



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of DAVID JOHNSON

August 17, 1919 - May 15th, 2014

Started modeling in the 1930s AMA# 6398



Written & Submitted by CM (1998) ; Transcribed & Edited by SS (12/2002); Updated by JS (05/2014, 07/2014)

Career:

- Won a first place trophy in rubber-powered scale as a youngster flying Megow's Gulf Hawk airplane
- Learned to fly full-sized airplanes then spent four years serving in the Coast Guard during World War II
- 1969: Started flying Radio Control
- 1972-: Has trained more than 100 Radio Control pilots
- Has frequently won at scale meets and in aerobatic flying
- 1976: First person to fly an Radio Control model over the Arctic Circle
- Developed a method to teach the hearing impaired how to fly Radio Control
- Flew in the U.S. Scale Masters three times with his Nieuport 28
- Worked as a public relations field representative for Kraft Systems, Inc., after retirement
- Has been a member of numerous clubs including the Northrop Radio Control Club (served as president), the Yucaipa Radio Control Club, the Scale Squadron Radio Control Club, the High Desert Barone Club, the Hemet Model Masters Radio Control Club (served as president) and the Valley Wide Radio Control Glider Club (served as president)
- Contest directed seven four-stroke contests for the Hemet Model Masters
- Specializes in demonstration flight

Honors:

- 1992: Waldo Award for significant contribution to promotion and enjoyment of miniature aircraft

The following biography was written and submitted by Charles Mackey.

David Johnson is one of the most unforgettable characters you will ever meet. David's love for building model planes can only be topped by his love for flying them or talking about them or his love for his wife, Dottie, who is always at his side.

David loves people and feels it's his duty to liven things up when it gets a little dull. He has been known to fake a fall at a Hemet Model Masters club meeting when some member begin to nod off or challenge some of the younger flyers to a 75-yard foot race at the flying field – quite a feat for a man 79-years-old (in 1998). David is an excellent flyer and he delights in thrilling the crowd with unbelievable maneuvers.

David has been training student pilots for years and although he never keeps a record, we would estimate he has trained over 100 Radio Control pilots. When you ask David what his greatest

thrill in model airplanes has been you would expect him to say something like his big wins at a scale meet with his Super Marine 1/5-scale seaplane or some of his wins in aerobatic flying. It would even be reasonable for him to mention he was the first to fly a Radio Control model over the Arctic Circle.

However, what David is most proud of is the method he developed to teach the deaf to fly Radio Control. The way David's method works is to stand behind the deaf student, placing his hands on the pilot's shoulders and gently nudges his student in the direction he wants him to move the controls. This method requires a second instructor on the buddy-box to take over in emergencies.

If you were to listen to Dave exchanging insults with his flying buddies, you might be inclined to think he is a pretty tough customer, but when he speaks of his flying buddies who have fallen victim to cancer, you can see his eyes cloud up and his speech failing him; it is pretty obvious that under that tough mask is a soft-hearted guy.

David was born August 17, 1919 in Hollywood, California. He was raised in West Los Angeles near the Cloverfield Airport. He started building his first models in the 1930s. They were solid balsa wood kits. He progressed to Free Flight rubber-powered scale. One of his first successful models was a Megow kit by Al Williams – the famous Gulf Hawk airplane. David won his first place trophy in rubber-powered scale event with this airplane.

David took drafting in high school and continuously got into trouble for drawing model airplanes. The teacher finally realized the situation was not getting any better, so he made a deal with David. If David and his friend would each design, draw, and built a model airplane that successfully flew, he would base their grade on the results. They designed model airplanes to resemble the national air race airplanes of the day. The planes would fly in a straight line for about 200 yards, which made racing a lot of fun. They both received passing grades.

David was learning to fly full-sized airplanes at the Metropolitan Airport in the San Fernando Valley in California. The plane he learned to fly on was a Cirrus-powered Great Lakes bi-plane. When World War II started, Dave's modeling career stopped while he spent four years in the Coast Guard. Dave worked in the Sea and Rescue Division.

When the war ended, he began flying Free Flight with a Zipper powered by a Brown engine and a Clipper powered by an Ohlsson engine. Dave lived only a mile from the flying field at Rosencrans and Western in Los Angeles where he was able to meet many famous modelers. David flew in the Nationals (Nats) when they came to California. He said he was just an average competitor, but he had a heck of a good time!

In 1969, Jim Lantham, an engineer at Northrop who was a good friend of Dave's told him he had to get into Radio Control. Jim gave Dave a Skylark 56 and a K&B engine. Dave said that did it. He was hooked for life! He joined the Northrop Radio Control Club. "I thought Radio Control was going to be easy," he said. "That was a laugh. It took me three months to solo."

His first scale model was a Comanche then a Proctor Nieuport II. Dave first starting teaching Radio Control in 1972 with the “grab the box system.” He is still teaching today (1998) at age 79. David retired from TRW in 1981 and devoted most of his time to teaching Radio Control to beginners and he says he loves it. He likes all types of Radio Control airplanes from ½-A racers to his big Pitts 300. Dave has flown in the U.S. Scale Masters three times with his Nieuport 28, which is featured on the cover and in an article of the December 1984 issue of Scale Radio Control Modeler magazine. David loves competition of any kind.

In 1976, David wanted to do something to celebrate the bicentennial. He decided to fly a Radio Control model airplane across the Arctic Circle. David had spent some time in the Canadian Northwest Territory collecting gems and minerals, so he figured that would be a good place for his flight. He fitted his Comanche with floats, packed it up with a ½-A Quickie 200 and headed for the Arctic. Dave and his wife drove 3,400 miles to Yellowknife on the Great Slave Lake where they rented a seaplane and flew 385 miles north to the Arctic Circle, which is 66 degrees, 30 minutes north latitude and 113 degrees, 15 minutes longitude. This was Dave’s first experience with a plane on floats, but it was successful. The story of the trip is covered in Model Airplane News magazine’s April 1977 issue. The museum in Yellowknife features a documentation of the flight. Dave put together a slide program that is very entertaining and full of laughs. He uses this presentation when he visits other clubs.

After his retirement, he went to work for Kraft Systems, Inc. as a public relations representative in the field. His area included Alaska, Canada, and the U.S. and he made many friends all over the country with his demonstrations of the Kraft Systems and his Ugly Stick airplanes.

Dave was president of the Northrop Radio Control Club and he belonged to the Yucaipa Radio Control Club, Scale Squadron Radio Control Club, High Desert Barone Radio Control Club, and the Hemet Model Masters Radio Control Club, where he was president for three years. He was contest director for seven four-stroke contests for the Hemet Model Masters. He is currently president of the Valley Wide Radio Control Glider Club in Hemet, California. He was instrumental in procuring the flying site and golf-type vehicle that holds the winch.

Dave specializes in demonstration flight and is really motivated by the cheering of the crowd when he puts on his Piper Cub act. He says the spectators love it, even when he crashes – which does happen.

David’s attempt at Control Line flying resulted in about half of a lap. He built a model of the battleship Missouri that used a Deltron Tone one-channel radio. When he built his Super Marine seaplane, he called on help from Irwin Ohlsson for his expertise in using K&B paint. Dave said it came out pretty good as he won the scale event. Dave has pleasant memories about flying at the Haystack Reservoir with Irwin Ohlsson and Joe Bridi.

1998 will be Dave’s 18th year at the Q.S.S.A. fly-in. In 1992, he was the master of ceremonies at the banquet and was the announcer at the flying field. He received the Waldo Award for significant contribution to promotion and enjoyment of miniature aircraft the same year.

Dave still received a lot of pleasure helping others build and fly model planes.



Dottie and David.



David's Super Marine floatplane that Irwin Ohlsson helped him paint.



David landing his Comanche for the Artic flight.



A 1946 Brownie box camera shot of David and his son, David Jr., at Rosencrans in western Los Angeles.



David's race plane was his high school drafting project.



David's first win in rubber-powered was with his Gulf Hawk that featured retractable landing gear and movable controls from the cockpit.



1998: This is not a contest or museum. David moves his airplanes to the backyard for this photo. Unfortunately, he couldn't get all of his planes in the picture.



Dottie with the airplane and first place trophy David won for aerobatics.



1939: David with his rubber-powered racing plane, at age 19.



Dottie, David's wife and constant companion, holds the biplane David decorated in her honor.



Johnny Clemens (left) and David discussing the Arctic Circle flight.



David calls this one the learning curve.



"I did it!" David just flew over the Arctic Circle.

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