



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of CLARENCE MATHER

Born August 12, 1922 AMA #8133



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The following was printed in Model Aviation's AMA News column about the 2004 Model Aviation Hall of Fame winner. (February 2005)

Clarence Mather

Clarence Mather, 81, is a lifelong Free Flight aeromodeler who lives in Bishop, California. Born in 1922, he grew up in Lemont, Illinois, a Chicago suburb.

Clarence has enjoyed the hobby for more than 70 years, starting as a youngster with his own airplanes crafted from orange-crate wood and whatever tools were available. For 10¢ and an oatmeal box top, Clarence purchased a Vought Corsair kit through an advertisement in a magazine.

“That box of tiny, fragile balsa strips and sheets, tissue, glue and a very complicated plan was a real eye-opener for me. That model was a biplane with an oval fuselage – about the worst possible model for a youngster who had never seen a built-up structure or a construction drawing before.”

Undeterred, Clarence completed the model and began purchasing and constructing other 10¢ models. His farm chores left little time for his hobby, but if he hurried, he could manage a few minutes of flying before breakfast. “Those periods were short but they were gems of pleasure. That time of day is best; the air is cool and smells of green plants.”

Clarence enlisted in the Army Air Corps at roughly the same time the United States entered World War II. Trained as an aviation mechanic, he was assigned to pilot training and eventually became a flight instructor. Clarence managed a little modeling at each place he was stationed, building rubber-powered and gas-powered models of his own design.

Following service, Clarence entered college and continued to build models. Robert Clemens, who nominated him for the Hall of Fame award, met Clarence when he began using the family's workshop for his model building. “My dad [Lou Clemens], my younger brother Jack and I all learned much about building and flying from having Clarence working beside us.”

The four attended the first post-war Nats in Wichita, Kansas and Jack won in Junior Rubber Cabin. A few weeks later the boys' father died but Clarence continued mentoring them and taking them to contests.

Clarence earned a master's degree in biology and physics, became a high school teacher in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and taught college-level physics courses at night. He began flying Indoor with members of the Detroit Balsa Bugs, using Rubber Scale models. Clarence won many contests and awards in both Indoor and Outdoor Free Flight.

In 1946, Clarence moved to San Diego, California, continued to teach high school science, and joined the San Diego Orbiteers club. He served as the club's president and helped develop the popular A-6 event, a casual competition for small, easy-to-build Indoor models.

Clarence earned a place on the 1968 and 1970 United States FAI Indoor teams and competed in Japan and Romania. His Peanut Scale model of the Nesmith Cougar homebuilt monoplane was kitted by Peck-Polymers in 1970 and is still in production today.

"I've flown in nearly every Free Flight event," said Clarence, "both indoors and out. I've tried many experimental designs, including canards, push-pull twins, flapped Wakefields, biplane microfilm models, and zero-decalage models. I've competed in many local, regional, and national contests and have placed and won at all levels."

Between 1970 and 1980, Clarence held three national records. He has been the Indoor Contest Board representative for District X for 25 years. A Contest Director for 28 years, he served as an event director at the Nats and the FAI Team Selection director.

Many of his designs and articles have appeared in publications including *Model Airplane News*, *Flying Models*, *Model Aeronautics Yearbook*, *American Aircraft Modeler*, *Sport Models*, *Free Flight Digest*, and *MA*.

Clarence retired from teaching in 1986 and moved with his wife to Bishop, California. At age 81, he is still an active modeler, competing in several contests each year. He was recognized by the National Free Flight Society (NFFS) in 1992 and elected to its Hall of Fame.

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