



The AMA History Project Presents: Modeling History of PHIL MILLER



Written by PM (01/08/1957), Submitted by RBM (01/2012); Reformatted by JS (02/2012)

The following was written by Phil Miller on January 8, 1957 for his English 1500 class at the University of Kansas when he was 18 years old. According to his brother, Roger:

“Phil was 6 years younger and his references to my model making ring true. I remember his wanting to “help.”

As I read it I couldn't agree more with his observations. Still “ring true” today.

Unfortunately he didn't get to pursue modeling very long as he died of Asian flu in 1960.”

Roger submitted this piece to the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program) in January of 2012 in memory of Phil Miller. It is verbatim.

My Interest in Model Airplanes **By** **Phil Miller**

Model airplanes have always held a great fascination for me. Building something that will fly, in my opinion, is the greatest thrill that a person can have. The uninitiated can't imagine the feeling that one feels when the plane into which he has put long hours of work, leaves his hands and takes off into the sky.

I must give credit to my brother for his influence in interesting me in model airplane building. I can still remember sitting quietly to one side while he would sand and carefully fit the different parts of the plane together. He would take such great pains in building a model. He did not allow himself to be rushed and do a sloppy job, a lesson which should be practiced in everyday life. Finally, after carefully painting the model and touching it up, he would hold the model high in the air for me to see. A thing of beauty it was, almost coming to life in his hands. How I wanted to make one just like it! I often would ask him if I could help, and usually he would give me just enough to do to whet my appetite for more. On Sundays we would go out with my brother's older friends and I would watch them fly line-control models. They could make them do loops and figure-eights in the air with such precision that sometimes I could almost see the pilot in the cockpit at the controls.

Sometimes they would let me fly one of their planes, but all I could do was make it go around in circles. They were patient with me though, and said that the loops and figure-eights would come in time and that first I must get the feel of the lines and learn to control the plane. Because my brother and his friends were always nice to me and looked upon me as a student of theirs rather than as a little brother and a nuisance, my interest in model planes grew and grew and was never hindered or snuffed out.

It is almost impossible for a person to make model planes and not become acquainted with some of the technical aspects of the aeronautical field. In order to build even a model he must know something about plane construction. It would look quite silly to put the wings where the rudder

should go and vice-versa, and of course the plane wouldn't fly.

Knowledge of different flight patterns also come in handy for the young pilot. Often in airplane meets he is required to perform several patterns, two of which I mentioned earlier such as looping and the figure eight. If he is acquainted with several of the technical aspects of the plane in flight, as for instance which way the plane will go if he pulls the ailerons down, the pilot will definitely be able to control his plane better.

Engine construction will also be of benefit to the model builder. Although the model airplane engine is a miniature, the experience to be gained by working with it is valuable. The type and size of engines range from ones which are about the size of your thumb and forefinger to engines as big as your hand. I think that the smaller engines are the most fun with which to work. They usually sound like a swarm of wasps buzzing around, and long hours of pleasure can be obtained by working with them.

The larger engines are used in the Free Flight models. They need a larger engine because sometimes their wingspan may be twelve feet or more in length in order to achieve a longer glide pattern. Consequently they need an engine that will get their relatively huge frame up in the air.

In every hobby there are always some drawbacks. This does not exclude the model airplane hobby. If a person is money conscious he will have to budget his funds accordingly. Usually the engine of the plane is the most expensive part. Several of the more complex planes have two engines, which can make the plane cost quite a bit. If one does not like to start his plane motor by hand, electric starters can be bought for about the same price as a good sized plane itself. With the advancement of radio-controll [sic] models, new equipment must be bought in order to obtain maximum performance from the plane. There are all types of planes ranging in all different price brackets and one can usually select a plane suited to his taste and pocketbook.

Fuel is another problem which must be faced. These engines which run on such a rich mixture use up gas as if it were water. A person can run up quite a bill by simply keeping his plane supplied with fuel.

We must also take into consideration that sometimes a person's plane simply refuses to fly, due either to faulty plane construction or engine failure. This is why a person must be careful in what he is doing when building the model. As I pointed out earlier, the knowledge of aeronautics will come in handy when making the plane. There will, no doubt, be many crackups. But the hobbyist should take this in stride and realize that since "Rome wasn't built in a day", he too, must be patient.

If one is a socializer, he need not think that building model airplanes is a drawback. Many people think that a hobby like model airplanes will hinder their social life, thinking that the model builder must sit in a corner, making his models, only to be enjoyed by himself. This is the wrong attitude entirely, for the whole purpose behind model airplane building is for the enjoyment of others as well as your own satisfaction. Just look at the expressions on some of the faces of the people who are watching a model airplane meet. I am confident that you won't find an expression of boredom in the crowd. If the person feels that he still wants to have more company

in his hobby, he can join various model airplane clubs throughout the United States. In these clubs he will meet new friends and gain knowledge about his hobby by working with the members of the club. By joining these clubs he will find that his travel experience can also be enlarged. Many times these clubs go to regularly sponsored meets in order to compete with other clubs. Regular trips can be planned to national and state meets and this travel is enjoyed by all. One need not feel that the expenditures always exceed the receipts, for many times valuable prizes are given away at these model airplane meets. I am reminded of the saying, "You only get out of something what you put into it". This is especially true if a person is competing for prizes. If he has put lots of work on his model, and taken the care and patience necessary for a good model, his efforts usually will not go unrewarded. Later, if this person still retains his interest in his hobby he might eventually go into the model airplane business. With the increasing number of hobbyists in America today, there is a growing demand for model supply shops. If I had not already chosen my profession, I might have been tempted to open a hobby shop and sell various types of hobby equipment.

Taking then the advantages and disadvantages of model airplane building, we must weigh the two together before we form our opinion of the hobby. I am sure that most of you have realized that the advantages of this hobby greatly outweigh the disadvantages. Model airplane building is a universal hobby which can be enjoyed by people of all ages. Couple with this the self-satisfaction of creating from wood and paper a device that will fly, as well as making new friends and one will have a hobby which is extremely beneficial and enjoyable.

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