



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ELBERT J. (JOE) WEATHERS

1920s – 1984 Began modeling in 1930



Transcribed & Edited by SS (03/2003), Updated by JS (10/2008, 2018), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

Career:

- Won the Pacific Coast Gas Model Championship sometime before it was discontinued in September of 1939
- 1935: Won the Richfield Oil Company scale model contest; was successful in any contests
- 1935: Co-founded the San Diego Aeroneers and served as its corresponding secretary until 1940
- Developed shock-absorbing single-strut landing gear
- Started Rite-Flite Specialties in 1946 and manufactured modeling accessories of his own design, including engine mounts, tank mounts and tailskid assemblies
- Was a member of the Model Airplane News magazine's Air Ways Club
- Designed more than 90 of his own models ranging from racers to scale models to camera-carrying airplanes to endurance models
- Had designs published in all the major modeling magazines

Honors:

- 1988: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1988: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1990: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
- 1999: Kits and Plans Antiquitous Hall of Fame

Though the following biography is compiled based upon magazine and newspaper articles, G. James Alaback compiled lists and copies of the articles relating to Elbert J. Weathers that made such a biography possible. The following article ran in the January 1940 issue of Model Airplane News magazine.

We'd Like You to Meet Elbert J. Weathers

Every reader of Model Airplane News is familiar with the activities of Elbert J. Weathers of San Diego, California. His plans for the Westerner gas model appeared last May and June and his many very excellent flying scale craft have been a tribute to his designing and building skills.

But few folks know, however, that this West Coast expert was responsible for a lengthy discussion and investigation of aeromodeling rules by the Academy of Model Aeronautics at its November conference at the Hotel New Yorker.

Open-class-man Weathers, it seems, had astonished expert circles by bringing out a novel 6-1/2-foot gas model aptly named Mystery Man and distinguished by the use of take-off gear, which is dropped from the craft when it attains enough lift to rise off the ground.

The Academy ruled finally that the take-off gear must be a permanent part of the ship and cannot be dropped in flight. But largely because of Weathers' experimentation in this field, the administrative group agreed that a one-wheeler, which can take off unassisted and land without nosing over, is permissible in sanctioned contests.

This anecdote serves admirably to illustrate our aerobiography with the contention that this San Diego chap is quite a fellow and one not to be dismissed lightly by merely quoting a couple of rules.

Weathers started building models when one of his friends interested him in the hobby just 10 years ago. Elbert (or Joe to his intimate friends) has built all types of outdoor gliders, stick and fuselage craft, flying scale models and gas jobs. Just now, what little extra time he can devote to his model work is usually in the gas and flying scale fields.

His work with the Adco-Neon Signal and the Weather Electric Motor Companies, both of San Diego, doesn't give him an over abundance of leisure time, especially since he's engaged in various experimental activities, including the distribution of a new and radical automobile spark plug.

However, E.J.W. manages to design, build, and compete in California meets with a certain amount of regularity and success. Here is a brief cross-sectional of his work:

First, we might take the Pacific Coast Gas Model Championship (the title to be held until September 1939). This was won over a field of 400 entries with the Westerner. Another might be a first place in the Richfield Oil Company scale model contest held back in 1935; with a Kinner Envoy model, the Aeroner entrant netted prized totaling \$185.

A recent victory was scored in the Reginald Denny Industries design contest by E.J.W. Two places were good for \$80 and it was in conjunction with this competition that Weathers developed a new type shock-absorbing single-strut landing gear.

We could continue indefinitely with the listing of similar awards, but feel sure you have an inkling of this chap's skill on the field of battle. Right now, E.J.W. is serving as the corresponding secretary of the San Diego Aeroners (composed of 47 outstanding gasoleers) and also holds membership in the N.A.A., Model Airplane News' Air Ways Club, and the International Gas Model Airplane Association (I.G.M.A.A.).

When the subject of contest rules is raised, Weathers is strong for the abolishment of the cross-sectional fuselage requirement for gas craft, since, says he: "Any gas job of the fuselage type, if several square inches under the minimum, has no more chance than any entry which passes it. Moreover, a stick-type gas model has no advantage whatever over a fuselage-type (less efficient, if anything) and as it has, few are built."

Gas model competitions should judge entries for design, construction and finish as well as duration, he feels. And the 12-ounce wing loading with larger bore engines, which is popular on the West Coast, will eventually be taken up by most all groups.

One of E.J.W.'s fondest hopes is to get east to a Nationals in the near future so, among other things, he may participate in a Berryloid Finish competition and meet some of the aeromodelers from the eastern section of the country. He'd like to see a precision event for gas models at the Nationals as well as the continuance and encouragement of flying scale models.

Queried as to the future of model aviation in this country, Weathers points out that the surface hasn't even been scratched, yet.

“The opportunities presenting themselves to the more aggressive builders are too numerous to mention. The next few years will see those having all the time necessary at their disposal, working on a specific overgrowth of gas models – Radio Control. Herein lays the really golden opportunity, together with other matters, which may develop after the Radio Control itself is worked out correctly. In the meantime, the youngster or oldster, for that matter, can continue to produce experimental aircraft in model form based on new and unproven theories. Among the less popular categories, tow-line gliders should be encouraged, especially.”

E.J.W.'s advice to the novice enthusiast, which sums up his experiences of the past 10 years, is that “a beginner should watch another more experienced builder for some time, if possible, before he begins the actual construction of a model airplane or glider; thus getting the underlying points of building even a simple job well in mind. He should start with a simple hand-launched all-balsa glider or Rise-off-Ground model, advancing rapidly as he can although no one should ever build models in a hurry.

“No really young boy should be allowed to ‘make the plunge’ by starting with a gas model for the very first project, both for his own good and that of others where he may be attempting to operate it.”

The following piece about Elbert J. Weathers ran in the December 1988 issue of Model Aviation magazine after he was inducted posthumously into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

Elbert J. (Joe) Weathers, for many years a flyer, designer, club leader, writer and manufacturer, left us in 1984. His legacy of creativity, energy, success, and friendships will keep him with us for generations. Joe was a teenager in the early 1930s when aeromodeling really took off. Growing up in San Diego, California, he loved model aviation right from the start and seemed to prefer his own designs to anything that was available through magazines or stores.

The earliest extant drawing, his #W-5G, is dated October 5, 1931. Later that year his towline glider #W-8G was published. This same model is included in Vic Smeed's book, Model Flying – The First Fifty Years. [Editor's note: The model being referenced here in Vic Smeed's book (on page 50) is called a Class C glider. Page 51 of that book states that model was designed by Weathers in 1933. An article by Elbert J. Weathers himself in the August 1939 issue of Flying Aces, titled Classy Class 'C' Glider, shows that model with plan, and states “This glider,

designed and built in '33... ” The AMA Plans Service has a plan of that same model in its collection, labeled “Class ‘C’ Glider W8G (IV)”, traced by Herb Kelley, which states it was designed by Weathers in 1931. From the information in the E.J. Weathers article and what is shown in the plans, we believe the W-8G referenced in this article is the Class C glider referenced in the book and magazine, and believe it was designed in 1933.] Joe followed these early aircraft with more than 90 originals. These ranged in scope from racers to scale models, from camera-carrying airplanes to endurance models. In the National Model Aviation Museum, there is a beautiful example of his Winged Victory, built to the original drawings. There is also Joe’s original Pacificoaster that was restored by Jim McNeill.

Thus did Joe Weathers fulfill a prediction made by Charles Hampson Grant in 1932 that “Mr. E.J. Weathers shows promise of being one of our future well-known airplane designers.”

Flying Aces, Model Airplane News and Air Trails magazines all published Weather’s designs. In recent months, Model Builder magazine republished the Winged Victory details. Joe had a reputation for excellence, and many hundreds of his own designs were built and flown.

In 1935, Weathers co-founded the San Diego Aeroneers. This club is still an active AMA club. Joe served as corresponding secretary for five years until 1940.

When World War II began, Joe worked for North American Aviation in engineering. In 1945, he again found time for model design, and then in 1946 he started Rite-Flite Specialties. He manufactured a line of modeling accessories of his own design, including engine mounts, tank mounts, and tailskid assemblies.

The following is a list of E. J. Weather designs are contained within the AMA Plans Service’s collections.

Name of Plan	Wingspan	Details	Area	AMA number	John Pond Plans Service number	FF	OT	Scale	Gas	Rubber	Glider
Aircraft Mechanics Flyabout	23	Model Airplane News, 4/1947, Weathers	2	22593	26A6	X		X		X	X
Burnelli Transport	34	Elbert Weathers, 8/1932	5	22644	26D2	X		X		X	
Class C Glider W8G (IV)	30	E. J. Weathers, 1931 [Note: Should be 1933]	7	14345		X	X				X
Darmstadt 22 (inc temps)	22	Model Airplane News, 12/1936, Weathers	4	21512	16A7	X		X		X	
E-10G Airmaster	33	Elbert Weathers, 1/1931	4	28401	62A6	X					

Focke Wulf A 38 Seagull	26	Elbert Weathers, 6/1934	3	21685	17D1	X		X		X	
Glider	60	Elbert Weathers, 2/1933	9	33018	62A2	X					X
Go Getter	52	Weathers, Air Trails 3/1940	22	20127	2C5	X	X		X		
Guillemin J G 10	26	Flying Aces, 2/1936, Weathers	3	21781	18B1	X		X		X	
Industria Aero Romana 14	26	Flying Aces, 3/1936, Weathers	3	22544	23G2	X		X		X	
Kayoe	60	Elbert Weathers, 1/1941	12	20157	2G5	X	X		X		
L. A. R. 14 Pursuit	21"	E. J. Weathers, 1935	3	15218		X		X		X	
Miss San Diego	42	E. J. Weathers, 1935	7	14344		X	X		X		
Mystery Man	78	Air Trails, 6/1939, Weathers	26	20170	3A7	X	X		X		
Pacificoaster	60	Model Airplane News, 11/1956, Weathers	18	20621	9B2	X			X		
Pylon Polisher	20	Flying Aces, 9/1937, Weathers	4	24533	40E1	X				X	
Ridge Runner	76	Elbert Weathers, 4/1952	17	28410	62B3	X					
Sparkler	39	Elbert Weathers, 2/1949	10	28394	62A3	X				X	
Sparkler Wakefield	38	E. J. Weathers, 1949	16	14346		X	X			X	
Speedster #1	26	By E.J. Weathers, 3/1935	4	11954		X				X	
The Erne W-5G	30	E. J. Weathers, 1931	3	14348		X	X				X
Towmorrow	76	Elbert Weathers, 4/1952	14	28402	62A6	X					X
Tubby	52	Elbert Weathers, 1/1936	20	33376	5G1	X	X		X		
W-14G Monarchaire	40	Elbert Weathers, 3/1932	3	28406	62B1	X					
W-18G Glider	66	Elbert Weathers, 4/1933	5	28407	62B1	X					X
W-19G (no wing plan)	42	Elbert Weathers, 6/1933	4	28470	62E7	X				X	

W-21G Glider	60	Elbert Weathers, 8/1933	11	28408	62B2	X					X
W-24G Glider	68	Elbert Weathers, 2/1933	14	28397	62A4	X					
W-5G Erne	30	Elbert Weathers, 1931	3	28392	62A1	X				X	
W-61 Gas Model	46	Elbert Weathers, 6/1936	9	33358	79E1	X	X		X		
W-17G	60	E. J. Weathers, 1933	10	14347		X	X				X
Westerner	96	Model Airplane News, 5/1938, Weathers	27	20300	5B7	X	X		X		
Westerner Four Foot	48	Elbert Weathers	7	20550	8D3	X	X		X		X
Westerner*	48	Model Airplane News, 5/1938, Weathers	9	29170	68G3	X	X		X		
Westerner*	66	Model Airplane News, 5/1938, Weathers	10	30583	80F6	X	X		X		
Winged Victory	45	E J Weathers	14	20322	5C4	X	X		X		
Winged Victory	55	By E. J. Weathers	14	12014		X			X		

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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

