



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of MARK FREELAND



Written by JH (2018), JH (2011), and JS (2012); reformatted by JS (04/2019)

The following was submitted by Joe Hass for Mark Freeland's nomination for the AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame. Freeland was inducted in 2018.

There are precious few modelers who successfully and simultaneously participate in RC, CL, and FF. Mark Freeland is one of those individuals designing, demonstrating, teaching and manufacturing a wide variety of multi-disciplinary aircraft and accessories through his company, Retro RC. More than just business, Mark actively reaches out to the public as well as the aeromodeling and educational communities.

Mark has taken all of his life experiences as a successful engineer and aviation enthusiast and created some fascinating aircraft and accessories for all of us to enjoy through his company. There is a decided emphasis on successful designs of the past, hence the name Retro. But Mark also provides young people with an avenue to enjoy model aviation the way he has for many years.

Always thinking outside the box, he looked at the “standard curriculum” of simple introductory aircraft and could see why youngsters weren't interested. Mark went to his own inventory of designs and presented a plan to a group of students that would allow them to build, cover, and fly an unusual canard rubber powered aircraft, his version of the Frank Ehling Trioxide Darling. All the kids had to do was make the initial purchase at a deeply discounted price and show up.

Mark invested about 2 hours per week in class with the kids. Obviously, a lot of prep work went into each session. But in 10 short weeks (a phenomenal commitment for a one-man business operation) all 20 students finished their aircraft. At the appointed “fly day,” all those present flew successfully! One young man who finished his model was not present as he was required to stay home on doctor's orders. Upon getting clearance to return to school, his aircraft put in the longest flight of any of the participants. Mark has repeated this phenomenally successful effort again and again with students young and old around the area. See attachment #1, *Model Aviation*, June 2011.

Again supporting Science Olympiad in 2016, 2017, and 2018, Mark adapted the Minnow design to produce an easily-built rubber powered kit for young Olympiad competitors. With a wing design that newcomers can't build backwards, enough parts for two aircraft, and a jig to make sure everything comes out straight, Mark has once again served the national educational and S.T.E.M. community well. Mark further goes above and beyond by participating as a Science Olympiad counselor and judge.

In 2016, Mark upgraded the 1950s Sassy Saucer CL design to make it a successful CL and RC design named the Saucerus (see October 2016 *Model Aviation*). Mark just introduced a remake of the Ebenezer, a “Cartoon Scale” biplane that originally appeared as a free flight design in the 1958 British *Aeromodeller* magazine, creating a precision laser cut kit that could be flown RC or Free Flight. Beyond working out all the bugs and creating a high-quality kit, Mark spent multiple weeks teaching aeromodeler enthusiasts who have never built a kit how to construct their own

flying machine.

Mark's creativity and commitment doesn't stop there. He generously supports multiple events. When the first Ultra Micro RC Pylon Races were held at Ultimate Soccer Arenas in Pontiac, MI in December 2012, Mark designed, manufactured, and donated aircraft themed wallets as prizes.

When shuttle Endeavour astronaut Lt. Col. Greg Johnson came to town for a speaking tour, Mark again designed and manufactured additional wallets commemorating the last flight of the shuttle and presented them to Johnson and those responsible for arranging the speaking tour.

Mark supports the Free Flight community with numerous designs and quality products. In order to help the AMA Headquarters staff understand Free Flight, Mark conducted a Free Flight workshop during the 2012 Free Flight Nationals. Each participant successfully built and flew their own Camp Racer under Mark's expert tutelage. See the attachment #2 article from *Model Aviation*, December 2012.

Mark recognizes the value of S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) education. Mark participated in the S.T.E.M. Teacher's Workshop in October 2013. [*Model Aviation*, January 2014.] After his experiences the first year, Mark designed and manufactured kits that allowed students and teachers to experiment with the load-carrying capabilities in different structures. He demonstrated them to the teachers during the 2014 S.T.E.M. Teacher's Workshop.

Mark continues to fly Free Flight competitively, entering and doing well in numerous categories.

During all of this activity, Mark developed, manufactured, and distributed multiple new RC, CL, and FF kits, a unique building board system and numerous aeromodeling accessories. He has also devised and shared cutting edge assembly techniques and participated in a Building Advice Podcast on October 9, 2014. Unused building material from his manufacturing operation has been donated to local children's programs.

2015 was a watershed year for Mark supporting the Free Flight community. He acquired Campbell's Custom Kits and Campbell's Models, two separate free flight kit and supply companies. Both were destined to shut down, robbing modelers of many unique items. As is typical of Mark, he didn't merely move inventory but instead immediately updated designs and began producing laser cut kits. Mark is now shipping worldwide. Simultaneously, Mark developed what has become a very popular flight box for electric flyers and has done design, development, and production work for other manufacturers. Mark has also filled single requests from modelers who needed precision cut parts for their individual projects.

Mark has been rightly recognized for his efforts by being awarded the Carl and Beth Goldberg Vital People Award.

It is difficult to clearly write this submission as Mark has been simultaneously involved in so many aeromodeling activities for such a long period of time. Mark's passion for aviation, aeromodeling, dedication to learning and his continued generous commitment to sharing with everyone make him a natural for the 2018 Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

Joe Hass

The following, written by Joe Hass, was printed on page 11 of the June 2011 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

Dedicated Modeler and Manufacturer Introduces the Thrill of Flight to Middle Schoolers

Picture a four-year-old boy gathering scraps of wood to make out the rudimentary shape of an airplane and finding hours of fun sitting on and flying his creation. Move forward about a decade and picture that same young man struggling in school, although his parents were accomplished academics.

Picture a shop teacher who intervened and provided a method of education, not from books, but from using your hands and working with wood. Now move forward many decades to the present. The young man is now graying and semiretired, but with the same passion for aviation, learning, and sharing both with youth in the same way that shop teacher did for him so many years ago.

Mark Freeland of Retro RC (<http://retro.us.com>) has taken his life experiences and created some fascinating aircraft and accessories for all of us to enjoy. There is a decided emphasis on successful designs of the past, hence the name Retro. But Mark also wanted to provide young people with an avenue to enjoy model aviation as he has for many years.

Always thinking outside the box, Mark looked at the standard curriculum of simple introductory aircraft and could see why youngsters weren't interested. Mark went to his own inventory of designs and presented a group of students from Geisler Middle School in Walled Lake, Michigan, with a plan that would allow them to build, cover, and fly an unusual canard rubber-powered aircraft: his version of the Frank Ehling Trioxide Darling. All the kids had to do was make the initial purchase at a deeply discounted price and show up.

Mark invested roughly two hours per week in class with the kids. Much preparation work went into each session, but in 10 short weeks, all 20 students finished their aircraft.

At the appointed "fly day," those present flew successfully! One young man was required to stay home per doctor's orders, but upon getting clearance to return to school, his aircraft put in the longest flight of any of the participants.

They built all-balsa, rubber-powered canards, covered them with tissue, and all flew! A great design was matched with laser-cut technology and a talented and dedicated instructor.

Retro RC is located in Keego Harbor, Michigan. Mark can be reached at (248) 212-9666.

- Joe Hass
Skymasters RC Club
District VII

The following, written by Jay Smith, was printed on page 13 of the December 2012 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

AMA Employees Try Free Flight

Interacting with members allows AMA employees to be exposed to the different disciplines of aeromodeling. Add to that the fact that many events are held here at the International Aeromodeling Center, and many have the chance to see firsthand what the excitement is about. However, employees who are not modelers miss out on the experience of actually building and flying their very own models.

Shortly after the July issue of *MA* was released, which was dedicated to FF, there seemed to be a growing interest in the office to learn more about this early form of flight.

With the FF Nats on the horizon, Mark Freeland, owner of Retro RC, agreed to conduct a FF workshop. Everyone who attended built his or her own catapult-launched Camp Racer.

Mark brought a couple of his competition models to give a basic FF overview and then everyone dove into building his or her own Camp Racer. Mark walked the staff members through every step of the process.

How often does one get the chance to build a model alongside the designer? It was obvious that everyone benefitted from this opportunity and it ensured the successful completion of a dozen aircraft.

When construction was complete and the models were adorned with each pilot's Sharpie color scheme of choice, it was time to go outdoors and learn the next skill: trimming a FF model.

The Camp Racer is designed with added weight in the nose that is easily sanded away using an emery board to get the perfect balance. So, in the next 15 minutes, the excitement built as pilots dialed in their models and achieved progressively longer flights.

More than half of the FF workshop attendees had never constructed or flown a FF model-except for a paper airplane. Everyone who attended left with a greater appreciation of building and flying FF models.

For more information about the Camp Racer and Retro RC, visit www.retrorc.us.com.

-Jay Smith

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