

OLD TIME BLACK MAGIC



By Dave Surry - 2352

While the South Western Ontario Old Timers, a club of 22 members, is still affiliated with SAM as Chapter 89, we are now known more for its old time members than for its SAM activities.

We fly an eclectic mixture of models from a grass strip that is used as the home base for agricultural spraying aircraft near Lucan, ON, not far from London. The AgCat first flew in 1957, 61 years ago and is still going strong. It's big radial engine is reminiscent of the Harvard power plant, and is deafening as it roars past on the runway (photo 1). Just sharing the field with these full-scale old timers is a privilege.

The following are some thoughts centred on two more of our club's old time constituents; its members and one of its models. It's always fun to share, and when others compare their experiences, there may be more stories out there in other clubs worth sharing with the rest of us.

The nature of our hobby is that many of our members are ageing, and society no longer sees fixed-wing aircraft as the exciting frontier that it was when many of our members were growing up. About two-thirds of our members are older than 75, nearly half are over 80, and the oldest is in their mid-nineties.

Among our members, there are enough of us that came up through the golden age of aeromodelling to still enjoy and encourage building models from scratch, whether it be from bits of balsa or bits of foam, and shake our heads at the current trend of 'building' models by assembling pre-packaged pieces built or formed elsewhere. Not that we don't do that too, but nothing can replace the satisfaction that comes from seeing your own creation actually perform that act of magic, of actually flying!

One of those creations, aptly known as the 'Black Magic' was built by me about 60 years ago, and is still actively flying! The Black Magic is a 60" span cabin model design by Fred Hempsall,



Black Magic with the author ready for another ethereal flight.



Lloyd Switzer poses with the Dave Surry's Black Magic. Lloyd was recently honoured by MAAC with a lifetime achievement award. He also started his modelling career as a boy and at 94, he still out pilots most of us. Photos courtesy of Fred Schakel



first published by 'Aeromodeller' in 1947, which became very popular in the UK. My considerably older brother built one to fly in the Channel Islands when we lived there in the late forties, and gave me my first exposure to model aircraft.

Although I never saw him fly it, as he travelled to his flying site by bike, and I was only 6 or 7 at the time, my contribution was to occasionally stick my fingers through the doped tissue covering to hear the satisfying 'pop' when he wasn't around; just another form of hangar rash!

Despite my 'help', it flew very well, as a free flight, of course, and once had to be rescued from the sea by a friendly fisherman.

In the mid-fifties, I decided to build one here in Canada to try and re-interest my brother in the hobby, unhappily to no avail. Again, it was built as a free flight, mine powered by an ED Bee, a 1.0cc diesel. It flew elegantly, as classic cabin models do. I recall flying it during a lull in a competition at Keele and Steeles near Toronto, allowing it to take off the grass a bit too close to parked cars. As it climbed out, it bounced lightly off the slanted rear window of one of the parked cars and merrily went on its way. Not to be emulated of course, but pretty memorable at the time for a 16 year old.

As my interests became more competitive, I gifted it to a nephew who had shown some interest, but it did not



AgCat with friends, built and flown by Tom Jory

Photo courtesy of Tom Jory

inspire, so it was returned and languished in my basement during my career/family years away from the hobby.

When I retired, I decided to convert it to electric RC, and refurbish it a bit. The old tail assembly had always been prone to warping and so was rebuilt in sturdier form and with control surfaces. The fuse required work at the front, of course, but otherwise it and the wings were simply given a coat of rejuvenating butyrate dope around the original decals.

The underlying finish is nitrate-painted modelspan. Its two control surfaces are powered by 1970's Graupner servos (slow but reliable) and power comes from a 1300mAh LiPo through an Axi 2212/20 motor. It's current flying weight is just over 2 1/2 lbs.

It amazes me how these old structures, built with the likes of Ambroid, still hold together well after 60 years.

So, are there any older flying models out there?

Any clubs with an older members?