



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of MATT ANDREN



Written by JTG staff (05/2015), transcribed and reformatted by JS (02/2016)

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Matt Andren: A Lifetime of RC Flight

I have encountered Matt Andren at RC events across the country for many years. When I bought my first Discus Launch Glider (DLG) three years ago, he showed up at the Southeast Electric Flight Festival (SEFF) with a micro DLG he had cobbled together. I had to have one! I later saw the final version of that airplane on the Horizon Hobby website and man was I excited.

You may not know Matt's name, but I bet you have heard of, or have flown, a few of the airplanes he has helped develop.

He started working for Horizon Hobby 10 years ago in consumer sales, then moved into product development as an aircraft technician for the Hangar 9 team. He was later given the opportunity to be a product developer in the ParkZone team because of his experience with electric aircraft. He has been designing and developing foam aircraft for the HobbyZone, ParkZone, and E-flite brands since then.

Here are a few of the airplanes that Matt has helped develop:

- Hangar 9 Piper Pawnee 40 ARF and Saratoga .46
- ParkZone Bf-109, Stinson, UM Mosquito, P-47, Spitfire, F4U-1A, Habu 2, Radian Pro, and Sport Cub
- E-Flite UMX Radian and UMX Whipit

***Jim Graham:** How did you get into the RC hobby?*

Matt Andren: I have always been into planes, trains, and trucks. I gravitated toward airplanes, as my grandfather was an instrument mechanic at Scott Air Force Base. Growing up, I made countless Free Flight balsa airplanes from sheets of wood I bought at the hobby store and that is where I learned what makes a plane fly. I was given a Gentle Lady kit for Christmas of 1992. It took me four months to complete it and [I] did the maiden flight over spring break of 1993.

***JG:** When did you get serious about RC?*

MA: The second flight of my Gentle Lady was my first full solo flight on an early, dead-calm morning, and when the plane touched down so smooth and slid about 30 feet across the grass, I was hooked!

JG: When did you start designing your own aircraft?

MA: I made hundreds of Free Flight planes of every type of configuration from sheets of balsa wood growing up. Once I started flying RC, I was given a few sets of hand-launch glider wings (the old javelin style) and I would build fuselages for them until I wore the fuselage out and then build a new one. It gave me a lot of experience in incidence angles and tail volumes, and what not only makes a plane fly, but fly well. After I got comfortable building fuselages, I started designing whole airplanes either from scratch or using parts of old planes.

JG: Who were your role models and mentors when you started flying?

MA: I learned to fly over spring break of 1993 and was taken under the wing of a number of the Soaring club members in Albuquerque. That summer, one of the guys who was helping me arranged to have me try to break the Thermal Duration records for AMA Junior Classes A, B, C, and D.

JG: How did you move from being a hobbyist to making your living in RC?

MA: I was working in Moriarty, New Mexico, at Sundance Aviation, a commercial glider operation, and one of the glider students who attended the University of Illinois mentioned there were some RC companies in Champaign, Illinois. During one trip to visit them, I went up to Champaign to see the RC companies and filled out an application at Horizon Hobby. I got a call back for an interview, was offered the job, and ended up moving across the country from New Mexico to Illinois.

JG: What is your favorite part of the job?

MA: Meeting all the great people in this hobby and being able to go to events and trade shows. Joe Nall, SEFF, the Westchester Radio Aero Modelers Show, the Toledo Weak Signals Show, and Oshkosh EAA AirVenture are some of the events I really have a lot of fun at. The flying RC airplanes part is pretty fun too!

JG: What are some of the airplanes you helped develop that are your favorites?

MA: I was lucky in that I was able to be the product developer on one of my favorite planes of all time, the P-47. I always loved the P-47, with its huge size and the fact that it was competitive during World War II.

As a model, the P-47 is one of the perfect warbirds. It has wide landing gear, making takeoff and landing easy. Its good moments make it a smooth-flying aircraft, and you have a variety of schemes. Plus, it's an iconic warbird. I had a lot of fun putting the passion of one of my favorite planes into the model and I hope it showed.

The other is the Whipit. The Whipit was a project I started about three years ago. I had scratch-built an all-balsa ultra-micro DLG and it did well. I then built a larger, higher-performance 700mm-wingspan DLG and it was a lot better, but I put a lot of work into it.

If I dented the wing I would not have been happy, so I wanted a DLG that was easy to fix if I dinged it. I ended up making a DLG using a HobbyZone Champ wing with a foam pod and 3mm

Depron tail surfaces to see if foam would hold up to the launch stresses.

The plane I built has lasted over two years and can withstand the stress of DLG. Every time I fly it, it reminds me of flying those balsa chuck gliders. Even if I don't catch a thermal, it is a blast to just throw around.

This project was something I have been working on for years, so to see it finally come to market is very exciting.

Once I got bitten by the DLG bug, I ended up with a couple of Blasters, but wanted something smaller and more convenient. I figured the UMX gear would be perfect for a micro DLG and started scratch-building planes. After I made the prototype of the Whipit using the Champ wing, I knew I had something special.

I am looking forward to the reaction of consumers who get the Whipit, and I hope it will allow people to try DLG and Soaring without breaking the bank.

JG: Are there any future projects that you are working on that you can discuss?

MA: Man, if I had a dollar [for] every time I have heard that! Unfortunately, I can't talk about projects that have not been announced, but you can be sure we have some cool stuff we are working on at Horizon.

JG: If you had one thing you could tell a new RC pilot, what would it be?

MA: Take your time and be patient. With the technology available, learning to fly has never been easier and if the new pilot is willing to put effort in, he or she will be rewarded with a great hobby for the rest of his or her life, and meet some great people along the way.

Sources:

Horizon Hobby
(800) 338-4639

www.horizonhobby.com

ParkZone

(877) 504-0233

www.parkzone.com

E-flite

(800) 338-4639

www.e-fliterc.com

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