



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of BOBBY WATTS



Written by RH (2016), reformatted by JS (07/2016)

The following was published online, an extended interview from what was featured in the summer 2016 issue of Park Pilot magazine.

The Other Side of the Treeline - Bobby Watts



By Rachelle Haughn

Bobby was featured in the summer 2016 issue of Park Pilot.

When he flies, Bobby Watts puts everything he has on the line. His passion, drive, and determination have helped him become a fierce competitor, an entrepreneur, an engineer, and someone who has turned his love of aeromodeling into an exciting career. Through it all, he has remained humble and thankful for those who have helped him along the way.



Right: In his spare time, Bobby enjoys competing in FPV drone racing.

Rachelle Haughn: *What was the first aircraft that you flew and what do you fly for fun today?*

Bobby Watts: The first aircraft that I flew was my uncle's GWS Tiger Moth 400 when I was a kid. I flew that once or twice and learned the art of RC flight, but it wasn't until I built and flew my first Raptor 30 V1 helicopter that my involvement and passion for the hobby really came to life.

Currently, I fly FPV racing quadcopters. It is nice to have a smaller aircraft that will fit almost anywhere and doesn't require a full-size field for flight. I also find myself flying a DJI

Phantom, DJI Inspire, Freefly ALTA (35-pound octocopter), and even bigger.

***RH:** How did you learn how to fly?*

BW: I tried to learn how to hover the Raptor 30 V1 in the back of a supermarket parking lot. With training gear attached, I scooted back and forth without much success. It wasn't until that summer when I joined my first AMA club—the Sunday Flyers in Baltimore, Maryland—that my learning curve really spiked. With so many helpful and skilled pilots out there every single weekend, the environment was viral for learning.

***RH:** What was your first contest and what did you fly in it?*

BW: My first real contest was the XFC (Extreme Flight Championship; xfc-rc.com) competition in Ohio in 2006. I flew a Miniature Aircraft Stratus and placed ninth.

***RH:** When did you compete in XFC and what did you learn?*

BW: I competed in XFC from 2006 to 2012. The main thing it taught me was how to prepare for such a big event. There is so much to prep—music, flying routines, machines, required maneuvers, etc. As I competed more, I felt that my preparation always improved.

This skill has allowed me to transition into working with RC aircraft for a living. One of the biggest things I take pride in is that during my competition years—through roughly 75 competition flights—I only had to land my aircraft early one time due to mechanical failure.

The ability to fly in an RC helicopter demonstration in front of thousands of people, and flying a drone with a movie camera attached in front of a big shot director, is almost one and the same. They both use the same skillset that I have acquired throughout the years and I mainly have XFC to thank for that.

There is really nothing like pulling off the flight of your life to an applauding crowd. XFC was always my creative outlet for any crazy ideas I had at the time (such as making my heli do tricks like a dog), so I do miss that aspect.

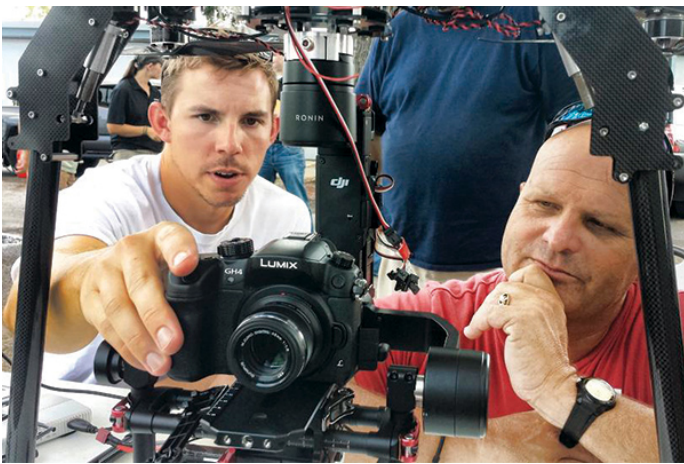


Bobby Watts (center) watches a flight demonstration at the 2013 International Radio Controlled Helicopter Association Jamboree. Photo by Jennifer Alderman.

RH: Please tell us about your job for Jordan Klein Film and Video.

BW: For the last few years, I have been working with a production company in Orlando, Florida, called JKFV (Jordan Klein Film and Video; jordy.com). Jordy (the owner) has been in the film business his entire life and is a second-generation cinematographer. His father, Jordan Klein Sr., is a two-time Academy Award-winning underwater cinematographer who is responsible for bringing films/shows such as Flipper, Thunderball, The Abyss, and countless more to life.

I am the chief pilot and technician for JKFV's sister company called XCam Aerials (xcamaerials.com). With XCam Aerials, we use full-size and RC aircraft to capture stunning shots for the TV and movie world. On the RC side, we fly aircraft that weigh up to 50 pounds and carry cameras that cost well upward of a full-blown college degree!



Bobby Watts (L) and his boss, Jordy Klein, adjust the camera settings before takeoff.



In this photo taken at Legoland in Winter Haven FL, Bobby (far L), poses with his XCam Aerials coworkers.

RH: What do you like about it?

BW: The cool part about the movie industry is that every job is different. Because we are in Florida, you can almost guarantee that every job will require us to fly over water ... usually saltwater at that. We are almost always launching and landing from boats, flying through trees, around obstacles, and chasing after some sort of motorized vehicle.

RH: Did you ever think you would have a job that allowed you to use your aeromodeling skills?

BW: I was always taught to “Love what you do, find a way to make money doing it, then you will never have to work a day in your life.” I guess I am on the correct path!

I have somehow managed to make a living using my RC skills and my engineering degree for the last 10 years, and for that I am extremely thankful. It is an interesting time to be working in our industry, with the entire world now hopping on the “drone” bandwagon.



Bobby (L) flies a multirotor near a cruise ship at the Port of Tampa for a work assignment. The aeromodeler lives in Florida and many of his video shoots take place over large bodies of water. Photo provided.

RH: How are you using your degree?

BW: I am working as a part-time design engineer with a company called Drone Aviation Corporation in Jacksonville, Florida, which specializes in tethered drone aircraft and

applications. I am also an engineering/design consultant for various companies in the Orlando area that are all doing something with drones.

***RH:** What businesses have you started throughout the years?*

BW: My first business was an online video instructional series called SmackTalk RC. Along with my friend Bert Kammerer, we created more than 30 episodes that were about an hour long that taught all aspects of RC helicopter flying. We did three full seasons of the show and then took a hiatus because our schedules were crazy at the time. We still put episodes out here and there, and we are now working on a new project ... coming soon.

My second business venture was called Chimp Systems, which was a joint venture between my college roommate, Caleb Pinckney, and I. We worked on some technology that allowed me to do things with my night-flying routine that were never done before. We eventually created a product called the DALCON that allowed users to program their lights to music.



Although Bobby flies camera-toting multirotors for a living, he said that nitro-powered helicopters will always be his favorite aircraft. Haughn photo.

My most recent venture was a company called Encore RC. With Encore RC, my friends Mike Evans, Art Hughes, and I put together the world's first fixed-pitch 3-D multirotor kit that allowed pilots to fly a multirotor just like a 3-D helicopter. Without all of the moving parts, it gave pilots the confidence to try new things that they would normally never dare with their RC helicopters.

We ended up folding the business last year.

RH: *If you could choose one aircraft to fly for the rest of your life, what would it be?*

BW: I would have to say any 90-size nitro helicopter (also called a 700-class heli). That is the type of aircraft that propelled me to big things in this industry.

RH: *What advice do you have for new pilots?*

BW: My advice for heli pilots: enjoy it. If you have caught the RC heli bug, there is really nothing like it out there. The first few years of learning how to fly were some of the most incredible years of my life. Being involved with RC helicopters has allowed me to do so much, that I will forever be grateful.

The RC heli industry has taught me massive amounts of technical skills, has allowed me to travel the entire world, introduced me to some of the most genuine and nicest people I have ever met, and acted as a gateway into so many other industries.

I feel that the RC heli industry is going through tough times now. Lots of heli manufacturers are going out of business, fewer competitions are being held, and new faces don't seem to be coming in as fast as they used to. I do not believe [the hobby] will ever go away, but maybe it is just making the RC heli family a little tighter.



Bobby Watts (R) was one of the pilots chosen to put on a flight demonstration at AMA's 75th anniversary celebration in July 2011. Rachelle Haughn photo.

My advice for a new multirotor pilot would be to learn the basics first. Many new multirotors practically fly themselves, so it is important to start with flight training and learning aircraft basics. Learn all of your hovering orientations and build your own quadcopter. If you know how it works and how to fly in all orientations, it will give you a new appreciation for how much is going on when you flip that Return to Home switch.

***RH:** Where do you see yourself in five years?*

BW: I hope to continue to use drones (or any type of RC aircraft) to help people or solve a problem. I would absolutely love to assist with, or head up, any project that would allow drones to do a task better than is currently being done. I love problem solving, so as long as I can continue to work in this field and continue to solve problems, I am a happy guy.

***RH:** If you could call anyone to come fly with you, whom would it be?*

BW: It would have to be my original crew back in Baltimore that got me started with flying. Without them, I wouldn't be doing the things I am today. Not to mention that they were some of the funniest guys and the best teachers to be around. I am pretty sure that we all laughed and gave each other a hard time more than we flew at that field. At the end of the day, that is what it is all about.

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

