of Dave's u-control models of the time were scavenged from the trash cans at that field and rebuilt to fly again.

The park where Dave had his first flights also spawned the first model club he was a member of, the Flying Fools of Lawndale, California. It had about 25 members, most of them in their 20s and 30s, and many of them more than willing to help the few youngsters that fell under the spell of model airplane flying. The members were mainly competition fliers, in Combat, Stunt, and Rat Racing, and always had a spot in the back of their car for the kids, taking them to all the local contests. Dave's first AMA Nationals was in 1963, where he flew Combat and 1/2A Speed.

During that time, one particular man, Bill Hart, a school teacher, became Dave's mentor and lifelong friend. Together they became one of the most formidable rat race teams that California had seen, winning numerous contests with record setting performances. In 1965, they were the first team to break the 6-minute barrier in the Rat Racing class using Supertigre engine power.

Dave enlisted in the USAF in 1968, and after attending technical school was assigned to the USAF Fighter Weapons School at Nellis AFB, Nevada. His next assignment was at Ramstein AB in Germany. During his assignment in Germany, he applied for and was accepted as a member of the USAF aeromodelling team, which was scheduled to attend the AMA Nationals, but was unable to attend due to his sensitive career field commitments. Dave was still flying Control Line during much of his time in the Air Force, but a chance meeting with another modeler would change his life forever.

In Germany in 1970, Byron (Bud) Grover, a USAF Master Sergeant and expert RC flier, convinced Dave to purchase his first RC system, and over the next two years taught Dave to fly RC slope sailplanes, which he still enjoys flying today. Upon returning to the US, Dave became immersed in the southern California sailplane scene where he excelled, winning numerous awards in regional competition. At that time, Dave worked in his first job in the RC industry, with Roland and Bob Boucher at Astro Flight as their sole employee. While working at Astro Flight, along with the production of RC airplane kits and developing new products, Dave assisted in the construction and flying of one of the first RPV research aircraft under contract to Northrop Corp. It was a 25-pound electric-powered flying wing that ultimately flew for more than one hour and established a closed course distance record for aircraft of that type.

In 1974, Dave left Astro Flight and worked with Mark Smith of Jonathan Livingston Seagull fame at Mark's Models. He partnered to operate the ready-to-cover division of Mark's, which was one of the very first ARF-type models sold in the US. His continuing competition successes include winning standard class at the SOAR Nats and being runner up to the overall champion Otto (Otto Von Helium) Heithecker at the 1974 SOAR Nationals in Illinois. Dave also flew in several LSF Tournaments from 1972 to 1975, attaining numerous category championships. Dave was the twelfth person to achieve Level 4 in the LSF soaring accomplishments program and had completed most of the requirements to reach Level 5 when his direction in RC changed completely.

In 1975, Dave once again changed employment, this time to Kraft Systems, at the time the world leader in RC systems. He began at Kraft keeping the numerous test vehicles in order, along with acting as an interface between the modeling public and Kraft. During his five years there he wore a variety of hats, including production supervisor, QC manager, and chief pilot in charge of engineering test and evaluation for future production. Being surrounded by the best builders and fliers in the RC industry had a profound effect on Dave, and his direction in aeromodelling took an abrupt turn, away from flying sailplanes and into a short-lived stint in RC aerobatics.

In early 1976, Dave became interested in Formula 1 pylon racing, which became his complete obsession for the next 25 years. His very first pylon race was at the Bakersfield Air Races in 1976, at the time the largest Formula 1 pylon race in the USA aside from the AMA Nationals. He placed third in the standard class, a division which the NMPRA set up to help new people learn pylon racing. At the time, you moved to the expert class after achieving a level of success, which included faster times and contest wins. Dave lasted 3 races in the standard class before being bumped up to the expert class. At the NMPRA Championship race that year, Dave met Jim

Shinohara, and over the next 20 years, pylon racing would never be the same. In 1979, Dave and Jim scored their first NMPRA season points championship, and over the following twelve years won the points championship eight more times.

In 1980, Dave left Kraft Systems and joined Airtronics Inc. as general manager. He remained there for 3 years, and during that time he and Jim continued to rack up the wins in pylon racing. In 1982, Dave scored the first triple crown of pylon racing, winning the AMA Nationals, NMPRA Formula 1 Championship, and the NMPRA season points championship. They did it again in 1986, the only Formula 1 racers ever to achieve that goal.

In 1983, Dave left Airtronics and soon after started Performance Specialties. At the time, most Formula 1 competitors were using Supertigre engines, and many were being supplied by Terry Prather of Prather Products. Terry's interest at the time had shifted to RC boating, and he was getting out of the Formula 1 engine customizing business. Dave purchased Terry's remaining parts inventory and embarked on the beginning of more than twenty years supplying racing engines and accessory parts for pylon racing. Dave also convinced the Supertigre factory in Italy to continue building the X-40 engine which they had discontinued, making one more production run, which Dave bought in its entirety to keep F1 alive until a suitable replacement could be found.

In 1984, our current AMA President Bob Brown browbeat and cajoled a few pylon racers into becoming interested in FAI F3D Pylon Racing, the world pylon event that the USA had not been involved in since Bob Violett's world championship performances in the 1970s. It was a totally different event from what the US pylon racers were racing, using different airplanes, fuels, and scoring systems. Only a few racers wanted to bother with an event that they didn't normally race, but a few, including Dave, took up the challenge. With new rules for the F3D event, their then-current F1 aircraft could be used for the FAI event with some easy modifications to the airframe and a change in engine type.

Dave qualified for the 1985 F3D World Championship to be held in conjunction with the AMA Nationals at Chicopee, MA in August of that year. The contest was a complete disaster for Dave, and he placed dead last in the competition. That failure only made Dave and his caller, Jim Shinohara, even more determined to correct their mistakes for the next world champs.

In 1986, Dave and Jim had what would be their finest year of Formula 1 competition, losing only the first heat race of the year and winning 96 heat races in a row, winning the AMA Nationals, winning the NMPRA F1 Championship race, and winning NMPRA National points once again. This feat has never and will never be equaled as Formula 1 no longer exists as a rulebook event.

The F3D World Championship was held in Australia in 1987. The US team of Dub Jett, Brian Richmond, and Dave Shadel, along with callers Bruce Richmond and Jim Shinohara, were heavily favored to dominate the competition and did not disappoint, sweeping the top three spots while trading the lead throughout the event. Dave came from behind in the last round of the contest to best Brian Richmond by a scant 8/10ths of a second.

In 1989, the F3D World Championship was held in the USA at Virginia Beach, in conjunction with both F3A and F3C, the aerobatic and helicopter events. Dave went as defending world champion, and the US team was made up of Dub Jett, Bruce Richmond, and Gary Hover, with Brian Richmond and Jim Shinohara as callers. The US was again favored, but the rest of the world had been working to prevent that happening. The US again dominated, but did not sweep the top places, 3rd place going to Australian Bruce DeChastel. Dave successfully defended his 1987 World Championship win with another gold medal victory.

Again in 1991, the Pylon World Championship traveled to Australia. The team consisted of Dub Jett, Henry Bartle, and Lyle Larson, with John Shannon calling for Dub, Dave once again defending his 1989 World Championship win. Dave's caller and friend, Jim Shinohara, was unable to attend due to health issues, and Australian Bruce DeChastel subbed as Dave's caller. Dave managed a 3rd place finish under difficult conditions, and the US once again swept the competition.

In 1993, the US pylon team consisted of Richard Verano, Henry Bartle, and Dave Shadel. Dub Jett was defending World Champion from his win in 1991, and they journeyed to Austria for the competition. The contest was a bit of a disaster in the beginning due to pylon racing being outlawed in Austria for being too dangerous. But Austria wanted to host the 3-event World Championship as in 1991, and the FAI made it mandatory that pylon be included. The pylon contest management had little experience running an event of this magnitude and there were many miscues. With help from all the contestants, the problems were solved, and the contest ended well. The US finished 1st and 3rd, with Richard Verano winning and Dave in 3rd place.

The AMA hosted the F3D World Championship in Muncie in 1995. The pylon team consisted of Dave Shadel, Gary Hover, and Lou Rodriguez. Richard Verano flew as defending World Champion. For the third time, Dave Shadel was the gold medalist, followed by Richard Verano, and Thomas Lindemann from Germany in third.

The 1997 World Championship was held in the Czech Republic in August 1997. The team consisted of pilots Richard Verano, Bob Smith, and Jim Allen, with Jim Shinohara, Gary Hover, and Gary Schmidt the callers. On the first day of the competition, Jim Shinohara suffered a heart attack. It was decided that even with Jim in the hospital, the team would soldier on and do the best that they possibly could under the circumstances. It was exceedingly difficult for the team to leave Jim behind when they left the Czech Republic, as none of us would see him again. He passed on October 5, 1997 with his family at his side. Pylon racing had lost one of its biggest supporters and certainly its biggest personality. RC pylon racing would never be the same.

With the void left by Jim Shinohara's passing, Dave's last World Championship appearance was in 1999. The US team again swept the World Championship, with Chip Hyde winning, Dave in second, and Rich Verano in third, respectively.

The 21 seasons of racing that Dave and Jim had together would never to be equaled in terms of both success and a tremendous amount of comradery and good times with modelers worldwide. While Dave continued to fly in a few pylon racing events through the early 2000s, he has ended his pylon racing career with few regrets, many great memories, and a record that will never be broken.

Dave still flies RC and has now come full circle. He is back to slope soaring for fun, and the business of RC is now a retirement memory.

In view of his many accomplishments in both the business and competition portions of aeromodelling for more than 50 years, I recommend that my father, Dave Shadel, be inducted into the AMA [Model Aviation] Hall Of Fame.

Note: In 2013, Dave Shadel was inducted into the National Miniature Pylon Racing Association (NMPRA) Hall of Fame.

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