



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of DAVE MATHEWSON

Started modeling in 1960
AMA #23



Written by JG (05/2009); Reformatted by JS (05/2011); Updated by JS (05/2013, 03/2018)

Career:

- 2008-April 2011: 23rd AMA President
- April 2011-April 2018: AMA Executive Director
- Flies RC Pattern/Precision Aerobatics
- Served in an officer position of an upstate New York association of clubs.

Honors:

- 2003: AMA Exemplary Award
- 2006: AMA Distinguished Service Award
- 2009: AMA Fellowship Award
- 2011: AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame Inductee

The following was printed in the "Born to Fly" section of Model Aviation magazine in the May 2009 issue, written by Jim Graham. In spring of 2011, Dave Mathewson was hired as Executive Director of the AMA.

Getting to know AMA President Dave Mathewson

I am fortunate to have known Dave Mathewson for several years. Since the day we met, he has treated me with respect and is quick to reply to any question. He has also been a lot of fun to hang out with at shows across the country.

Dave and his wife, Ginger, are good people. It dawned on me that many AMA members don't know much about him, so I tracked him down at the 2009 AMA Expo in California and asked him some questions, hoping that it might help readers feel as if they know him better.

JG: Is the position of AMA president what you thought it would be?

DM: I had a perception of what I expected it to be. As far as job responsibilities, it has met those expectations. It has taken more of my time than I expected. I think things are going well, and I enjoy what I'm doing.

JG: I envision you in Muncie doing your thing, but I wonder what kind of workload it is.

DM: Like most of us, I have a full-time job. I own a dental laboratory in upstate New York. I spend a significant amount of time doing AMA business. I average about 1,000 emails a month, and I answer them all. I was out to Muncie nine times, and that is usually three days or four days at a shot.

I want to get to all AMA districts this year [2008], which means 11 locations. I made 10 out of the 11. So I'm on the road quite a bit and spend a considerable amount of time at home doing logistical work. I'm pretty fortunate that my work schedule is flexible enough to allow me to do that.

JG: When did you get into RC in general?

DM: My dad was into RC models, so I have been flying models since I was 8 years old. I don't remember a time when I wasn't flying RC models.

JG: When it comes to RC, some pilots fly everything. I am a profile-model pilot and only focus on that. Is there a particular type of flying style that you prefer?

DM: I always preferred RC Pattern/Precision Aerobatics, and I flew that for a number of years. I think I've done probably a little bit of everything. I used to do some Quickie racing, and I probably still have the granddaddy of all profile planes. I have a Sig Fazer that I built in the 90s. I still have it, still fly it, and I have a ball with it.

JG: At what point did you have aspirations of getting involved in the AMA, and did you ever think you would be the president of the AMA?

DM: I thought one day I would be a vice president. I didn't really ever consider being the AMA president. I'm probably like a lot of folks; my involvement started by volunteering to do some of the operational leadership in my local club. I held every office there.

In upstate New York, we created an association of clubs and [I] was one of the first officers there. It's just something I do. I think it's something that is instilled in you and you grow up with. Going through school, I was always the student senate guy, and it's just an extension of that. I always had aspirations of being an AMA vice president, and once I got involved at that level, I decided to go a step higher.

JG: I was a big 3-D proponent back in the days when that was a dirty word. I met you at a trade show, and you took the time to listen to my points and discuss my issues. That was when I became a Dave Mathewson fan. It is interesting that that encounter all those years ago brings us to this point in time when you are the president of the AMA.

I have preached the RC religion of 3-D for years and thought that our days of being treated as second-class citizens at certain fields was over. I was lucky to have a very supportive club in Nashville, but that was not the case for my online friends. I thought that at this point 3-D was widely accepted as an important, vibrant part of our hobby. I am amazed that, once again, I'm hearing stories of 3-D pilots being run off of fields and potentially out of the hobby. What is your take on 3-D and what it means to the hobby?

DM: You know, I look at the activity that is taking place in the hobby and the percentage that is 3-D, which is obviously significant. It has made significant inroads into model aviation over the

last few years. I don't see 3-D any differently than when model helicopters or ducted fans were new, and there will be something someday that comes out as the next big thing.

It's not the mind-set of AMA the association, but it is the mind-set of some of our members. I was never exposed to a lot of this until I became an AMA officer. My local club is probably like a lot of other clubs: to us it doesn't matter what you fly as long as you fly. I think that is the goal we should all try to aspire to.

JG: This year you surprised me at my own event that I host every year. I have put together a profile model 3-D-based event in Nashville, Tennessee called NashBro, for the last six or seven years. Mark T. Smith, the AMA executive vice president, has shown up at a lot of Pro Bro events and always supported us.

I looked up on Saturday afternoon and realized that you were on our field walking toward me! I was totally blown away; I had no idea you were coming. And if that wasn't enough, later in the day you presented me with a plaque from the AMA and blew my hat off! I wanted to thank you for all of that and taking time to visit a bunch of 3-D profile pilots having fun in a field. I was also excited that you actually got to see what a Pro Bro 3-D event was all about.

DM: Well, obviously we gave you the plaque because we wanted to thank you. That was planned months and months in advance, but the way. I knew in early spring of last year that we were coming down to NashBro. You know, it's an event. I didn't hear any "3-D" or "profile"; it was just a fly-in, and it had a camaraderie that went along with it.

I think that is the way we should all participate in this hobby, whether you're flying helicopters, sailplanes, or IMAC [International Miniature Aerobatic Club]. We are all in this hobby because we love model aviation, and that's the way we should treat each other.

JG: Many of us have families, jobs, and things we need to do. The Pro Bros and the RC hobby in general have allowed me to make lifelong friends. The amazing thing is that this was done through a Web forum. We meet up with one another across the country and fly together, and there is no way to put a value on that.

DM: There's not. And as someone who has been in model aviation all my life, 90% of my friends are probably model aviation enthusiasts. I don't know anything different and it's been such a big part of my life and an important part of my life. You ask, "What's the value of clubs and what's the value of AMA?" You hear all the time: it's bringing modelers together. It's as much about the friendship as it is about the flying.

JG: My goal, when I go to a show or cover an event for RCGroups.com, is to have a good time and make sure everyone around me is having a good time, and I hope that's what we all do.

DM: Absolutely! You know I love this stuff. It doesn't matter what you're flying. I love going to events, whether they are for Warbirds or whatever. When I get to those events, I love watching things fly and talking about them. The hobby is all-encompassing.

JG: The goal of this month's column is to let the membership get to know you better. Is there anything you would want to say if an AMA member were standing in front of you?

DM: The Executive Council and those of us who are the leadership of the AMA are modelers just like everybody else. We fly our model airplanes or our helicopters. Some of us are 3-D pilots or turbine fliers, but we're active fliers like all of our members.

We have worked hard this year to become an association that is more progressive and does more to advocate for our members, and I think that will benefit all of us in the long run.

JG: When I came up, the AMA was a bad word in my group. I always felt on the fringe or outside of RC. I never felt a part of the AMA as a 3-D pilot. It's great to now have been around long enough to feel that the AMA defends and supports us. I think it's great that you and the other officers are so accessible. The fact that I have an AMA shirt on would have been unthinkable a few years ago!

DM: Well, that's exactly right. Again, model aviation is more than the airplane that you fly. I spoke with some of the folks down at NashBro, and each niche of the hobby thinks of themselves as rebels or radicals. The truth is, and I'm a little older than you, when I was your age, we were doing the same things you guys were doing. There were probably members back then who thought I was a rebel as well.

The fact is, we aren't rebels; we just all enjoy model aviation. I'll leave you with this comment that my friend, Dean Pappas, used to start his columns with: "If it flies, I'm interested in it." That epitomizes how I feel about model aviation.

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