



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of LARRY DAVIDSON

Began modeling around 1941

AMA #118



Written by LD (n.d); Edited by JF (11/2003); Updated by JS (12/2008)

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## Career:

- Built and flew Control line and Radio Control in younger days
- C. 1970-: AMA Contest Director
- Beginning humbly in his own basement in 1968, Larry branched out to own two different hobby stores and a successful distributorship, D&D Hobby Distributors, Inc.
- Started Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) #75 Long Islanders around 1987
- Vice President of Long Island Drones Society for many years; also VP of Long Island Radio Control Society for many years
- Eastern Vice President of Society of Antique Modelers through 2005
- Publisher of numerous articles for *SAM Speaks* and other publications worldwide
- Educational involvement includes production of video "Covering with Polyspan," and has taught many people aspects of flying and modeling

## Honors:

- AMA Contest Director and also directed Radio Control race car contests
  - Life member of the Society of Antique Modelers
  - 1991: Radio Control Grand Champion in Jean, Nevada
  - 1992: Radio Control Grand Champion in Lawrenceville, Illinois
  - 1993: Radio Control Grand Champion in Taft, California
  - 3-time SAM Free Flight Grand Champion
  - 1999: NFFS Nostalgia Gas Grand Champion, Muncie, Indiana
  - Only SAM Radio Control Grand Champion to win three years in a row
  - 2006: Model Aviation Hall of Fame inductee
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## In the Beginning

As far back as I can remember I was fascinated by flight and airplanes. I guess it may have been when I was about 6 years old.

Several years later, I found out that there were modelers flying model airplanes not too far from where I lived in Hicksville, Long Island, New York. I went to this field and met many modelers there, including Norm Rosenstock, Ed Mahler, Jimmy Forrest, and Dick Padgett. I remember some modeler allowing me to chase his Buzzard Bombshell many times and bring it back to him, which was a big thrill for me. I also watched and helped chase some early radio control models that Norm Rosenstock had built and was flying. This was in the beginning of the Radio Control era. Norm was one of the pioneers and this was a great experience for me.

The first model was a Jasco Baby Phoenix powered by an OK Cub .049, built from the Jasco Kit, which was bought at Boslet's Stationary and ice cream parlor in Hicksville, Long Island, and the local hobby shop. The owner, Joe Boslet and his son, Gordon and I became real good friends. I spent many hours at the shop and their home, talking about and building models. I bought an Ohlsson .23 front rotor ignition model from Joe, which I still have to the day, in the box.

I built the models in my basement and flew some of them right outside my house where there was large fields to fly the free flights and U-controls. I also built and flew many control line planes, including a Jim Walker Firebaby, Baby-Di-Doe and Some Testor U-control planes.

## Competition

One of my school friends was Ronnie Williams, also from Hicksville and his brother, Chubby who also was building and flying models. We later joined the "Long Island Gas Monkeys" club who held the meetings in Valley Stream, NY, in Bob Aberle's basement. There were quite a few good modelers there, including Bob Aberle, Danny Logue, Al Schumacher and Eddie Howe. We went to several contests and my first trophy was a second place trophy, flying a Mini Hogan 34 with a K&B .049 Torpedo. The plane was covered in Japanese tissue and flew real well. Ronnie Williams, who built an identical plane, beat me out for first place by a few seconds in the Connecticut contest, which was held on June 10, 1951.

We attended several contests held at the Easton Airport in Easton, Pennsylvania, where two years in a row I won first place flying a Zeek with a McCoy .19 red head engine, which had been reworked by my friend Jimmy Forrest of Rutherford, New Jersey. Jimmy was a great modeler to have as a friend and teacher. He designed a plane called "Long John Silver" in the early fifties, which was powered by a Dolling .29 and had an Air-O prop. The plane was one of the best competition planes I had ever seen. I wound up building one, also with a Dolling .29 and covered it with silk as Jimmy's was and won a second place in a meet sponsored by the *New York Daily Mirror*, which was commonly called "The Mirror Meet." I probably could have won first place, but got the plane back too late to put in another flight. I finally lost the model in a thermal in a contest held at a Naval Air Station in New Jersey and never got it back. I wish I could find my friend, Jimmy Forrest, today.

In later years, I joined several other Radio Control clubs, including the LIDS, Screamin' Demons, which later was called the LIRCS where I won many club contests held by the club, taught many people to build and fly Radio Control, and got them to join the AMA.

Sometime in 1986, I joined the Society of Antique Modelers and became a life member. My first contest that I entered in "SAM" was at the Mid America Air Center in Lawrenceville, Illinois in 1987, where I entered a Playboy Junior with a Cox .049 and won my first trophy by winning the 1/2A Texaco event with that plane. I was the only one who made the two Max flights and was thrilled to win that event.

After that, I started building many more Old Timer planes for the many events SAM ran in Radio Control.

In 1990, at the SAM Championships in Chicopee, Massachusetts, I was awarded the Radio Control Grand Championship but thought that my good friend and mentor for SAM at the time,

Jim Renolds of Texas had actually won it but the contest director told me that I had won it. When I got back home, I checked all my scores and tried to remember the scores that Jim had and called the contest director back and told him he had made a mistake and that Jim was really the Grand Champion. I called Jim and told him what had happened and then sent Jim the trophy and had the information about who won changed for publication.

I won my first grand championship in Radio Control, October 1991 in Jean, Nevada. I then won it again, July 1992 in Lawrenceville, Illinois and the third time in Taft, California in October 1993. To my knowledge, no one has ever won the SAM Radio Control grand championship three times in a row.

In 1994, after being the Radio Control contest director for the SAM Championships in Muncie, Indiana, I went back to flying my first love, free flight, again. At that contest, after Don Reid's persuading me to build a Korda Wakefield Rubber model for that Dick Korda special FF event, I flew the model to fifth place with 55 entries competing and probably could have done better but the plane DT'd early and did not max on the fourth flight. I was hooked on free flight! Dick Korda and I became good friends there.

I have since won the SAM free flight Grand Championship three times and won the NFFS Nostalgia Gas Championship in Muncie, Indiana, August 1999 and have won hundreds of other places too numerous to remember.

## **Experiments**

I scratch build almost all of my models for competition now and have made many construction changes within the rules to make the planes stronger and easier to construct. Many years ago, I designed a free flight model for the K&B Torpedo Green Head .19 that was covered in silk and was, I thought, and improvement of the Zeek. I didn't work out as well as I thought or didn't know how to trim it properly.

## **Leadership**

I am an AMA Contest Director and Leader member and have been since around 1970. Around 1987 I started the SAM 75 Long Islanders Chapter on Long Island New York and held monthly meetings in my office at my Hobby Shop Business there. Since moving to Virginia, The chapter moved with me, but many of the members are still in New York.

I was Vice president of the Long Island Drones Society for many years and later the VP for the LIRCS of Long Island for many more years.

I was elected to be the Eastern Vice President of the Society of Antique Modelers two years ago and re-elected for another two-year term this year (2003)

I served as Chairman of an engine Bylaws rule change committee this year for the purpose of correcting some loopholes in the reproduction of SAM legal reproduction engines. The results

will be published in SAM Speaks and the membership will vote on the changes the committee recommended.

I am presently are working with Jim Coffin, who I appointed to be the 2004 SAM Champs contest manager on the details of that contest to be held at the Muncie AMA location on September 13 thru 17, 2004.

## **Contest Leadership**

Sometime in 1970 or so, I became an AMA contest director and directed some Radio Control racecar contests held on Long Island. In the summer of 1990 I started to direct SAM type contests at the LIRCS field on Long Island and ran those contests nine years in a row, one of which I called the Joe Beshar commemorative, for my friend, Joe and the last being a SAM Radio Control and free flight contest which was held at Galeville, New York, in August 1996 for my good friend Leon Shulman. I called this the Leon Shulman Commemorative and it was the last time that the location was available for model airplane flying. The contests was attended by competitors from as far as Texas and Canada and was very successful. To this day, friends keep asking, "When are you going to run more contests?"

## **Publishing Experience**

When Radio Control 1/8 scale cars started to come on the modeling scene, Walt Schroder, a long time good friend, asked me to write some reviews on three different Radio Control car kits for publication in *Model Airplane News* magazine.

I did articles on the Kyosho, Associated, and Dynamic cars within a two-year period. I'm not exactly sure of the time frame, though. I also wrote an article on silking model airplanes, which circulated around the world, by evidence of it being in a French magazine at the time. I originally wrote the article by being persuaded to do so by Don Reid and Dan O'Grady from SAM 86 in Canada, which is the newsletter it was originally published in. I also wrote an article for SAM 86 about the Cox 1/2A Texaco engines, giving my experience and knowledge on how to pick out a good engine and the details necessary for a good competition engine. The Cox Company at the time sent anything I needed to help them on the engine design and changes we used in 1/2A Texaco events in SAM contests. That article was also put into many other club newsletters.

I also wrote an article for SAM Speaks called "The Time Has Come." This was a controversial article as there were many rule changes and things had come up in the Radio Control part of SAM competition that needed to be addressed and this article was well-received by the members of SAM. The majority of members agreed with the whole article. There were a few people who were not in favor, which is to be expected. At the time, I wrote the article, I was competing in the Radio Control Assist contests in SAM so I knew what the majority of competitors were in favor of.

## **Hobby Industry Involvement**

### **Products**

There was a need for an adapter to reduce the thread size for the spark plugs that were on some of the early ignition engines from 3/8 X 24" to 1/4 X 32" as good 3/8 (V) style spark plugs were very rare and hard to find. There were many V-2 Spark plugs so an adapter was needed. I designed and had manufactured the adapters and have sold hundreds of these around the world and still sell them as well as the spark plugs.

## **Hobby Distribution Industry**

I started a retail hobby business with the prodding of Walt Schroder, of *Model Airplane News*, sometime in 1968, which I ran out of my basement at the time. I did this on a part time basis as I ran a full time landscaping business during the day and opened the "store" in the evenings and on weekends. It became really successful and was averaging six hundred to nine hundred dollars gross sales per week. The local hobby shop at the time was going out of business and really never had the merchandise that was needed by the modelers and this is why Walt Schroder begged me to do it.

A few months later, the retail hobby shop went out of business and I got the lease of that store and in April 1969 opened up "Larry's Hobby Supplies, Inc" in East Northport, Long Island, New York.

After renting the store for a few years, I bought a vacant piece of property across the street and built a much larger store, which had a retail area of 2365 square feet, plus a two-story warehouse with an office in the rear of the building. I also designed the building to have two tenant rental stores that was also very successful.

I later opened up another store in East Meadow, Long Island and operated that for many years that also had a warehouse in the rear of the rental building. The shop in East Northport became even more successful and I decided to open up a hobby distributorship early in the 1970s that was called D&D Hobby Distributors, Inc. With the help of Walt Schroder, I met many of the manufacturers of hobby products and had 51 different lines of merchandise that I bought and sold as a distributor.

I had the good fortune to meet and have as my friends such great names in the industry as Carl Goldberg (I was responsible for the Goldberg line of spinners, which are still available today), Phil Kraft, Mike Schlesinger, Sid Axelrod, Matty Sullivan, Dewey Brodberg, and many others but last but not least is my good buddy, Leon Shulman. It is great to have known many of these people, some of whom are no longer with us. Carl Goldberg tried to get me to sell the retail store business and just be a distributor, but I told Carl that the retail business made the wholesale business possible. He later agreed with me.

The distributorship also became successful and I had two part time salesmen calling on other hobby shops and sold to many hobby shops in New York, New Jersey, and a few other states, including Florida. I had an average of ten full time and part time employees in the height of the business.

In 1985, I had two offers to buy the wholesale and retail hobby businesses and they were offers that I could not refuse. In August, 1986 I sold the business and retired at the age of 51 to pursue my real love of building and flying model airplanes and have been at it ever since. My wife,

Elaine, has been with me in the hobby business and helped to make it a huge success. She travels and puts up with the long hours at contests to this day.

I have been selling hard to get items for modelers for many years now, including products like spark plugs for ignition engines, solid-state ignition units, coils, covering materials, glass-fueling syringes and other items. I have shipped them all over the world.

### **Education Involvement**

I never did any classes for a school, however I was asked by several clubs on Long Island to give demonstrations on covering models with silk and dope, teaching and demonstrating the use of SIG Epoxolite for fillets, etc., and giving talks on SAM Radio Control Assist competition and free flight competition where I brought several of my planes to demonstrate how they worked. I taught probably hundreds to fly Radio Control planes, cars, and helicopters and was responsible for having hundreds of them join the AMA. I also made a video tape on “Covering with Polyspan” and have sold hundreds of these tapes around the world. Some clubs loan the tape out to their members.





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