



The AMA History Project Presents: History of AIRBORNE MODELS



Written by DL (07/2012); Reformatted by JS (01/2013)

Jay Smith wrote the following, published in the About Us section of Model Aviation magazine, July 2012 issue.

About Us: Airborne Models

World Models Manufacturing Company has been in existence for more than 15 years and has produced a wide range of aircraft for gas, glow, and electric power. Although the company is headquartered in Hong Kong, its U.S. distribution is handled by Airborne Models in California.

Fai Chan, owner of Airborne Models, started the company when he moved to the US in 1997. Before moving, he worked as an engineer and enjoyed Slope Soaring, through which he met and became friends with Mr. Kong, the owner of World Models.

Fai shared with me that one of his responsibilities at Airborne Models is to assist in the designing of aircraft. His experience as an engineer, coupled with his love of RC aircraft, made it an easy transition.

His first design was the *Super Sport 40*, which he completed on his kitchen table. Fai told me it was a dream come true to be able to design model aircraft, but it also comes with a lot of pressure because it is so important that the designs be commercially successful.

When designing models, Fai believes the most important thing is an aircraft that flies well. His next priority is that the model be easy to assemble, followed by keeping the airplane as true as possible to the full-scale aircraft.

I asked Fai about the process of bringing a model to market. The procedure takes roughly six months. After the type of aircraft and size of the aircraft are determined, it's time to choose a color scheme. World Models is able to print on the covering, which allows for more options, especially with warbirds.

Fai works with the designers in China, and after they agree on a design, two prototypes are constructed. One is tested in the US, and one in China. The prototypes are covered with clear covering on the bottom of the aircraft so that Fai can inspect the construction methods.

Both parties come together and determine if any changes need to be made to improve the model and another prototype is constructed. This process continues until everyone is satisfied.

Having a foundation as a modeler that dates back to building 3.5-meter gliders in his bedroom in Hong Kong, Fai considers himself more of a modeler than a businessman. Although he is modest, I found out through our conversation that Fai has designed nearly 80% of the models sold by World Models. He also designed the company's robot, the RoboPhilo, which is targeted at the hobby market!

While we were on the topic of aircraft design, I asked Fai how he felt about foam aircraft and the line of foam jets that the company sells.

“I didn't like foam at first, but improvements in the foam has made it more durable and better looking. It is the material of the future and you can adjust the density to make it stronger. EPO foam is used in World Models aircraft and it is also very repairable. It is the best choice for the beginner.

“Foam jets are designed after the real plane and they need to have plenty of air intake. All of our jets use a 68mm [ducted] fan, so all of the jets are built around that power system. We ensure that the jet can fly nicely.”

Fai and I had the opportunity to sit down at the Toledo Expo to complete this interview. As we discussed Airborne Models and Fai's experiences, I was amazed. He shared with me what it was like to be a kid in Hong Kong. He had a strong desire to get into RC while in middle school, but the cost to get started in the hobby was equal to a month's salary for his father.

Knowing this, I asked how he felt when one of his designs makes it to market for all to enjoy at an affordable price. He responded, “The satisfaction comes when people say the plane flies good. I don't tell people that I design the plane and when I get the feedback, I know I am doing something right. I always try to do something to help the flier.”

I asked Fai what his goal was for the company. “I would like to make the business grow bigger,” he said, “but it is a shrinking market. The type of people that like to build aircraft is getting smaller. While we want to make things easy for the customer, it is also important to learn the basics of aircraft setup, especially when dealing with big aircraft.”

My experience with World Models aircraft has been with the park flyer *Cub*, *Zero*, *Texan*, and *TameCat* models. All of them flew well and the Warbirds even include retracts, which is a nice touch for a balsa model in this size range.

If you have also been successful with World Models aircraft or have any idea for a new addition to the company's lineup of models, I'm sure Fai would be happy to hear from you.

Sources:

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