



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of GEORGE PERRYMAN

August 30, 1924 - February 22, 2003

Started modeling in the mid-1930s

AMA #514



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Career:

- 1951: U.S. Team Captain for the World Wakefield Championships
- 1953-1954: Captain of the Nordic team at the World Wakefield Championships
- 1951: Awarded honorary membership into the Society of Model Aeronautical Engineers of Great Britain
- 1983-1984: Given the Robert Meuser Award for Modeler of the Year
- Attended many national and international competitions
- Many of his distinctive designs have been featured in magazines and books
- Some of his models include the Swami, Superasteroid, Little Daddy and the Great Speckled Bird
- Has been AMA District V vice president and associate vice president
- Has promoted model aviation on radio and T.V.
- Three of his models are in the collection of the National Model Aviation Museum – the Great Speckled Bird, the Helicopter Speckled Bird and the Giant Speckled Bird
- Won over 700 trophies in 47 years of competition
- Member of the Model Aviation Hall of Fame selection committee
- Worked as a designer for Lockheed for 35 years

Honors:

- 1984: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1985: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
- 1991: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame
- 1998: AMA Fellow

The following is an excerpt from a letter to the editor George wrote in the November 2001 issue of Model Aviation.

I was born in the little town of Irvington, Kentucky, just across the Ohio River from Indiana. I was almost born a Hoosier, which would not be half-bad since it is a beautiful state. I have found from my many trips to Muncie, Indiana, the AMA folks and the local people are the friendliest and most helpful of anywhere I have been.

My father was a circuit rider Methodist preacher, and the little towns we lived in didn't have electricity or running water. I am still a hill boy from Kentucky.

When I was nine or 10, my mother, Nell, went to Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and bought me a model airplane kit for 25-cents. She helped me cut out all the pieces using scissors, which broke most of the balsa wood. We didn't get the model finished, so she bought me a 10-cent stick model, which would fly across the street.

Today I still get a thrill – the same thrill I got then – flying models.

I went to the first of my 43 Nationals in Chicago in 1941 at age 16. I rode a Greyhound bus holding two small rubber models in my lap all night. I met many of my heroes.

My mother died last year at 100-years-old. When she was 98-1/2, she assembled a simple all-balsa model, the Centurion. She was tickled beyond words when National Model Aviation Museum Curator Michael Smith installed it in a glass case next to one of mine in the AMA museum. She was my greatest supporter for 76 years.

In 1938, I first joined AMA when a license to fly rubber and glider cost 50-cents. I didn't have money for an engine, for which a license cost \$1. I only built small rubber models and gliders, since I couldn't afford materials and rubber for big models. This is my 63rd competition year.

I was elected vice president of AMA for District V in 1954 when I was 29. I have been an associate vice president for several decades under outstanding guidance from my friend and district vice president, Jim McNeill. He and many others advanced AMA to where it is today.

Modeling is without a doubt the greatest of all sports. I owe my 35 years at Lockheed as a designer directly to models. Jim Wade, the employment manager of engineering, contacted me shortly after I returned from Finland as captain of the Wakefield team in 1951. I was a textile machine designer in West Point, Georgia, and Jim made me an offer I couldn't refuse.

Most of my career with Lockheed was designing wind tunnel models, which I'd almost paid them to be able to do. I was privileged to help design some of the world's greatest airplanes – the C-130, C-141, C-5A and F-117 stealth fighter.

I am a full believer that God bestows special blessings to modelers. We have to do things that the average citizen is not required to do. Adding together all disciplines of modeling – Free Flight, Radio Control, Control Line, boats, racecars, and rockets – we modelers are outnumbered by over 1,000 to one by fishermen and hunters.

We modelers should consider ourselves part of a brotherhood. Few, if any, organizations are as blessed as modelers, having as many fine people as we have.

By helping the upcoming young people like the Science Olympiad, we can ensure the future of modeling. Most of what we know we learned from someone else, beginning with our parents, then teachers, fellow workers, family members and modelers. The things we have learned should be passed along, which might be a help to many. I'm thankful every day for my modeling friends.

The following article ran in Model Aviation magazine's June 2003 issue following George's death.

“The only difference between an expert and an amateur is plenty of sandpaper and a strong thermal.” – George Perryman, August 1924 – February 2003

George Perryman, of Smyrna, Georgia, died February 22, 2003, following a brief illness.

George was honored by the Academy of Model Aeronautics as one of the 10 Most Influential Model Aircraft Designers of all time in December 2002. A prolific designer, his designs included the Mini-Maxer, which is the best-selling kit of all time, and the Speckled Bird series, named for Atlanta's underground newspaper of the 1960s. His kits are sold in hobby shops worldwide.

George's models on display at the Academy of Model Aeronautics' National Model Aviation Museum include the original Great Speckled Bird, the Centurion, and the Pot Bellied Tub O' Lard. George's mother sparked his interest in aeromodeling when she took him to his first model airplane competition. A rubber stick model she built at age 98 is on display at the museum.

George was six when he built his first airplane. Throughout his entire life, George preferred rubber-powered Free Flight models and considered them a great test of design.

George was an active builder and flyer, competing until the end. George won his last event in December of 2002.

Last summer he won many awards in the National Aeromodeling Championships (Nats) and Society of Antique Modelers Championships in July held in Muncie, Indiana.

Born in Kentucky, George moved with his family to Griffin, Georgia, in 1936. He attended Griffin High School and then Emory University where he studied to become a geologist. Following a stint in the Army Air Corps during World War II, George met Tina Johnson, who he married in 1948.

In 1951, George, whose only engineering training was a mechanical drawing class in ninth grade, was hired as a junior draftsman at Lockheed. Eventually he became a wind tunnel expert and helped design highly classified aircraft. George retired after 37 years as an aircraft design engineer.

George was able to combine his engineering skills with his hobby – aeromodeling. He designed a special wingtip on his models and was once told by a person at NASA that his design was more efficient than the tiplets being used on full-scale airplanes.

As a person and an aeromodeler, George touched many people. Mike Fedor, a fellow modeler, wrote, "I first met George in the late 1960s as a Texas kid attending Georgia Tech and flying Free Flight models when I probably should have been studying.

"George was a true southern gentleman and the best rubber flyer I have ever met. He has been an ambassador for our sport over the years that cannot be equaled. As a contestant he has probably competed for the Mulvihill Trophy awarded for high time in unlimited/Mulvihill at the Nats more times than any one else and has even won it a few times."

A suggestion to rename the Mulvihill Trophy in George's honor is being considered.

George served as an AMA District V associate vice president and was a charter member of the Thermal Thumbers of Metro Atlanta (TTOMA). He was a member of the Model Aviation Hall of Fame and the Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame.

Longtime friend, Jim McNeill, wrote, “A description of George’s models’ performance closely describes his own performance in his journey through life. He climbed higher and achieved greater heights than anyone. George had no enemies and everyone liked him. His sudden passing is like one of his little airplanes fading slowly into the interminable haze of the afternoon walls of Heaven.”

George is survived by his wife of 55 years, Tina J. Perryman, sons Steve and wife MaDonna; Greg and his wife Connie; granddaughter Stephanie and husband William Busby; granddaughter Paulette Perryman. Other relatives include a sister, Mary McCann; sister, Eleanor Morris of Dallas, Texas; several in-laws, nieces and nephews and his beloved dog, Shadow.

All who knew George will miss him.

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