



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of DAVID (DAVE) R. PLATT

Born September 20, 1934 Modeler since 1944
AMA #975



Written by DRP (c. 2001-2002) and AMA staff (2009), Transcribed & Edited by SS (01/2003), Updated by JS (10/2008, 11/2008, 06/2021), Reformatted by JS (01/2010)

Career:

- 1957: Flew Control Line stunt on the English Internationals Team
- 1966: Won the British National Radio Control Scale event
- 1972: Formed the original Dave Platt Models, Inc. with a partner; reformed the company by himself in 1975
- 1975: Flew the world's first successful ducted-fan Radio Control Scale model of his own design at the U.S. Nationals
- Served on the AMA scale contest board for over 20 years
- Produces Black Art videotapes to share his modeling knowledge
- Won numerous awards in major contests

Honors:

- 1996: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
-

The following was published in the Fall 2009 issue of Park Pilot magazine, in the section The Other Side of the Tree Line.

Dave Platt, known throughout the aeromodeling community as “Mr. Scale,” was born in London, England. He came to the U.S. in 1967, designing model aircraft for Top Flite Models in Chicago. Dave designed all the models for the 1966 motion picture blockbuster, *The Battle of Britain*, and won the British National RC Scale Championships in 1967 with his North American *T-28* Trojan. His *T-28* was the first RC scale model to fly in competition with retractable landing gear.

Dave counted the term “standoff scale,” and designed several airplanes for Top Flite under that banner. His World War II fighter series, far ahead of its time in design and construction, scale features and flight characteristics, included the Bell *P-39 Airacobra*, Curtiss *P-40 Warhawk*, North American *P-51B Mustang*, and other popular subjects.

Dave served on the AMA Scale Contests Board for more than 20 years, and was involved in the founding of the Top Gun Invitational Scale Championships. He flew the first successful ducted-fan-powered RC scale model at the 1975 AMA Nats in Louisiana, using a model and fan unit of his own design.

An artist and master craftsman by every definition, Dave Platt was inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 1996.

PARK PILOT: Many of us have built your kits, seen your Black Art videos, and read your countless books and magazine articles over the years. We've learned so many modeling

techniques through your expertise, and have enjoyed seeing your outstanding models at the AMA Nats, Top Gun, and other premiere events. We think that Park Pilot's readers would benefit from knowing more about you, and learning about building and flying scale models that are beyond the limits of most small electrics. When and how did you get started in model airplane building and flying?

DAVE PLATT: I was a kid during World War II. In those days, just about every male child had a go at building a model airplane at some point. Some of them stayed with it forever; I was one of those. We call these people "lifers," a term coined by Dave Thornburg.

PARK PILOT: How were you introduced to competing with model airplanes, and did anyone in England help and guide you along as you have mentored so many over here?

DAVE PLATT: I started by the most incredible set of circumstances. A mere two miles or so from my home, there was an RAF (Royal Air Force) Fighter Command Station named Fairlop. I recall many visits there to watch the Typhoons going out after the V-1s.

Anyway, when victory came in 1945, the RAF walked away from Fairlop, leaving this magnificent airfield, runways and all. Very quickly, it was adopted as THE place for model flying by everyone in the entire London area, easily reached by bus or underground train. At any time when the weather allowed there'd be dozens of fliers out there.

I didn't have an older "mentor" as such, but I had a school pal of my own age, and we learned by doing and by watching.

PARK PILOT: What is it about scale modeling that attracts you above all else?

DAVE PLATT: I wouldn't say above all else. In my home, there are dozens of models, fairly evenly split between free flight, control line, and RC. Of the RCs, maybe half are scale.

PARK PILOT: Do you fly in competitive events other than scale?

DAVE PLATT: Besides RC scale, I fly competitive free flight, and Old Time Stunt and Team Racing control line events.

PARK PILOT: You design and fly turbine-powered jets, heavy metal WWII fighters, multiengine scale subjects, and even antique aeroplanes. We understand that you are now also designing and building your own operating model engines. What compels you to such broad, creative lengths?

DAVE PLATT: Model building is such a wide and varied hobby that it seems to me that anyone who only does one small fraction of it is missing most of the fun. There is a whole world of interesting things; it's only a shame that we can't live long enough to do all of it. For instance, I've always had a hankering to build a live steam locomotive, but I know I'll never get to it.

PARK PILOT: Before you came on the American competition scene, scale models always appeared pristine. The typical fighter looked as though it had just rolled out of the factory hangar, yet might display a dozen or more kill flags under the canopy! Was it difficult to get modelers to understand the principles and techniques of weathering?

DAVE PLATT: Actually, you might be as surprised as I was to find that scale modelers took to weathering like ducks to water. I believe that there had always been the nagging knowledge that what was happening wasn't right, but nobody knew how to fix it.

The answer is that at some point the model building job ends and the artist's job begins. This is why I came out with a video on weathering – to guide the builder through the artist part.

PARK PILOT: Your company, Dave Platt Models, offers a selection of “short kits” for some of your finest aircraft designs. Please explain what makes a short kit, and how each of your models has proved to be an accurate and effective sale subject.

DAVE PLATT: A short kit, or semi-kit as we call it, gives the modeler the parts of the design that he cannot handle himself. The plans, obviously, and the building instructions, then those parts that require expensive tooling to make. For instance, the spinner (a plastic-injection nylon piece), then the canopy, and any fiberglass or plastic moldings.

The wood parts are easy for the modeler to duplicate, and many have adequate stocks already.

PARK PILOT: Your Black Art series of DVD instructional techniques is packed with tips, tricks, and important information in every installment. Can you tell us what might be a good starting point for newcomers to scale modeling?

DAVE PLATT: We always recommend that the newcomer to our videos starts out with the “Building and Fiberglassing” (BF) set, followed by the “Detailing and Painting” (DP) set. Then, as individual interests dictate, the more advanced and specialized titles. One of our most popular sets, the “Scratch This” set, teaches the kit-basher the tips he needs to begin designing his own models.

We presently have 25 titles, and the series is still growing. Right now, we've begun filming an EP set, “Watt's the Deal,” to explain all the intricacies of electric power.

PARK PILOT: With all the exotic competition models you build and fly, do you think you might ever become curious enough to try a park model?

DAVE PLATT: Perhaps you're suggesting that there's something lacking in my life? But kidding aside, who knows? Someday I might get turned on to designing something like that.

PARK PILOT: Thanks so much for yakking with Park Pilot, Dave. We hope you've enjoyed your visit as much as we have.

DAVE PLATT: Jeff, you have, far and away, the best park flyer magazine. May it live long and prosper.

*The following biographical writing about Dave Platt is from his website,
<http://www.daveplattmodels.com/DavePlattBIO.htm>, printed here with permission.*

In the last 50-plus years, Dave Platt has become an internationally well-known and respected scale competitor. Here are just a few facts about Mr. Scale:

- Born in London, England, in 1934
- Started modeling at the age of 10
- Began with Free Flight, then took on Control Line and eventually Radio Control
- Flew Control Line stunt on the English Internationals (Internats) Team in 1957
- Took up Radio Control Scale in 1963
- Won the British National Radio Control Scale event in 1966 with a North American T-28, which was the first use of retractable landing gear in a scale model.
- Worked on the “Battle of Britain” movie, designing all models for that movie in 1966
- Immigrated to the United States in 1967 to join Top Flite; worked for five years at Top Flite in Chicago
- Designed first Standoff scale models for Top Flite in 1970
- Formed the original Dave Platt Models, Inc. in 1972
- In 1975, his partner sold the business to PICA and Dave reformed his company – this time doing it alone.
- At the 1975 U.S. Nationals (Nats) in Lake Charles, Louisiana, he flew the world’s first successful ducted-fan Radio Control Scale model using a model and fan unit he designed.
- Through the 1970s and 1980s, he concentrated on Radio Control Scale, designing and kitting new models. Always innovating new techniques, many of the methods used as a standard in Radio Control Scale originated with Dave.
- Involved in the founding of Top Gun and has flown in all 12 contests.
- Served on the AMA scale contest board for over 20 years
- Inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 1996
- Has built up a decent machine shop in his workshop and now designs and builds his own glow and diesel engines.
- While still maintaining an active involvement with Free Flight and Control Line, these days Dave is designing and building his own turbine-powered Radio Control Scale jets and passing on his nearly 60 years of modeling experience through his Black Art series of videotapes. These tapes have now become standard reference material for beginners and old hands in Radio Control Scale.



Dave Platt (right) presenting George Perryman with an award in 1989.



July 1996: At the Celebration of Eagles in Muncie, IN, Dave Platt receives his Model Aviation Hall of Fame award from AMA President Dave Brown



At the WRAM Show in Westchester, New York, Dave Platt receives his AMA Fellow Award from AMA President Dave Brown

Other Personal Highlights

- Married in 1961 to wife, Margaret, who has her own career but helps with the modeling business.
- Have two children: Shelley, who works for NASA at Edwards Air Force Base, and Tony, who is a golf course superintendent.
- More than 50 of his designs have been kitted and/or published in magazines.
- AMA Nats scale winner several times, most recently 2002 Nats Designer Scale first place.
- Numerous Pilot's Choice and Critic's Choice awards at Top Gun and Scale Masters
- Currently produces highest quality Radio Control Scale kits and components.

This PDF is property of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Permission must be granted by the AMA History Project for any reprint or duplication for public use.

AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

