



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of HOWARD BONNER



Written by AMA staff (06/1992); Transcribed by JS (06/2008)

The following was published in the June 1992 issue of Model Aviation magazine. Howard was inducted into the 1991 Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

Howard Bonner is an organizer, competitor, and innovator. In his earlier years, he was a prime mover in the establishment of the Los Angeles Larks Club. He competed extensively and won many trophies on local and regional levels as well as at the National Championships.

As radio came on the scene, he quickly saw the significance of its potential adaptation to the control of model aircraft. After World War II, he began the design and development of an escapement mechanism. Those on the market at that time were on/off types – unreliable, primitive, and subject to quirks that destroyed many airplanes. Howard wanted to achieve a super compound escapement, and he finally did. His design would give positive up, down, right, left, and also motor control commands.

His next achievement was the Bonner Servo, a motor-driven actuator. Intended to be driven by the “reed” radios for the period, the servo gave two-directional movement from a neutral position. Howard could see that development of a “proportional” radio was a critical link to reliable and precise control of a model aircraft in flight. He worked with Cliff Weirick and Bob Elliot to design and produce the Bonner Proportional System, which he named the “Digimite.” This was an eight-channel fully proportional radio – the first produced under engineered production conditions. Later, a four-channel set was marketed.

In 1957, Howard was invited to visit South Africa and Great Britain to demonstrate the latest American techniques and equipment for radio control of model aircraft.

Unfortunately, Howard’s health began to deteriorate, and rather than sell the business, he decided to close it. The leading steps he took toward the potential of radio systems we use today identify him as the pioneer he was, and his contributions will long be admired and valued.

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