



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of JAMES R. VANDERWALKER



Born: December 20, 1931 Modeler since 1937
AMA #7708

Information submitted by JRV (6/2003); Written & Edited by SS (06/2003), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

Career:

- Placed fifth in class C novice at his first Nationals in 1970 flying his own design that used the Taurus wing; the design was later published in the November 1979 issue of Radio Control Modeler magazine
 - Competed at Nationals throughout the 1970s placing fairly well, including third place in 1973 and 1974
 - Received many first through third places in regional contests from the late 1960s through the early 1980s
 - Qualified for the 1979 Master's and flew at the FAI team selection that year
 - Received a lot of first places in Canadian contests he competed in from 1979 to 1983
 - Built and designed his own speed and stunt planes in 1949 and 1950
 - Started the Clintonville Radio Control Club in the late 1960s; served as president, a leader member and newsletter editor
 - Is an AMA-sanctioned contest director; directed his first local contest in 1971
 - Is his area's Radio Control flying instructor
 - Has taught over 100 people how to fly Radio Control
 - Developed a flying routine called "ShowBatics," which is an air show of conventional and 3-D maneuvers
 - Produced and sold a carrying handle and stand for transmitters called the Van Handle from 1970 to 1977
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The Beginning

Airplanes were popular everywhere and to everyone when James was young. His grandfather's farm was even used by barnstormers who gave his grandfather airplane ride tickets for the use of his farm. James was given rides in a bi-plane while sitting on his mother's lap. He can still remember that first ride and how he wanted to climb out so he could play with the little cows and horses.

By the time James was five, he was making Gulf Hawk solid models from 10-cent kits. He worked on the models by himself. For James the hardest part was cutting the parts out of the printed wood with a razor blade. Gluing it together was much easier, but seeing the finished plane was the most exciting part of modeling for James.

It wasn't until 1945 that James joined his first club, the Clintonville (Wisconsin) Model Airplane Club. He was a club member for four years.

The following year, 1946, he got into U-Control modeling and built a Stik kit of a Piper Cub (Tri-Pacer) with an Ohlsson and Rice (O&R) 23 ignition engine. James never flew this plane with the O&R 23, but instead used the plane to learn how to fly U-Control by whip control.

Competition

James' first contest was a U-Control contest in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in 1948. He was 17-years-old and flew a Demeco Stunt Wagon with a McCoy 36 glow engine. Unfortunately, James crashed while learning to flying with another flyer in the same circle at the same time, so he didn't place.

A few decades later, James competed in a Nats at age 39. At the 1970 Nationals, he flew a model of his own design that used a Taurus wing he had modified to have a straight trailing edge and a double taper. The model was called Epitomy and used a ST60 engine and Kraft radio.

At that time, the Nationals had only a class C expert and novice class. James competed in class C novice and received fifth place. His was the first Nationals Radio Control trophy to go to Wisconsin.

James continued competed in the Nationals throughout the 1970s and received the following places:

- 1970 – fifth place
- 1973 – third place
- 1974 – third place
- 1976 – sixth place
- 1978 – 27th place
- 1979 – 15th place
- 1980 – 29th place

James placed well in other competition as well from the late 1960s into the early 1980s. Some of his non-National wins include the following:

- 1968 – Wausau, first place
- 1977 – first in Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- 1977 – first in Chicago, Illinois
- 1977 – third in Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- 1978 – third in Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- 1979 – first in Milwaukee
- 1980 – third in Milwaukee
- 1981 – third in Pebble Creek
- 1981 – first in Saint Paul, Minnesota

FAI competition went well for James also. He qualified for the 1979 Masters and flew at the 1979 Master's for the FAI team selection. James, who was 49 at the time, flew a Compensator with a Rossi 60 that he had made a Perry Pump fit into the back cover. According to James, it was the most powerful engine there.

James will never forget the Master's competition. Being with the country's top pilots, such as Dave Brown, Steve Helms, Ivan Christensen, Mark Radcliff, Ron Chidgey, Jim Martin, Jim Whitney, was a great experience for James. He was also glad to be able to spend time with his friends Carl Webber and Tiny Westberg at the competition.

James recalled that they all went to the banquet together and had a great time. Everyone got a Master's plaque and John Mallony, president of World Engines, gave everyone a new OS 61 Radio Control engine.

Also that same year, James went to a two-day pattern contest called the Ugly (Upper Great Lakes) meet in Saint Marie, Canada. He received first place most every year he went from 1979 until 1983 and would take as many as six other flyers with him. He enjoyed that contest.

Experiments

From 1949 to 1950, James designed and flew his own designed speed and stunt planes, both with glow engines and with DynaJet. His fast speed with the jet was 130 mph.

After James got involved with Radio Control modeling, he continued experimenting with his own designs. In 1970, his plane was unique. It was the Taurus design for reed Radio Control by Ed Kazmirski. When proportional radios came about, Top Flite included a modification by Kazmirski in the later kits that was to update the building for proportional radios. The modification increased the wing dihedral. James, though, went the opposite way, decreased dihedral, and also built the wing with a straight trailing edge. The plane was a winner and published in the November 1979 issue of Radio Control Modeler magazine on page 25. It can also be seen on the AMA film of the 1970 Nationals in pattern flying.

Leadership

James started the Clintonville Radio Control Club in 1968 or 1969 and served as its president and as a leader member and also a contest director, number 755. The club became an AMA-chartered club not too long after its formation.

The club has now become the Shawano Radio Control Flying Club and is AMA charter number 893. James creates the club's meeting and newsletter each month (as of 2003). He has also been the club's president, secretary, and treasurer.

He began directing local contests in 1971 and continues to the present (2003). James is still Contest Director Number 7708 and runs two events each year.

Currently (2003), James is the area's Radio Control flying instructor. He has also taught over 100 people how to fly Radio Control and continues to instruct beginners. James is frequently sought after for building aircraft and for aerobatic flying. He has developed a flying routine that he calls "ShowBatics," which is an air show of conventional and 3-D maneuvers.

Industry Involvement

From 1970 to 1977 James produced a carrying handle and stand for transmitters called the Van Handle. He sold them directly.

*(signed) James R. Vanderwalker
June 2003*

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