

Ross Melhuish – Balsa Beavers President 1958 - 1987

Ross Melhuish recently passed away after a short illness, but for 30 years or more, he was the heart and soul of the Balsa Beavers Model Flying Club, serving as the club's President starting in 1958.

Ross became President in the second year of the club's existence, and during that time he worked tirelessly to establish it as the vibrant organization that we still enjoy to this day.

His motto was "A club that flies together stays together". He knew that the main problem of similar model airplane clubs was the lack of a central flying field where all the membership could get together and fly.



Etobicoke Council approves Centennial Park flying site

Most clubs back in the day hopped from field to field using whatever open space they could find to fly on, which usually meant having problems with noise complaints. It was also difficult dealing with field owners who did not want the liability in case of a serious accident, and this made it sometimes impossible for the clubs to get from the owner the necessary permission for the use of their property.

Ross began his competition career in Control Line model aircraft in a time very different from the one we live in now. There were almost no ready built models available for beginners, except for the plastic Control Line models made by several manufacturers such as Cox and WenMac. These were usually sold to novice flyers who had to overcome a huge learning curve in order to make them fly successfully!

The serious model flyers of that day were not interested in these ready-built airplanes, especially because their flying characteristics were nowhere near as good as the balsa airplanes being made from plans, and kits.

Free Flight and Control Line was where the main interest in model airplanes was concentrated. Radio Control was still in its infancy. It was still too expensive and unreliable for the average modeller, but that would change later on!

The Balsa Beavers held their first large scale contest in 1961, and the Toronto & District Model Airplane Championships was born.

Ross was the key mover in getting the site for this event at the Woodbine Race Track, and his ability to secure Downsview Airport the

following year for the meet provided continuity for the contest until the club acquired their current flying site at Etobicoke Centennial Park in 1968.

He was also enough of a visionary to be able to convince the Borough of Etobicoke Council to provide the club with the area for a flying site at the newly constructed Centennial Park in 1967.

The Borough of Etobicoke provided the club with one paved circle, and two grass circles.

This area would become very important to the Balsa Beaver's survival as it was one of the few Control Line flying sites in Canada where contests could be held in a safe and controlled environment.

Ross also became involved with the Canadian National Exhibition, and coordinated an annual contest in the CNE ball park which became very popular with the Exhibition patrons, as well as the flyers who competed in it.

As well as being a deft organizer, Ross was a very skilled and savvy competitor, especially in the combat and racing events.

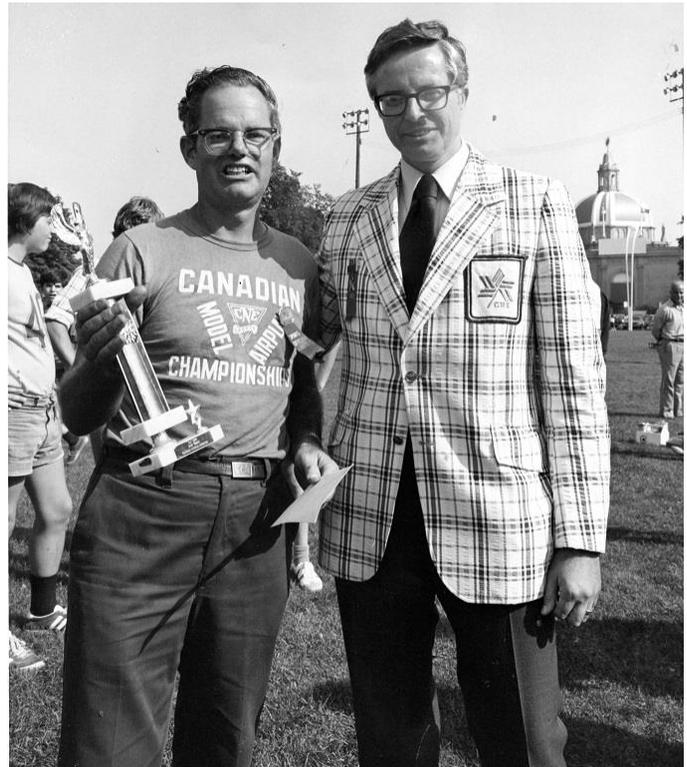
He was one of those rare individuals whose flying was natural and tactile. He always knew exactly where his model was without having to look at it, and although there are some very skilled flyers today with the same ability, in his day he was definitely a force to be reckoned with in a close combat match!

Some may have found his competitive intensity a bit hard to take at times, but that is what makes a serious competitor what he is. Losing a contest was definitely not a welcome result for Ross!

Ross flew FAI Combat (F2D) in several World Championship events. He was a member of the Canadian F2D Team in 1978, (Woodvale, Great Britain), 1980, (Poland), and 1982, (Oxelsund, Sweden.)

His talents also involved him in the C/L Scale event, where he successfully campaigned his Hawker Typhoon, Douglas DC-3, and Lockheed Lightning.

Ross also managed a few stunt flights from time to time, and for many years he was the prevailing Grand Champion at the Toronto & District Control Line Championships, as he was seen usually to be flying in almost every event.



Ross Melhuish (left) with unidentified CNE official

It is probably not an overestimation to say that Control Line is still being flown in Toronto today because of Ross. His dogged determination to keep the Balsa Beavers a going concern was passed on to the current club membership, and he will always be remembered for his enthusiasm, and hard work.

When he finally decided to retire from the Presidency of the club in 1987, there was some doubt as to whether the Balsa Beavers could carry on without his leadership. Fortunately, the club did, and so his legacy to us will be secure as long as there are flying circles, and people wanting to fly on them.

Chris Brownhill, April 26, 2016.



T H A N K Y O U

*In times of sadness,
the warmth and compassion of those who care
make the difference.*

*Thank you
for the lovely floral tribute
from Balsa Beavers
It helped to brighten our day
Maryjane Melhus
or family*