



The AMA History Project Presents: History of the BOB SMITH INDUSTRIES

Since 1983



Written by JS (11/2010); Reformatted by JS (05/2010)

Jay Smith wrote the following, published in the About Us section of Model Aviation magazine, November 2010 issue.

About Us: Bob Smith Industries

If you've ever shopped for CA or epoxy at your local hobby shop, you've probably seen and purchased adhesives labeled with the store name. This private branding was Bob Smith's idea.

He and his brother, Charlee, along with 11 other employees, are the driving force behind Bob Smith Industries (BSI), which got its start in 1983.

The Smith brothers were exposed to aviation at an early age; their father was a tail gunner on a *B-17* during World War II and a private pilot. It seemed natural for the two to get involved in aeromodeling; they were drawn to Radio Control in their early teens. Bob went on to become a National Senior Aerobatics (Pattern) Champion and a National Pylon Racing Champion.

In 1973, Bob and Charlee started Smith Brothers Hobby Center. Also at that time, Bob began producing model kits, first under the name of P. B. Products, and then Bob Smith R/C Aircraft. Some of the designs included the *Miss BS* and the *Miss DARA*. That effort evolved into making Pattern designs such as the *T-2A* and the *Patricia*.

When Bob traded eight bottles of glue for one of his kits, he began thinking that he had the ability to manufacture adhesives that could rival any that were available – and that it would be much easier than making kits.

The first release under the BSI name was epoxy sold in 9-ounce bottles that was available in 5-, 15-, and 30-minute working times. Bob started the glue business in his garage, and before long, he moved it into its own facility, which now comprises 10,000 square feet.

In 1984, BSI added CA to its lineup. With business increasing, the decision was made to sell Smith Brothers Hobby Center in 1985. Charlee transitioned to the newer company as the sales manager.

Between 1984 and 1992, Bob brought all of their products in-house so they could attain more control over them. Within this time, they added Insta-Set accelerator and Super-Gold odorless CA to the ever-expanding line of aeromodeling goods.

As has the glue, the accelerator has undergone changes to make it better; most important is that it's safe to use on any surface. In addition, the sped-up cure time was slowed from 4 seconds to 8 seconds; that cut down on the heat produced and provided for a stronger bond.

While we were on the phone discussing adhesives, I eagerly asked Charlee some questions about epoxy and CA. He shared with me that the key to a good epoxy bond is ensuring that the temperature in which it is used stays about 70 degrees throughout the curing time. A temperature of 85 degrees is optimum for obtaining the best bond. If your work area is colder than 70-degrees, you can use a lamp inside a cardboard box to generate heat.

Charlee also provided information about storing CA to ensure freshness. The refrigerator is the best place if the glue will not be used for a while. However, refrigeration alone is not the answer, because moisture can be a problem. He recommends using either a steel or glass airtight container with a couple of silica gel packets thrown in with the glue, just to be safe.

I had an important question to ask regarding CA: How much strength do you lose on a glue joint when using accelerator? According to Charlee, only approximately 10% if you use Insta-Set. That is still plenty strong, he assured me.

Today, BSI has a network of 1,700 dealers worldwide and bottles tens of thousands of adhesives each month. The hobby industry accounts for approximately 80% of those consumers, while the other 20% includes dental labs, shoe repair, shops, and aquariums.

Freshness is the BSI secret. Since the adhesives are bottled in California, it is possible for consumers to obtain them a week after they are put into containers.

The best-selling adhesive in the company's lineup is gap-filling CA. Thin CA is a close second. And CA, as a whole, outsells epoxy four-to-one.

To conclude our interview, I asked Charlee what part of his participation in BSI has been the most rewarding.

"Being involved in the creation of new products and being able to sell what I had a big part in developing," he replied. "I know I am selling the best, and that is very satisfying; it's an ideal job."

It takes only a few minutes on the phone with Charlee to realize that he is extremely knowledgeable about BSI products and that he has a great relationship with his dealers.

The company stands behind its products, with a three-year guarantee on standard CA and a two-year guarantee of the foam-safe and toughened variety, as long as it is kept at room temperature or lower.

So the next time you stop by your local hobby shop for some privately labeled glue, say that Charlee sent you.

-Jay Smith

Sources:

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