



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of BERT KAMMERER



Written by CM (10/2014), transcribed and reformatted by JS (03/2016)

The following was published in the October 2014 issue of Model Aviation magazine, written by Chris Mulcahy.

The name Bert Kammerer is synonymous with Goblin helicopters. His hard-flying style has garnered him the reputation as one of the greatest demonstration pilots.

Bert and fellow heli pilot Bobby Watts cofounded Smack Talk RC, which is a great resource for pilots. He is a multiple-time Extreme Flight Championship competitor, and the mastermind behind the successful Orlando Heli Blowout event.

I had a chance to catch up with Bert, and ask him about his history in RC.

Chris Mulcahy: *Tell us how you got started in RC helicopters.*

Bert Kammerer: I started flying RC back in 1983 when I was 12 years old. A good friend of mine from school introduced me to airplanes and I immediately got hooked! I flew airplanes for many years and then quit as life got in the way – college, work, etc.

Then in 2003, I walked into one of the local hobby shops in Orlando, Florida, and saw a micro-size heli (a Century Hummingbird), and for some reason I thought I had to learn to fly helicopters. The little thing was fixed pitch and horribly unstable, but it taught me how to hover and fly around. From that point I just kept practicing, buying new models, and getting better. I couldn't get enough of it.

CM: *What did you do before working in the RC heli industry, and what was the transition like?*

BK: I went to college to study engineering – computer science major to be exact. This led me to get a job working with local and wide-area networks. During the early days of the Internet, I worked with a group programming internet core routers and helping further develop the Internet infrastructure in the U.S. I then started a business offering internet hosting for small and medium-size businesses.

As my flying skills progressed, I was offered a sponsorship by Miniature Aircraft USA and this was the beginning of working in the industry. Soon thereafter, I started working in R&D [research and development] testing, and later on, started working on a few designs and as a consultant for a few companies.

My Internet business started to decline due to the economy and the evolution of the Internet industry, but by then I was busy enough working in the RC heli industry. The transition was seamless, to be honest, and now I spend 100% of my time working on RC-related stuff.

CM: *You travel to events and meet people. Does it still feel like hobby?*

BK: Not really. Once you make it a job, it is not the same. Don't get me wrong, I still love it and enjoy it, but it is not the same feeling as before. The part that actually feels different is the flying. I focus primarily on R&D and testing, and the type of flying that you do during testing is different from the type of flying you do for fun or practice. It is often repetitive, which causes you to kind of slow down your progression. I have always believed that a good test pilot could never be a good competition pilot, or vice versa, and this is very true.

CM: *Can you give us a brief rundown of how you set up a new helicopter for its first flight?*

BK: If it is a brand-new machine that is already in production, it is simple. I don't really do anything special. I simply build it per the manual, install the electronics, etc., and go fly.

Contrary to popular belief, I don't do anything special to my machines. In fact, the simpler I keep my setup, the easier it is to fix after a crash, and the better it is to upgrade, etc. If it is a prototype then, of course, things are different. Sometimes it takes a lot of ingenuity to make things work the first time around.

CM: Do you have any words of advice for pilots looking to take their flying to the next level?

BK: Yes, enjoy it! This is the most important thing. It seems like nowadays, every pilot wants to be sponsored, but many of them miss the most important thing: they started flying because they enjoyed it [and] they must enjoy it still, no matter what. Stop worrying about sponsorships. Fly because you want to and things will naturally progress.

When I started, I never thought I would get to where I am. I didn't even care - I just did it because I loved it. Circumstances led me to where I am, but I'm sure [that] if I would have been aiming for this, I wouldn't have gotten it because I would have been more worried about it than actually enjoying what I was doing and focusing on my flying.

Other than that, practice, practice, practice! Use the simulator a lot. It is a great tool. And try to stick to the same machine. It is good to use a single aircraft because you can get used to its flying behavior, its parts, and what it takes to rebuild it, and you end up being more efficient with it.

CM: Who would you say is your favorite pilot?

BK: I don't really have one because they're all different and have unique styles. To be honest, I love to watch Kyle Stacy fly. He is quite underrated, but his flying is just unbelievable. It is technical, but most of all, it has emotion to it and is very exciting.

Of course, there are many other good pilots out there and they're all different with different styles and skill sets. I enjoy watching them all.

SOURCES:

International Radio Controlled Helicopter Association (IRCHA)
www.ircha.org

SmackTalk RC
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