



The AMA History Project Presents: History of TROY BUILT MODELS



Written by JS (11/2009); Reformatted by JS (05/2011)

Jay Smith wrote the following, published in the About Us section of Model Aviation magazine, November 2009 issue.

About Us: Troy Built Models

Owner Gene Payson's goal for Troy Built Models (TBM) is to be the “Wal-Mart of the model business,” providing a large selection of items at a low cost. To reach this goal, he has continually added product lines and purchased smaller companies, allowing him to amass a wealth of goodies that encompasses propeller- and turbine-powered aircraft.

Gene got involved in flying models at a young age. He started with CL with a friend in Illinois at age 12, and then he moved to RC by the age of 15. Later in life, Gene was ultimately drawn to International Miniature Aerobatic Club (IMAC) competition.

Taking advantage of his early retirement, he put in a lot of time practicing. That allowed him to quickly move up from the Basic through the Unlimited classes.

Gene purchased TBM from Troy Crowe in 2000, because the company had one of the best IMAC airplanes at that time: the *One Design*. Gene moved TBM from Michigan to the warmer climate of Florida in late 2002.

The company slowly began to add parts, to better support the aircraft line that it stocked. Gene was happy to take advantage of the year-round flying, but as his product lines grew, so did the demands of running the company, which kept him from getting his flying fix.

At roughly this time, Gene pioneered the use of carbon-fiber wing tubes after he found a good supply from a sail company. These components became hugely popular, and more and more sizes were needed.

“Once they are a joy to fly, it’s time to move on,” Gene told me about aircraft design and development.

Drawing from his experience as an engineer, Gene has developed several aircraft through the years. From helping design the first *Extra 260* for RC to pioneering a low-cost trainer jet, this is what keeps him excited about the hobby.

Being a history buff, Gene researches aircraft and pilots, looking for ideas for new models. Then he solicits the opinions of friends and club members about which airplanes they think will sell

well. As a businessman, Gene realizes that just because he likes an aircraft doesn't mean it will be successful on the market.

Armed with feedback, he often designs the model and then has an employee build the prototype. While Gene tweaks the design, he looks for feedback on markings or color schemes; the aircraft are normally available in two to three colors.

Lately, Gene has been interested in scale subjects. He is currently working on a WACO that will use a radial engine and be available in four color schemes.

Even when he's not designing his own models, Gene meticulously pours over each aircraft he has an interest in selling and provides feedback on ways to make it better. If the factory is willing to listen and incorporate the suggested changes, TBM will stock the model.

I asked Gene what types of changes were typical in design. He said almost everything, from throttle-servo placement to structural changes to the airframe.

Today, TBM is one of the largest hobby shops in the world. It is completely mail order and sells products at trade shows and flying events. The company has 21 employees, including Gene's wife, who handles invoicing and running the shipping department. TBM stocks more than 2,000 products and is always looking to continue to diversify its lineup.

The company took on the Pilot RC aircraft product line this year, and it has been quite popular. The models vary in size from 30% to 47% and include the *Decathlon*, *Yak*, *Extra 260*, *Extra 300*, and *Katana*.

For Warbird fans, TBM has added ESM: a new line of models that includes the *Corsair*, *Ki-84*, *Dauntless*, *Spitfire*, *Stuka*, and *Tigercat*. Ultimately, TBM plans to stock upward of 35 ESM aircraft when they become available.

I had the opportunity to visit TBM in Sarasota, Florida, before attending the Joe Nall Giant Scale Fly-In in May. Gene told me in advance that it's not too exciting to look at warehouses and boxes, but I thought it would be a great opportunity to meet the people behind the company.

Gene's passion for the hobby definitely came through in our conversation as he showed me around and introduced me to his staff. I knew he was as hooked on aviation as I am, when his wife proudly showed me a picture of the family dog sitting in an airplane pedal car!

If you are looking for one-stop shopping with a company that supports everything it sells, including Giant Scale aerobatic models, warbirds, jets, and everything that goes with them, look into TBM.

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Sources:

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