



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JEFF DUNHAM



Written by AMA staff (2013); Added to HP files by JS (11/2013)

The following was published in the December 2013 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the "I Am the AMA" section.

I Am the AMA Jeff Dunham, Stand-up comedian and ventriloquist

JS: How did you get involved with model aviation?

JD: In 1980, I was a freshman in college and I was driving through a parking lot in Irving, Texas, in the middle of the night. I saw this little radio-controlled car in the middle of the parking lot with a couple of guys next to it.

Suddenly it picked up into the air in a hover. I had never seen anything like that. I went over and talked to these guys and within a few minutes they sold me a wooden-frame Mantis and everything else I needed. I knew nothing about modeling and that is how I got started.

I fiddled with the Mantis and crashed it I don't know how many times trying to learn to hover. Then out came the Cricket. I have all of Gorham's' stuff and that was it.

JS: How has model aviation impacted your life and/or career?

JD: Thanks to RC helicopters, I became interested in full-scale helicopters because of a company called RotorWay which builds full-size kits. So I transitioned from models. That vast knowledge of rotary flight, how it works, and the piloting skills transferred over to building the RotorWay helicopter and piloting it.

In the school they say that the people who fly models learn infinitely quicker than someone who has never touched one. I was hovering and doing maneuvers in the full-scale aircraft in a quarter of the time of other pilots who had never touched a model helicopter before.

That changed my life because I have learned to build full-scale helicopters. I had never worked on a "real" engine before I became a pilot.

Some of the skills have even transitioned into building my characters: the dummies. If you opened up one of my characters you would find bellcranks, fittings, and such that come from hobby shops.

JS: What disciplines of modeling do you currently participate in?

JD: Occasionally I will mess with a car, but it is 90% helicopters. I have gotten a little into quadcopters since the technology has come so far and it's so much fun. I have flown a plane or two, but I'm really into the helicopters.

JS: What are your other hobbies?

JD: Building the dummies and I'm a complete Apple computer geek. I go all the way back to the beginning with them in 1984 when the first Mac came out.

I collect dummies and Apple computers. I have almost every significant Macintosh model that has come out since 19884.

I'm going to start my own geek museum. I also have a nice collection of historical dummies – one goes back more than 100 years.

JS: Who (or what) has influenced you most?

JD: In the modeling business it's Robert Gorham. I knew his father and I knew Robert when he was a championship helicopter flier back in the 1980s and '90s. When I moved to California, I got to know them well. They were very supportive.

Now it's Sergio Marachilian who has a hobby shop, PiroFlip RC, in the valley. He and Roman are here [at the 2013 International Radio Controlled Helicopter Association Jamboree] with me. Roman has helped teach me 3-D.

JS: How did you get started in ventriloquism?

JD: Ventriloquism was very simple. I saw a dummy in a store window when I was eight years old. It showed up under the Christmas tree.

I taught myself the skill using books, records, and a lot of practice.

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