



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of VANCE GILBERT



Written by DD (02/2016); Added to HP files by JS (03/2016)

The following was published in the February 2016 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the “I Am the AMA” column, written by Don DeLoach.

I Am the AMA **Vance Gilbert, singer/songwriter and Free Flighter**

Don DeLoach: How did you get involved with model aviation?

Vance Gilbert: My brother was a plastic jet builder. My father “porch flew” a Sterling Flying Fool like clockwork each year. He’d take it out onto the front porch, fill the tank, start the engine, run it ‘til it sputtered out, wipe it down, then it went back up onto my brother’s ceiling for another year.

I got discards and inspiration from them – Guillow’s rubber jobs, high school, college, teaching, tennis, and music got in the way. Then I made a chance visit to a used book store in the early 1980s, found a discarded model magazine, and I’ve never looked back.

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

VG: I write songs, sing, and play guitar for a living. I’m always honing my delivery, my lyrics, and the arc of my show. Model aviation is an opportunity to practice a disciplined approach in doing something until you get it right.

Because I am an old airliner enthusiast, model aviation is also an opportunity to practice telling a historical story that otherwise might not have been told – not unlike a good song.

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

VG: I pretty much exclusively fly Rubber-Powered Scale ships of all types and sizes. Myriad twins, trimotors, triplanes, canards, flying wings, and bipes litter my fairly successful 30-year “have done” list – in all sizes, too, from a 13-inch Peanut Scale to my most recent, a Focke-Wulf A-17 Möwe with a 54-inch wingspan. I’m kind of the rubber scale airliner go-to guy – in my house, anyway.

DD: What are your other hobbies?

VG: Other hobbies? Why would I need other hobbies? I have an airliner build list that reads like a book glossary! As a friend said to me once, “Now that you have this model aircraft obsession, when will you get a hobby?” Ha! Other hobbies?

DD: Who (or what) has influenced you most?

VG: I've had the great life fortune to do my building and flying here in the Northeast under the tutelage of iconic geniuses Dave Stott, Bob Thompson, Dave Rees, Don Srull, Henry Struck, et al. All of these men were and are friends, teachers, and mentors.

DD: Looking back at your involvement in the Flying Aces Club, what are you most proud of?

VG: There are a few 2-minute-plus flights that are forever burned in my mind – and some aren't even mine! I'd have to say that a regular correspondence with Earl Stahl in the early 1990s ranks pretty high.

There was also a letter from Henry Struck proclaiming my flying models to be "...the best-flying models he'd ever seen." I'm sure he was just being kindly enthusiastic to a newcomer, but I guess it speaks to the high quality of humans who fly Free Flight.

I'm terrifically proud of this community that I've become a part of.

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