

Pilot Profile – Duane Gagnon

by Russell Knetzger

Our pilot this month is very much a sign of the economic times, being on a 3 month layoff as a carpenter with Bell Craft Builders. He mostly does residential “rough-in carpentry,” but also finish work, and some commercial. The world-wide recession that started in the United States because of its many “sub-prime home mortgages,” now going sour, is especially reducing new residential construction, causing layoffs.

Duane, 47, is using this slow-work period to return to R/C model aviation, which he was in at our field 20 years ago. While he always was building and flying rubber powered models in the early 1970s as a boy in West Allis, (West Milwaukee High School) it was during US Army service in Korea in 1980 that R/C really caught his attention. Army helicopter pilots for recreation were flying R/C fixed wing aircraft.



Returning from 3 years of Army service as a wheel mechanic, Duane found Art Schmidt and Floyd Katz at our field, and they taught him to fly. Duane advanced himself to instructor status, and was flying the Piper Comanche pictured below. He then got diverted out of R/C aviation into R/C cars, and a 29 ft., minimum 2-crew sailboat on Lake Michigan, which he still owns.



Above: Duane Gagnon's Piper Comanche (prototypes had P-51 Mustang wings,) Jack Stafford 1995 kit, with retractable landing gear, flaps,.75 Supertigre engine, Darrell Hossalla helicopter in foreground.



Above: Duane Gagnon (pronounced “Gonyo”) with his 1995 Piper Comanche, sold and now bought back, shows rear empennage refinishing in progress.

Below: Closer view of Duane Gagnon's Piper Comanche refinishing project, with the white rear sections already sanded. Original use of a low cost and low quality paint likely caused the finish failure. This work is done in Duane's home with fiancée Christina Cabrera, near S. 92nd St. and W. Oklahoma Avenue

