

## A SHORT HISTORY OF IMACS *By Ron Crawford and G R Webster*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Many new readers of *avia mini* are ex-IMACS members, so for the benefit of those who are not, I have asked for some background information. Now let RC and GRW tell us the story.

### IN THE BEGINNING

An antediluvian edition of the famous comic strip, *Donald Duck*, once distinguished between types of collectors. Some, like Donald's Uncle Scrooge MacDuck, treated collecting as a solitary pursuit, compulsively squirreling away piles of treasures and drawing their enjoyment from the size and value of their piles. For many people, however, collecting is a social activity. Collectors typically hunt together, meet to compare and celebrate their finds, help each other research and restore bedraggled examples, endlessly negotiate swaps, and shamelessly attempt with shows and exhibits to interest unsuspecting visitors in the hobby.

### DIFFERENT COLLECTING SECTORS

Until the 1980s there were no broad-based organizations or media expressly for collectors of miniature aircraft. Collectors of diecast and toy aircraft identified most closely with the collectors of diecast vehicles and ships. Collectors of ID (identification) models clustered on the fringes of aviation history and plastic modelling. Collectors of display and airliner models survived on similar ties. Each segment had an Old Guard of established collectors who had been friends for years, and some, like the devotees of 1:200 models, even had informal newsletters and meetings in major cities.

### THE PLANE NEWS BEGINS PUBLICATION

We all wished that there were specialised magazines and shows for us but that was wishful thinking. By the late 1980s desktop publishing technology had advanced to the stage that one could efficiently publish a low-circulation, colour-illustrated magazine, using an Apple computer, Pagemaker, and Rapidcolor laser printing. In 1989, Geoffrey R (GR) Webster, then an American expatriate executive living in Paris polled his collector friends around the world, found enthusiastic support, and founded a magazine called *The Plane News* (TPN). TPN was an unabashed labour of love. G R Webster edited and published without any compensation, and the writers and columnists likewise contributed their efforts. Expenses were reimbursed only in hardship cases. Involvement was much more like being in a club, with the subscription charges hopefully defraying the inevitable club expenses. Editorially TPN was also a clubby product.

We contributors built stories and made photos covering the models which excited us personally, and we wrote for a readership whom we generally knew on a first-name basis. Balance was achieved mainly by giving roughly equal space to experts on ID models, display models, diecasts, current toys, and collector miniatures. Quality and style were functions of the professional training of writers, whose average education was above a master's degree. Occasional rockets from GR to Rambling Ron and other contributors provided fine tuning. We were all surprised at the popularity of TPN. Over its life span over a thousand collectors subscribed at least once and another 2000 sample issues were circulated. Despite the interest, however, the magazine regularly operated in the red.

### THEN THE SHOWS, MAQ AND IMACS

There was a lot of interest in model shows, where members could meet one another and the public could be exposed to the hobby. A first show was held in 1991 on the grounds of Roure Inc. in Teaneck, New Jersey. That was so well attended that the show subsequently moved to a hotel in Tenafly, NJ. A second NJ show in the autumn was added to the schedule about 1993, followed by Plane News shows in Los Angeles, Amsterdam and London. For a variety of reasons, not the least being similarity in title to a radical religious periodical, TPN was renamed *Miniature Aircraft Quarterly* (MAQ) circa 1995. At the same time a non-profit corporation called IMACS (International Miniature Aircraft Society) was founded as a holding company and liability firewall for the magazine and shows. Sy Merrall of Rochester, NY was named as president of IMACS and GR Webster as secretary. Both the magazine and the shows experienced difficulty in 1997.

### PROBLEMS IN THE LATE 1990s

Publication and mailing costs increased, revenues from the magazine and memberships fell during a turbulent economic period, and the annual shortfall for 1997 rose to approximately \$8,000 US. Concurrently, GR Webster, who had personally absorbed the accumulating losses over the years, found his time and energy absorbed by successive promotions in his day job. The final issue of MAQ was published in the autumn of 1997. The IMACS shows similarly fell victim to hard times. The European shows lost their key leaders. The US shows fell victim to the bureaucracies of American states, after harassment by state sales tax authorities. (Overseas readers accustomed to casual sales and exchanges at swapmeets should

understand that each American state and Canadian province collects its own sales tax, a rough equivalent of VAT. Some sales tax authorities are extremely aggressive and view any sale at a meet as a source of revenue.) Does that mean the end of IMACS? We think not. Rod Ward has generously agreed to team up with us by providing space in *Avia Mini*, and you will see stories and columns by a number of the experts in IMACS. In addition, Michael Blutworth has single-handedly established an email digest for the exchange of letters and ideas. You can subscribe to that merely by sending your email address to [mjbscape@worldnet.att.com](mailto:mjbscape@worldnet.att.com). Michael is also beavering away at creating a print newsletter to be titled *On Model Wings*. Further down the road we anticipate the establishment of an IMACS website with links to producers, sources, and specialised archives. More on these initiatives in future issues.

In the meantime enjoy *Avia Mini* and OMW. You're already getting more bang for fewer bucks, and your old TPN issues are now collectible classics.

### FOOTNOTE BY ROD WARD:

I am happy to provide any kind of platform, or place for IMACS minds to meet. Those who have known me from the 25 years I have been professionally associated with model collecting will know that I share the same aims as the IMACS luminaries. I never joined IMACS, as I feel that it is necessary for any journalist or publisher to be detached from any pressure group or organisation, even if he shares their views. Those who know *Model Auto Review*, which I have published for the past 17 years for model vehicle enthusiasts, will hear bells ringing in the description of TPN contributors and their philosophy. I express no particular view on any aspect of aircraft collecting, as I feel it is best to appeal to as many different types of collector as possible. If a collector knows that a publisher, editor or team is biased towards one aspect then they may feel that their own interests will not be well-served. I hope that the contributions we receive will make up a balanced publication to appeal to everyone. Of course, some people want a 'dedicated' publication which only serves their small interest field, to the exclusion of all others, but the economic practicalities of publishing make it necessary to cover as much as possible, and most readers understand this. As you will expect, the first four *avia mini* volumes, which were largely experimental in balance, have produced lots of input from readers. Everyone wants their own field to be covered: old Dinky or other diecasts, tin planes, card cutouts, expensive investment

products, modern diecast and plastic ranges, travel agent display models, 1:200 recognition models, resin, white metal, you name it it's been requested. The only request for EXclusion is plastic kits, but even these will be included from time to time if relevant (for instance 1:144 collectors mostly want to know about them).

In the 16-plus years that we have published MAR, which largely fills the same role for specialist model vehicle collectors, I have never joined any societies or clubs, and never 'taken sides' in any of the inevitable feuds and clashes of personality which seem to dog any special interest activity. This has enabled me to be a detached observer, able to juggle the sometimes conflicting interests of collectors, dealers, manufacturers, writers, advertisers etc. We have never published 'advertorial' (not knowingly, anyway), and I have always tried to adapt the balance of MAR to suit current areas of interest.

Some collectors think that there is a 'perfect' scale and no other should be covered. In cars this is probably 1:43, yet there are currently a dozen vehicle scales, all avidly collected, mostly because very large vehicles and very small ones are not suited to 1:43. Similarly 1:200 is often seen as the preferred aircraft scale, but there are followers of many other scales from 1:32 to 1:500, and these will all be served in *avia mini*. We'll see how it develops, covering old tinplate, cheap modern diecasts, whatever is of interest or newsworthy. The other (perhaps pretentious) role of *Model Auto Review* has been as a kind of 'journal of record', so that readers can refer back to old copies to find out what was new in 1986 or whatever, and to cover obsolete ranges in a clear and informative way. We will try to fill the same sort of role in *avia mini*, with the help of our contributors. Articles and news will be sufficiently detailed to not insult the intelligence of a real expert on the subject, whilst still being informative to a reader for whom this is not their main field, and retaining their interest. *avia mini* is not a dry as dust esoteric learned journal.

It is important that we continue to encourage new people to collect, so they must be entertained and informed, to encourage them to join in (or to revive an otherwise stale and flagging interest). It is my job to prune more wordy manuscripts. Only rarely do more words mean more information, any subject can be condensed, even if enthusiasts wish it wasn't. I welcome all contributions, which unfortunately will all be unpaid. We are never likely to sell enough copies of *avia mini* to have paid contributions, so this will continue to be a labour of love.