



# The AMA History Project Presents: History of STEVENS AEROMODEL



Written by DD (03/2013); Reformatted by JS (08/2013)

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*Don DeLoach wrote the following, published in the About Us section of Model Aviation magazine, March 2013 issue.*

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## **About Us: Stevens AeroModel**

As a 10-year-old son of a military officer, Bill Stevens had no idea he'd someday be the owner of an electric RC kit manufacturing company.

He began flying at that age with Cox plastic CL ARFs sporting the company's ubiquitous spring-start .049 glow engines. "I also did model rocketry for a time with the help of my dad, and then RC cars," he explained.

Bill dabbled in RC airplanes in his early teens, but then his hobbies took a back seat to school, and eventually family and career. Until recently, he was a graphic information systems engineer with the city of Colorado Springs, Colorado.

"I got back into RC as a helium blimp pilot – flying at trade shows and popular sporting ventures like college and the U.S. Air Force Academy," Bill said.

This is about the time career met hobby. According to Bill, "My job as a mapping engineer required me to learn AutoCAD, basically on my own. I got good at it, and was soon using it in my off-hours to improve the performance of my blimps.

"From there I met Doug Binder of Mountain Models, an RC kit manufacturer then based in Colorado Springs. Doug laser cut some of my early Stevens AeroModel (SA) kits that I brought to the Northeast Electric Aircraft Technology (NEAT) Fair in 2002."

The NEAT Fair was a smashing success for Bill. He recalls selling out of his kits by noon on the first day. Upon his return home, he began seriously thinking about SA as a part-time business opportunity.

"[The time period of] 2002-2003 was a great time to be launching an electric RC kit business. The designs on the market at the time were heavy and of disappointing performance.

"My lightweight CAP 232 was a renowned aerobatic .40-size park flyer that change the game, despite the fact that it used a tame (by modern standards) brushed motor and NiCd battery."

By 2004-2005, Bill had purchased his second and third lasers, added more kit offerings, and was struggling to balance his full-time job while also designing and filling Internet orders for SA kits.

"I knew something had to give, and I cut back to part time at the city, and then eventually left to devote all my time to SA in about 2005."

In approximately 2007, with the kit line still expanding and demand soaring, Bill opened a retail hobby shop/manufacturing warehouse, and added several employees. It was a rewarding experiment that taught him a valuable lesson.

“I learned that I would rather devote most of my time to developing great kits than serving as a full-line hobby shop with full-line hobby items like cars, trains, etc. so we closed the shop in 2011 and have shifted our focus back to the Stevens AeroModel RC line.”

### **The Aerodrome**

The latest news for the company involves the purchase of 80 acres of pasture east of Colorado Springs, where Bill and his family are pursuing their dream of the Stevens Aerodrome – a private model airport mere steps behind the family home and company headquarters.

“The plan is to open it to the public in the fall of 2013. We’re excited!” he said.

### **Uncommon Products**

Stevens AeroModel prides itself on innovation. From the beginning, the company has been proving wrong the hidebound constraints of the past, such as the misconception that balsa kits are difficult to build. Bill explains:

“In the beginning, we decided to use balsa and very light plastic coverings out of necessity. We simply couldn’t get the high performance out of heavier airframes using old brushed motors and NiCds. The difficult was that we were catering to a younger generation mostly interested in flying and not building. So, this first customer group was basically dragged kicking and screaming into the building.”

He added, “But this was not the more difficult kind of building involving lots of cutting and sawing. Our kits basically go together mechanically, with little or no cutting and little glue required. This enables the typical builder to put one of our kits together in a fraction of the time of a traditional kit.”

### **Uncommon Customers**

Bill considers Stevens AeroModel customers discriminating and loyal, and feels that they expect different things than ARF customers.

“Recent years have seen the big-box hobby companies offer much better flying small RC kits and ARFs than they used to,” Bill added. “This has focused us even more intently on serving our loyal customers.”

The typical SA builder is more attracted to nostalgia and whimsical aircraft than a low price, Bills said. SA model designs are easy on the eyes, and the company carries only top-of-the-line motors, batteries, and speed controllers.

“We’re probably best known for our DiddleBug indoor kit and our new Micro Builder Program – an annual subscription service that ships a newly released kit quarterly,” Bill said. “Subscribers

get new kits at a significant discount and about a month before public release, which has been a well-received concept.”

### **Micro Builder Program**

The Micro Builder Program is subscription based and offers annual priority access, exclusive member-only discounts, and quarterly shipments of the latest indoor micro kit offering from Stevens AeroModel. Program members receive:

- Four new Stevens AeroModel micro indoor kits shipped free to the member’s door quarterly – a \$200 value!
- Four free shipping coupons redeemable for free standard delivery or up to \$12.50 off any other shipping method – a \$50 value.
- Special member-only savings of an additional 15% off the sale price on SA kit products at [www.StevensAero.com](http://www.StevensAero.com)

The \$125 annual subscription delivers an immediate combined product and shipping benefit of \$250. That’s a 50% savings! Plus, members save hundreds more with exclusive member-only savings at [www.StevensAero.com](http://www.StevensAero.com).

### **The Future**

The year of 2012 was a time of transition for Stevens AeroModel. With the opening of new factory and airfield, 2013 will be the year of new beginnings.

Stevens Aerodrome will be a place to test aircraft as well as fun-fly, and Bill plans to host customers from around the world. “Folks always like to see where a product is made,” he said. “Here, they’ll be able to test it out before buying it, which will be a much more personal experience.”

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#### **Sources:**

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