



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of AMY POOL



Written by LE (09/2011), transcribed by JS (10/2011)

The following was published in the November 2011 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in Lee Estingoy's Radio Control Soaring column.

Sailplanes aren't just for men

Hi, my name is Lee and I have a Soaring problem.

Welcome to this month's group session. We have a few items to discuss and, as always, a few new members in attendance.

I'd like to begin by introducing Amy Pool. Amy would appear to be a normal person, except that she's one of the few women who voluntarily spend time at an RC Soaring field. She even brings her own gear and competes in our silly little games. Let's spend some time with Amy.

LE: How did you get started in RC Soaring?

AP: I was dating a man who was an RC Sailplane pilot. We lived in the Pacific Northwest where the Northwest Soaring Society runs a summer circuit of weekend-long Thermal Duration (TD) contests in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, British Columbia, and Alberta.

The first time I went to a contest, I found a spot in the shade to sit down and read, but a friend said, "No, no. We're putting you to work." He spent the rest of the day teaching me how to be a timer for TD. The next day, the CD taught me how to use his scoring program. By the end of the season I could set up the launch equipment, run a retriever, keep score, and time.

I loved the people and became a very active non-flying member of the community, but I didn't have much interest in flying. Then one day, a few years later, I had a moment when I suddenly realized: "I want to do this." I built a *Gentle Lady* and a friend started teaching me to fly. I started working on LSF tasks my first week and flew in my first contest as a novice my second or third week of flying. I was totally hooked.

LE: How often do you fly?

AP: My routine has changed over the years. My first year, I flew every weekend from July through mid-September in contests and often two days during the week, usually with a small group of two to four pilots. (I'm a teacher and I was on summer break.) I also flew occasionally in the winter as weather allowed.

As my life became busier, most of my flying became contest flying as opposed to fun-flying or practice. But between my local club, the Portland Area Sailplane Society, and the regional contest circuit, I was probably flying over 50 days a year.

Since I moved to Dallas a year ago, I haven't flown quite as much because new routines haven't been established. There are fewer weekend contests within a six-hour drive than there were in the Northwest, but the Soaring League of North Texas holds contests every month in Dallas. There are also a few events within driving distance which make up the Lone Star Soaring Series, so I consider myself lucky as I love contest flying. I would like to get back to flying at least 50 days a year once again.

When I first started flying, I also learned to launch my own planes, so it was not uncommon for me to go out and practice by myself, though it was more likely that I would go out with a couple of friends to practice (for one thing, someone always needed witnesses for LSF flights.)

About five years ago, I lost control of a plane while tensioning up to launch, so I've stopped throwing my own Open-Class planes. I developed relationships with several of my flying buddies, where they would throw for me. There was pretty much always a trusted "arm" around for me to borrow.

LE: Men are from Mars and women are from Venus, and NASA doesn't even try to fly Sailplanes on Venus. Would you care to share any opinions you may have as to why so few ladies seem interested in our hobby?

AP: I think it's similar to loving cars. There are some girls/women who become fascinated with cars, but a much, much smaller percentage than you see with boys and men. There are three other women, including one teenager, flying the Northwest Soaring Society contest circuit. For all of us, there were men in our lives involved in the hobby, but we have all made it our own.

LE: We've seen pink transmitters from Grand Wing Servo-Tech Co. (GWS) and I've seen a pink-molded aircraft in Visalia, California. Obviously that's not much of an effort to bring ladies into the hobby. If you were a marketing executive at a company that served the Soaring community, what would you do to introduced RC and RC Soaring, in particular, to the ladies out there?

AP: I don't think the best approach is to single out the women by marketing special products. I want to be recognized as an equal on the field, not different somehow. I would rather finish in the bottom of the pack at a Discus Launch Glider [DLG] event than take first place in a women's class. But, perhaps that reflects my values more than women in general.

I want to fly with the same equipment as everyone else. I'm not sure how to market to women, other than bringing up the awareness that there are women out there flying RC. And maybe pink park flyers or foamies would increase [the] interest of young girls. (Of course, really cool stickers/decals can dress up a plane with the bonus that you get to make it your own!)

I think the best place to capture the female market is at the flying field. It's the women who come out to the field with their significant others, their fathers, their brothers, or their co-workers, who are the potential market.

Unfortunately, flying fields are not always the most comfortable places for women to spend much of the day. Try getting your wife to come out more than a few times if she has to be out all day. Usually it is hot and this is the big one: there is no porta-potty. Seriously, if there were a fairy godmother of female RC pilots, she'd make sure there was a porta-potty on every field. I think you'd be surprised how much easier it would be to recruit new lady pilots.

Also, if you are in a long-term relationship with a woman who is interested in the hobby, consider seeing if there is another person in your club who will take her under his/her wing for the early part of learning. It was not my boyfriend who taught me to be a timer, and not my boyfriend who taught me to fly. From the beginning, then, the hobby became my own, not something that I only did with him. You might find that your significant other becomes your favorite timer, and that's great, but it's a bonus for everyone if she will go out and fly even when you can't.

LE: Do you have a favorite airplane these days? If so what? Is there an aircraft, present or past (RIP) that would be your "rosebud"?

AP: My two primary planes right now are a *Pike Perfect* and an *Xplorer*. I also fly an *Organic* two-meter that I love, though there are no two-meter contests down here in Dallas. So it's not getting as much use as it did up in the Northwest.

I've had a lot of planes that I've enjoyed, but an *Icon* that I bought used in 2007 has a special place in my heart. From the first moment I flew that plane I loved it, and my performance took a major leap up because I trusted that plane in a way I hadn't experienced before. I now know what I am shooting for in a relationship with a plane. [I have] complete confidence that if there is lift I will be able to identify it and work it.

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

