



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of MIKE WELSHANS

AMA Number 8351



Written by MW (2021); Reformatted by JS (10//2022); Updated by JS (01/2024)

The following was written by Mike Welshans and submitted to the AMA History Project in December 2021. It was updated in January 2024 to add Mike's 2023 induction into the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

The Model Aviation Story of Mike Welshans AMA 8351, FAC Vice President, NASA 240

This all began back in the mid-1950s. I was born in 1947 and was always obsessed with airplanes. I think the likely cause for this was because I had a large Hawker Hurricane model that my dad had built hanging in my bedroom, directly over my crib, when growing up. It was and still is one of my very first memories. My dad, a retired RCAF Pilot Officer, had moved to the Detroit area from Windsor, Ontario just weeks before I was born. In those days there wasn't much money so we would have family picnics on Sundays sitting on the grass at the side of a local airport. That didn't help me much either as I was fascinated with the medley of airplanes that flew in and out of that little place. It's still there by the way, but the two-lane road from 1950 is now an 8 lane boulevard divided highway and there is no grass.

In the mid-1950s, when I was 10 or 11, I decided to spend my 25¢ a week allowance on models. If I were frugal (*few or no baseball cards*) every two weeks, I could walk to the local hobby shop and purchase a 29¢ cent Comet N model kit, of which there was a large variety available. That left me enough for a 10¢ tube of glue to build & apply tissue (*I didn't know any better at the time*) and maybe even a 5¢ Coke out of the big cooler. Thinking back on the Comet N line, they were the kits with the boy and the Coke bottle on the box front – bright orange, black & white with the statement “Model Building Builds Model Boys.” Very fond memories.

As I got older and into high school, my likes changed to model cars but shortly after getting married to my ever patient wife Elaine in 1967 I was back building stick and tissue models for display. I never did get anything to fly until after I joined the Cloudbusters Model Airplane Club (Cloudbusters M.A.C.) of Southeast Michigan in 1976. Then there was all the help in the world. I had joined a club that included many famous modelers over the years and almost all of them helped the raw beginners with their flying and building. At that time I became interested in Control Line along with Free Flight, mostly scale in both disciplines.

After two or three years, and with the help of several good modelers, I became at least competent in both trimming and flying my creations. Then I started entering some local contests, and although I didn't do very well, I was having a lot of fun flying and competing. We had a local hobby shop, Henderson's Hobbies, owned by Bob and Glenda Henderson, that many local modelers gathered in most Saturday mornings. A lot of show and tell went on and a lot of excellent advice was passed out. It was at this hobby shop that I met and became friends with Skip Mast, Steve Sauger, and Cliff Tacie, all very good RC Scale modelers and former USA F4C

team members, and my fellow Cloudbuster, Ron Sears, a former USA F4B team member. These gentlemen convinced me to try to build a significantly better UC Scale ship than I had been turning out, and during 1981 I did build a 72" Wingspan B-25 which was my first Nats CL Scale airplane. As I was interested in FF too I also built a couple of FF Scale ships, a Citabria for Rubber scale and a Piper PA-12 for Power scale.

The plan was for the five of us to attend the 1982 Nationals in Lincoln, Nebraska, which we did. Prior to leaving for the Nationals, we all joined NASA (National Association of Scale Aeromodelers) as at the time NASA was the governing body for pretty much all Scale flown at the Nats. My NASA number was 240. I was totally surprised how well we did as a group. Everyone came home from that first Nationals with hardware, mine was a second place in CL Sport Scale and also second in FF Rubber and Power Scale. At that point, I became hooked and didn't miss a Nats unless they were on the west coast (which they were for many years). I'm still going, incidentally, having attended all held in Muncie either as a contestant or as part of Nats management.

My good friend John Guenther asked if I would help with Scale judging in Lake Charles in 1987 and I scale judged at almost every Nats through 1992. Events judged over the years included both AMA and FAI CL & RC Scale, FF Scale, Scale Sailplane, and Scale Helicopter.

In 1992, John asked me to be the CL Scale Event Director, and along with my wife Elaine's help, I was the Event Director for CL Scale at Westover AFB in Massachusetts, the first of many Nats through the 1990s. Back in those days, the AMA Nats also included the FAI Team selections on alternating years, another whole set of rules to learn. By 2000, I had managed enough in CL, and after retirement in 2001, I wanted to compete again, but I slowly drifted away from the CL Scale side in the mid-2000s.

By that time I was flying serious FF Scale and on the rules committee for the Flying Aces Club, now the governing body for FF Scale. I have served on the rules committee and/or the Board of Directors for the Flying Aces Club (FAC) since 2003. I also have served as the FAC Director at the AMA Nats in Muncie since 2012, although I did give that position up after the 2021 FF Nationals.

In Nationals competitions, I have been fortunate enough to win CL Scale three times: 1989, 2000 and 2001; and FF Rubber Scale twice: in 2012 and 2015 (*FAC rules allow the Contest Directors to fly in competitions they are running*). In 1989 in Washington State, I was also awarded the NASA Flight Achievement Award for realism in flight in CL Scale.

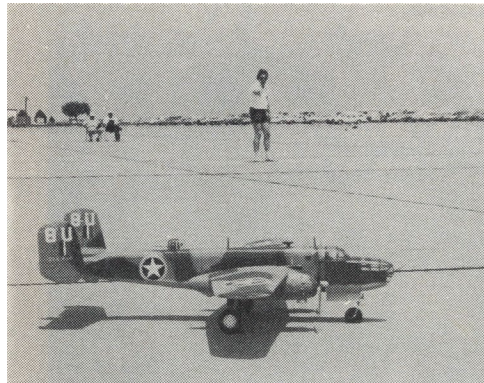
Now in my mid-70s, I have been active in model aviation for most of my life and in some type of management position for most of my adult life. As I told someone at the 2021 Nats when asked why I kept it up, I responded, "It is so someone like you can fly in a contest and not worry about it".

My life, which I have enjoyed, and a good portion of my friends and my chosen family have come from my being involved in and dedicated to this wonderful hobby.

Modeling Achievements

AMA Contest Director since 1991
Vice President of NASA during the 1990s
FAC Contest Committee since 2004
FAC Board of Directors since 2014
FAC Vice President since 2017
AMA Nats CL Scale Event Director 7 times between 1992 and 1999
AMA Nats FF Scale Event Director, 2012-2021
AMA Indoor Nats Scale Event Director in 2021
FAI F4B & F4C Team Selection Contest Director in 2003
Scale Judge at AMA Nats from 1987-2003 (when not an Event Director)
Past President, Vice President, Secretary, or Treasurer of the Cloudbusters
M.A.C., mid-1980s-2019
Three times CL Scale AMA Nats Champion
Two Times FF Scale AMA Nats Champion
Winner of NASA CL Scale Flight Achievement Award in 1989
Received AMA Carl Goldberg Vital Person Award in 2017
Received Vic Didelot FAC Spirit Award in 2018
Inducted into FAC Hall of Fame in 2018
Inducted into NASA CL Scale Hall of Fame in 2022
Inducted into AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 2023
Published several articles regarding FF Scale, modeling or full-scale history for
the *Flying Aces Club News*

Photographs



June 1982: “Mike Welshans’ Sport Scale B-25 taxis in front of Flight Judges Bert Dugan and Bob Adair. It was built from a Royal RC kit, spans 71 in., weighs 11 lb., uses two Enya .40s. It won 2nd.” Photograph and caption from Model Aviation magazine, “1982 AMA Nats” article, CL Scale section, by Mike Gretz, November 1982, page 51.



Circa early 1990s: My three-time CL Scale-winning Howard DGA-15. [Photograph provided by and taken by Mike Welshans.]



Circa early 1980s: Famous Clodbusters (L-R) Ron Sears, Dave Dulaitis (walked 350 km from Lithuania to safety after WWII), Joe Baranski (WWII B-24 pilot flying out of England), myself (with hair & still smoking). Lyle Bethel (a B-26 pilot flying from North Africa). These gentlemen were tremendous teachers when I was getting started in competition. [Photograph provided by Mike Welshans. Photograph taken by unknown club member.]



2015: Close up of detail on 20-inch wingspan rubber powered Glenny Henderson Gadfly, 2015 AMA Nats FF Scale Champion. [Photograph provided by and taken by Mike Welshans.]



Circa 1993/1994: CL Scale Rearwin Speedster M-6000C Speedster built for my last competitive AMA Nationals competition, flown in about 1993 or 1994. One of my favorite aircraft. [Photograph provided by and taken by Mike Welshans.]



Circa 2010: 22-inch wingspan rubber powered Rearwin M6000C Speedster from plan developed for the 2010 Flying Aces Club Outdoor Championships T-shirt and free plan. This plan is still available on the FAC website at

<http://www.flyingacesclub.com/Newsletters/FACN260.pdf>, pages 26-28. [Photograph provided by and taken by Mike Welshans.]

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