



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of LEN PURDY

Born August 19, 1921 Started modeling in the 1930s
AMA #129



Written by AMA staff (01/1999), LS (03/1990), JPB (03/1990); Formatted by JS (12/2005), Reformatted by JS (01/2010)

The following was printed in Model Aviation's AMA News column about the 1998 Model Aviation Hall of Fame winner. (January 1999)

Len Purdy - 1998

Len Purdy, Oakwood, Georgia, takes great pride in holding AMA number 129, an original number, which he obtained when he joined the AMA the year it took over from NAA, its forerunner. As a 12-year-old, he became engrossed with aeromodeling after winning his first contest in 1933.

His passion for modeling was evidenced not only through his flying and participation as a Contest Director, but the fact he was instrumental in the formation of clubs. He was also responsible for creating a system for the selection of the United States FAI teams through the use of local competitions to earn points to select participants for a final Masters" event.

Over the years, Len operated three different companies related to model activities. The first, established in 1955, was the Ectron Products, devoted to the manufacture of RC escapements. In 1960, Ectron evolved into Cobb Hobby Manufacturing. Finally, in 1964, the business was moved to Oakwood, Georgia and the name became Lanier RC. The contribution of Lanier RC to the hobby/sport cannot be overemphasized. Sensing that many potential modelers lacked the skills or desire to build, but wished to fly, Len began producing a line of models now referred to as "ARF" (Almost Ready to Fly). Between 1964 and 1978, almost 150,000 of these models were sold -16 different model types in all. The ability to repair a dinged wing and continue a contest was demonstrated time and again. On two occasions, Lanier models were used by Jim Whitley and Jim Kirkland to win international events. These models are being produced yet today under the Lanier name after Len sold the company in 1980.

The following are from Purdy's Hall of Fame application, submitted and written by Joyce Purdy Borra.

Len Purdy's 150, 000 "Ready-to-Fly Airplanes Revolutionized R/C Modeling

*Or ... What it was like to have an inventor in the family
by Joyce Purdy Borra*

Len Purdy's "almost-ready-to-fly" planes used the first new construction technology since the introduction of silk to cover the wing spars of balsa planes. The revolutionary plastic and Styrofoam models contributed significantly to the rapid growth of the R/C modeling hobby in the 1970s.

Ready-to-fly planes allowed those modelers who preferred **flying** to **building** to enter the sport in large numbers. Thousands of new modelers got into the hobby because they could now taste the thrill of flying without first spending months at a workbench.

It is logical that my dad, Len Purdy, should be the one to think about ready-to-fly. Len Purdy had been a modeler since he was 12. He loved competing in contests. He loved flying. He did not love having to sit out his turn at a contest because he had crashed his scratch-built model. For Dad, frustration became a challenge. How could he make models quick to build and quick to repair so he could spend more hours in the air???

The answer was the Lanier Industries "Jubilee" airplane. The first Jubilees were hand-built in our basement in Gainesville, GA in 1964. Before the idea could catch on, Dad had to prove that the Jubilee would fly. So he flew his new model at contests all over the US. To the surprise of many, it flew well! (He got a big boost later when Jim Whitely and Jim Kirkland won the Internats with his ready-to-fly planes.)

It was at the contests that Dad could demonstrate one of the chief benefits of the new technology. When he crashed a Jubilee, he was frequently able to make a field repair and get back in line for his regular turn. One reason was that the Jubilee was inherently stronger. A crash that would disintegrate the wing of a bench-built model would simply dent the Styrofoam wing of the Jubilee. All Dad had to do was cut out the dented chunk of wing material and glue in a new block of Styrofoam. THAT little field demonstration made quite an impression!

He also had to prove that the new plane was quick to assemble. So he would sit new modelers down at the workbench with a kit and some supervision, and in about six hours, they would have a plane in which to install their radios.

By 1966, Lanier Industries had enough orders to support a factory. Between 1964 and 1978, Lanier Industries sold almost 150,000 ready-to-fly planes...the Jubilee, Comet, Transit, Go-Go, Apache, Midget...16 models in all."

"Len Purdy: Modeler, Leader, Innovator, Hobby Manufacturer

Item A – Competitor: Leader: Modeling History

1933: Won contest at age 12 in Portsmouth, VA

1938: Started Portsmouth Aero-nuts club

1940: Joined NAA (a division for aeromodeling, AMA forerunner)

?: Joined AMA and hold membership #129

1958: Co-founded Cobb County RC club, Marietta, GA

1966: Co-founded Northeast GA RC club, Gainesville, GA

Item B – Contest Director: Masters Contest

Len Purdy suggested the procedure now used to select the US team for the international competitions. Instead of selecting team members from among contestants at the “Nats,” Purdy suggested a series of local competitions in which fliers could earn points. The top point getters would compete in a national Masters Contest for the three spots on the US team. In addition to this approach making the selection process more fair, it also served to generate much local interest in model RC flying and helped the hobby gain enthusiasts.

Item C – Industry: Business History

1955: Co-founded Ectron Products Co., Smyrna, GA. Manufactured RC escapements.

1960: Incorporated (bought our Electron partners) as Cobb Hobby Mfg. Co. in Powder Springs, GA. Manufactured compound rubber-powered and electric RC escapements.

1964: Moved business to Oakwood, GA and changed name to Lanier RC.

Manufactured the first almost-ready-to-fly kits.

Over next 14 years sold about 150,000 of these kits in 16 different models.

1980: Sold Lanier RC name and manufacturing plant to Harold Spivey.”

Len Purdy

“Aero-Nut” For Fifty Years

Or... A Passion Our Family Had to Live With

by Joyce Purdy Borra

As a boy, Dad was fascinated with airplanes. After he won his first contest with a free-flight model in Portsmouth, VA in 1933 (he was 12), there was no curbing his enthusiasm. Len got four friends together and founded the Portsmouth Aero-Nuts in 1938.

Dad continued building model planes when he moved to Georgia after the war. He co-founded the Cobb County R/C club in Marietta in 1958. As a child, I spent hundreds of boring Saturday and Sunday evenings at the “flying field” or at noisy, dusty contests. But for Dad and his friends, it was a passion we families learned to live with.

Dad started a third club in Gainesville, Georgia, when we moved there in 1966. It never took him long to find the modelers, locate a good field, and get a club going to get others interested in his passion for airplanes.

When AMA was formed, Dad joined, and he is very proud of the fact that he holds membership #129. Over the years he served as contest director for many local and regional contests, and participated in many “Nats” and Internats.”

He made a contribution to the national AMA organization in the Sixties when he suggested a new way of selecting the US team for international competitions. Dad suggested a series of local competitions in which fliers would earn points. The top point-getters would compete in a national Masters Contest for the three spots on the US team. The first national Masters was held at the Cobb County Radio Control field with Len Purdy as Contest Director.

The new selection process made selection more fair, served to generate much local interested in model Radio Control flying and helped the hobby gain enthusiasts.

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