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Aviation, LLC

The Death of
Seabiscuit

Owner's Corner:
Danny Hughes

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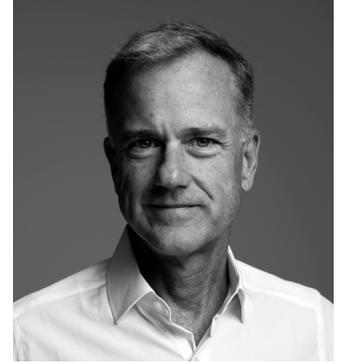
COVER PHOTO:

Jim Berry (left) and Dan Fagnoli (right) of Faber, LLC, in their Navajo. Courtesy of author Lance Phillips

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Editor's Briefing

by Lance Phillips



Staying Proficient

February is the time we have kept those resolutions we feel we can maintain, and maybe ditched those that we know we can't. Now that I don't fly for a living, I seem to resolve to not only fly more each year but to be safer and more proficient while doing so. I'm fortunate to be a member of the Rockwell Flying Club in Dallas at Addison Airport. Members have access to a very well-maintained F33 Bonanza (with air conditioning), a Cirrus SR22, and multiple single-engine Pipers. Last year, my schedule filled up quickly, and every time I thought I could get back into the air, something got in the way.

In 2026, I have resolved, once again, to be more proficient and to fly more. As a former Beech employee, I prefer to fly the club's Bonanza. It has the capability and is certified to operate in the IFR environment, but I wouldn't want to fly it in IMC. The autopilot wanders, and the cockpit instrumentation and lighting are pure vintage 1980s. There's no problem, though, filing IFR in VFR conditions. The plane performs perfectly.

My instructor and check pilot in the club is a high-altitude center controller in Dallas. He is a demanding instructor and fair evaluator, and we're lucky to have his experience in our club. When I moved back to Dallas a

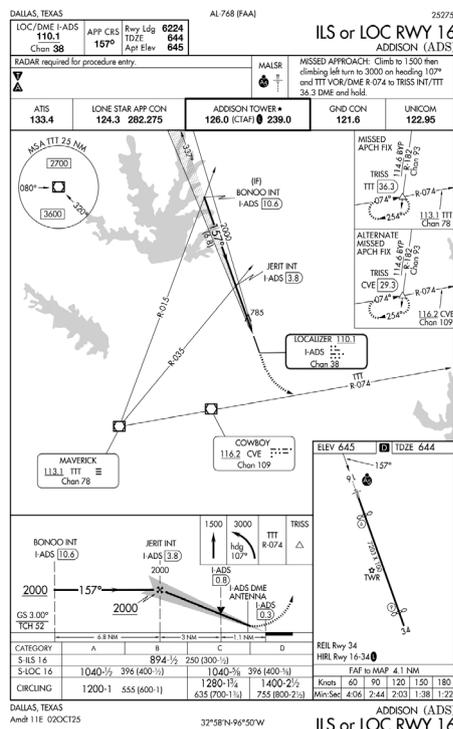
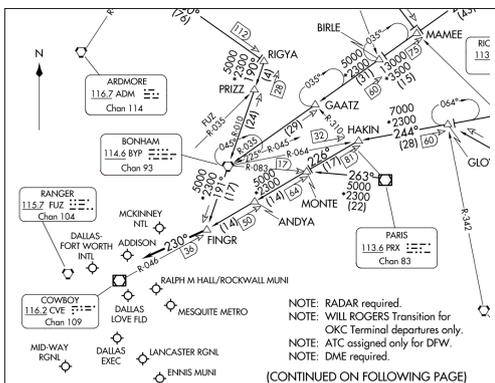
couple of years ago, I soon joined the club and got checked out in the Bonanza. We accomplished our VFR maneuvers and IFR procedures at other airports in the area because the airspace around Addison, Love Field, and DFW is so saturated. So, I never made any instrument approaches into Addison, the club's home field. Well, that's kind of an issue. Here's why. The local approach controllers in the area know this particular Bonanza as a KADS-based club airplane. But what they don't know is that some pilots flying it may not be completely familiar with the Addison arrivals and approaches. I was on an IFR flight plan in day VFR conditions on arrival to Addison when I was given a direct to BONOO instruction by approach control. Well, I was being given vectors and expecting vectors to a visual approach. I was using ForeFlight and had all the arrival and approach plates available in the app, along with the IFR low-altitude chart. I hadn't studied the approach plates because I was being given vectors to a visual approach. So, when given a direct-to-fix instruction, I started initially looking at the low-altitude chart and FINGR ONE arrival. There was BONHAM VORTAC on the arrival, but it was behind me. Just as I found the BONOO intersection on the RWY 16 ILS plate, the controller asked me why I hadn't turned yet. It was busy that day, so I couldn't really articulate the

situation over the frequency. I told him that I was turning to BONOO, and nothing was said further.

I never have any issues communicating with controllers, and if I am confused about something, I don't have any problems asking ATC for clarification. But this was a great wake-up call to improve a part of my proficiency. I will always expect the unexpected and review all arrivals, approaches, and other charts, especially when unfamiliar. I will also ask immediately for clarification when unsure about something.

Be safe out there.

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Victory Lane Aviation, LLC

by Lance Phillips



Ryan on the VLA ramp

Ryan Shepherd is originally from Toronto, living there until he was seven years old. His earliest memories of aviation include eating Wendy's French fries dipped in a Frosty while watching aircraft at the Toronto Pearson airport (YYZ). Ryan was able to gaze at the Concorde arrive and depart and thought, like most of us, that it was the coolest thing in the world. That was the catalyst that set the wheels in motion for his aviation career. No one in his family, near or distant, was involved in aviation, but he knew when seeing those planes at YYZ that aerospace was his calling.

When Ryan was seven, his dad, funded by the Baptist church network, decided to participate in humanitarian efforts around the world while based in Greece. He was a pastor of a church and felt that he was called to participate in disaster relief and humanitarian efforts overseas. While overseas, they helped to set up refugee centers, coordinating with other countries outside of Europe because of Greece's status as a gateway country. They assisted refugees from areas in the Middle East and elsewhere. He led response teams to provide relief to the earthquake in Iran, as well as bringing relief teams to help after forest fires in Greece.

Of course, we in the United States are lucky to have our airspace system and a relatively accessible and affordable aviation training environment. But in Greece, the opportunities to fly don't exist as they do here. However, as a Canadian, part of the British Commonwealth, Ryan had access to a Royal Air Force cadet program that brought young people into aviation at its training facility in Cardiff, Wales, just across the Bristol Channel from Bristol, England. As a cadet, Ryan was able to fly a Grob Tutor, a German-built aerobatic and composite two-seater with a three-blade, constant-speed propeller. A Lycoming IO-360 variant producing 180 horsepower turns the little Grob's prop, which pulls the plane forward at around 100 knots in cruise.

American Community Schools in Greece operated as primary education, at first primarily to support American kids with parents at the American bases there. Eventually, as the bases closed, the schools were able to accommodate an expanded student population, including American expats, foreign nationals (Samsung has a large presence), lots of embassy kids from different countries, and Greek nationals as well. Ryan appreciates the opportunities he was given to mix and learn about all the different



AOG at Stevens on top of the removed wing and engines from a salvage bird



AOG work in the back of a Citation X



Cadet in training

cultures he associated with in school. As he progressed through school in Greece, he began looking at colleges in the States with aviation programs. At 18, he eventually landed at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, renowned for having the largest faith-based aviation program in North America, attending the school's maintenance management undergraduate degree program. Along the way, Ryan dabbled in pilot and drone operator courses, earning certificates in those.

After graduating from Liberty University, Ryan worked as a mechanic at a local shop called Freedom Aviation. At Freedom, he was introduced to the work he loved, but he realized soon that he wanted to travel and learn more in the real world of aircraft maintenance. He then joined Stevens Aerospace & Defense Systems (Stevens Aviation at the time) in its AOG department, supporting Net-Jets in the U.S. and to a lesser degree internationally. Through Stevens, Ryan was able to learn a huge amount about a vast array of aircraft makes and models. Now with lots of piston and jet experience, he saw a need for a company on the East Coast that could service both types. Additionally, he wanted to supply the industry with highly qualified and motivated pilots through excellent pilot training.

Flight schools these days have almost become a sort of liability for a lot of MROs (maintenance, repair, and overhaul facilities). Back when I got into aviation, flight schools were often associated with an FBO and MRO shop. Victory Lane Aviation, LLC, (VLA) opened in 2015 in Charlotte, North Carolina, originally under different ownership as a flight school. Ryan bought in as an equity partner at the Charlotte location four years ago when the opportunity to move in and acquire a maintenance hangar at the airport and have a full-fledged flight school presented itself. He had been actively pursuing just this kind of opening to realize his dreams.

Ryan sees the VLA flight school as a recruiting tool to bring in well-rounded aviation enthusiasts. It's a huge perk to be able to offer a highly qualified and motivated technician the opportunity to acquire his or her flight



The Shepherd family



First job as a maintenance technician at Freedom Aviation

ratings at a discount. In some cases, Victory Lane Aviation will even pay for that training. They plan to continue the flight school, as it pays for itself by breaking even financially, and brings in employees who might otherwise go to another company. Ryan can track multiple trainees who came to VLA to learn to fly, who then go on to buy a plane, help them with a pre-buy inspection, and then take care of their maintenance needs. The flight school becomes a maintenance service feeder, and a great bonus for employees.

Victory Lane Aviation supports based fleets and transient aircraft, but also partners with charter organizations to provide maintenance and AOG services in Charlotte, Concord, and Wilmington, North Carolina. Recently, VLA has expanded up the East Coast to Bar Harbor, Maine. It is an authorized service center for Textron's Beechcraft and Cessna piston aircraft warranty work. And recently, it took over for Skytech's Piper warranty work as an ASC. In addition, VLA is an Icon Aircraft partner. As Epic Aircraft's only gold star partner, VLA maintains special tooling that only the Epic factory has access to otherwise. Recently, VLA became a TBM ASC as well. On the avionics side, they are a Garmin and Collins authorized



Checking fuel level on a Cessna



Ryan's mom and dad



Victory Lane Aviation maintenance hangar



Ryan representing VLA at a career fair



The VLA team in flight



Ryan's first solo flight



Ryan with the VLA service van

dealer and a certified Part 145 shop. When asked if anything else was new for 2025, Ryan responded, “We also became a Beringer Aero Brake Dealer and Hatzell Top Prop Dealer last year.”

If you ask any successful MRO these days, they’ll go on about the challenges of hiring well-qualified and motivated technicians. Maybe there’s a correlation with dropping flight training and losing out on enthusiastic maintenance professionals. I think Ryan has discovered a great way to overcome these modern challenges, and it’s actually an old solution. One that most MROs and FBOs used for decades but have gradually moved away from. I was excited learning about Ryan’s philosophy in this regard. He wanted to fly in the beginning and wanted to continue that endeavor after school. And he wanted to continue and progress as a maintenance professional. Through Victory Lane Aviation, he can accomplish all of his goals and still meet the demands of his customers and his leadership board.

With their son now a seasoned and successful aviation professional, Ryan’s parents continue to assist those in need around the world, but now they do it from the U.S. so that they can be close to their grandkids – Ryan now has three kids of his own. He wondered during our conversation how he might be able to come full circle and help with Greece’s forest fire-fighting effort with Air Tractors on floats, something he wants to accomplish at some point in his life. With all of his current and past successes, I truly think Ryan will make a reality of anything he puts his mind to.



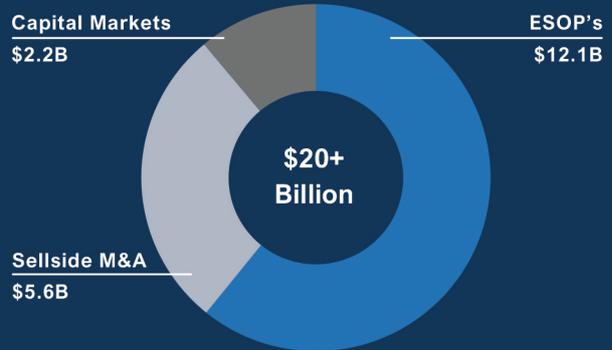
Lance Phillips is the Executive Director for the Pinnacle Air Network, a coalition of FBOs, MROs, and aircraft sales and charter organizations. He holds an FAA commercial license with instrument and multi-engine ratings and type ratings in the G100 and Beechjet aircraft. Lance has worked in management

and executive leadership roles for pilot training and aircraft manufacturing organizations during his career. In addition to Twin & Turbine, Lance manages Phillips Aero Services and his creative outlet, Air & Asphalt. You can reach him at lance@twinandturbine.com.

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Editor's Pics

Photo & Story
by Lance Phillips





THE RAMP PRESENCE IS REAL. PIPER'S BIG PA-31-310 NAVAJO IS A CABIN-CLASS WORKHORSE. THIS IS THE FEATURED AIRCRAFT IN THIS MONTH'S "FABER, LLC: KNOWLEDGE IS GOOD" ARTICLE. AS YOU'LL READ IN THE ARTICLE, THIS NAVAJO HAS BEEN MODIFIED WITH THE LATEST AND GREATEST AIRFRAME, ENGINE, AND AVIONICS UPDATES. I USED THE NIKON ZF FULL-FRAME CAMERA WITH ITS SPECIAL 40 MM F2 KIT LENS.





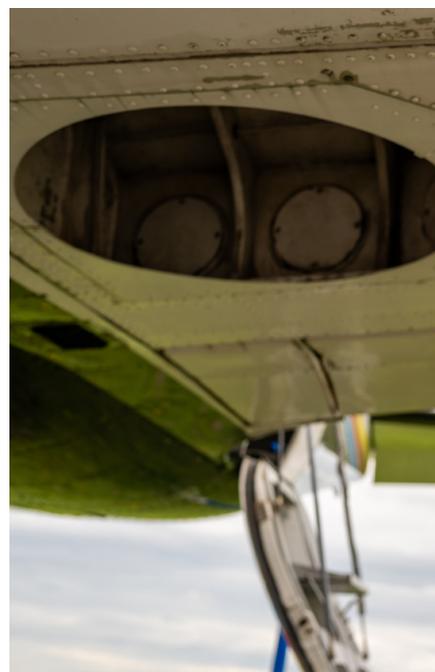
Faber, LLC: Knowledge is Good

by **Lance Phillips**

In 1978, the movie “Animal House” launched decades of raucous fraternity behavior across the U.S. Set in 1962, the movie depicted a couple of freshmen at Faber College, a fictional institution represented by the actual University of Oregon campus for filming. The beginning sequence of the film follows dorm roommates Larry Kroger and Kent Dorfman across Faber’s landscaped lawns and beautiful buildings while the two discuss the advantages (and disadvantages) of rushing various fraternities on campus, namely Omega Theta Pi (the Omegas) and Delta Tau Chi (the Deltas). As Larry and Kent deliberate along their evening stroll, they pass the statue of Emil Faber, the man who, according to the movie, founded the college in 1904. Beneath Faber’s likeness on the statue, the camera focuses and zooms in on the college founder’s painfully banal and stupidly funny quote, “Knowledge is good.”

Fast forward to 1988, I was pledging the Delta Sigma Phi fraternity at Florida Tech after completing the college's "Contact" summer program, in which freshly minted high school graduates like me, and maybe a couple of late career shifters, eagerly soaked up as much aviation knowledge as possible toward earning a private pilot license. That September in Florida brought a host of new characters into this Texan's life, many of whom have had a lasting effect. Two of those were a motley pair of nor'easters, one from Vermont and the other from Long Island, New York.

Dan Fagnoli and Jim Berry (you can't make those names up) were a year or two ahead of me, and they made it clear to everyone that they were going to be the greatest aviators on the planet. Fagnoli, a fullback type with an easy belly-laugh always on the ready, made sure you knew you were his friend, but with the understanding that he gave the B.S., he didn't take it. Jim Berry - if there was anyone who personified the Goose character from the original "Top Gun" movie, it was Jim, even down to the mustache. These guys were always up for fun, whether it was in the air or, often, the "Animal House" variety. They probably didn't know it, but I looked up to them immensely. I still do. When you combine the first few letters of



Dan and Jim's last names, you get the name Faber. Although this Faber actually means something real.

Following graduation, the two friends migrated north to fly for Larry's Flying Service in Fairbanks, Alaska. The aircraft of choice at Larry's? Piper's PA-31 Navajo. After thousands of hours above dangerous terrain in unpredictable weather, a pilot gains an appreciation for an airframe that does its job well in the most challenging conditions. It was no different for Dan and Jim. The PA-31 platform made an indelible impression on these young pilots' minds. And as you'll soon see, that impression brought them back again to the familiar cabin-class twin.

I hadn't seen Dan and Jim for probably 20 or 30 years, but after one of our other fraternity brothers, whom we call Zippy, group-texted us about meeting at Oshkosh last year, we took him up on the idea. We decided to convene at Zippy's Scamp RV at Wittman Regional's South 40 on Tuesday evening during AirVenture. It was immediately comfortable and fun with the assembled crew.

After reminiscing over the evening's BBQ and beer, we needed to rest up for the next day. Zippy was staying with his Scamp on the South 40, so I solicited a ride to Appleton with my long-lost brothers. Fagnoli and Berry, busting chops as always, made it clear



that I was a serious roadblock to their evening relaxation, even though I was staying only a mile or so from their hotel in Appleton. It was just like old times. During the 30-minute ride north, we spoke about the pair's plans for their Piper Navajo (yep, that same airframe from their Alaskan adventures). They had flown up from their home in Florida with Dan's daughter, Caitlyn, in the left seat. She's a private pilot who is contemplating where to go

to college. Will she follow in her dad's footsteps, attending his alma mater, or will she choose a different, possibly non-aviation, route? Whichever educational route she chooses, the Navajo will accomplish Fagnoli's and Berry's needs to provide speedy, cabin-class transportation, and possibly more.

Their current PA-31 is not just any run-of-the-mill Navajo. Its caretakers through the years have made this Piper faster, more efficient, and





Dan's daughter Caitlyn takes over in the left seat

objectively safer. Back in 1969, it came off the Piper Aircraft assembly line. Piper used manufacturing facilities in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, and Lakeland, Florida, for the PA-31 at the time. Its airworthiness records

show that its first certificate was issued in January 1970.

One of the plane's previous owners opted for the renowned Colemill Panther STC (supplemental type certificate) modifications. The Colemill Enterprises STCs were acquired by Mike Jones after Colemill went out of business following the Tennessee flooding in 2010. The Mike Jones Aircraft website now claims that the Panther conversion "improves the performance and safety significantly. Installation of 350-horsepower turbo-charged engines and 4-blade "Q-Tip" propellers optimize the power/weight ratio of the small-body Navajo. The result is superior performance." Mike Jones says that the converted aircraft will achieve 2,000 feet per minute at sea level and gross weight, while single-engine climb at gross weight will be around 400 feet per minute. The site also states that maximum airspeed increases to 275 MPH at 15,000 feet (compared to 261 MPH for non-conversion models). Dan Fagnoli's figures are a little more generous than the book, although when he captured his own numbers, he was around 1,000 pounds lighter than gross. At the end of October 2025, Dan flew the plane at around 5,500 pounds and saw a 2,100 feet per minute climb at best rate of climb speed. Best angle got him 2,400 feet per minute. He accomplishes a normal climb at 115 knots and gets

1,600 feet per minute, keeping everything nice and cool in the Florida heat. With one engine out, Dan gets 900 feet per minute at 105 knots (again, at 5,500 pounds). At 10,500 feet, 24 inches manifold pressure, and 2,300 RPM, Dan's Navajo cruises along at 192 KTAS, which equates to around 221 MPH. The full Panther conversion includes: Lycoming TIO-540-J2B turbocharged engines, winglets, dual-drive magnetos (this airplane adds the Slickstart magneto boosters, too), 4-blade Hartzell Q-Tips, new spinners, and finally, new vacuum pumps, lord mounts, and fuel and oil hoses. For low-speed performance, BLR vortex generators were added along each wing.

A few other significant modifications have been made to Dan and Jim's Navajo. ARC (arcmods.com) provides an STC to remove the inner main landing gear doors. The kit installs an aerodynamic fairing in the inner door's place, which enables landing gear retraction and extension faster with fewer moving parts and at a higher airspeed. Vle is increased to 153 KIAS. All this benefit comes with the added peace of mind of an extended gear-retraction inspection interval, from 100 hours to 200 hours.

A Nayak Aviation Corp. nacelle fuel system adds 15 gallons of fuel capacity per side. Keith Products air conditioning system (Faber operates out of Melbourne, Florida) keeps things nice and cool in the heat and humidity. A quick-release nose gear link relieves hassle on the ground. Aerospace Logic instruments update the panel from 1960s-era steam gauges. Finally, CiES digital fuel senders allow much more accurate fuel measurement with a modern digital indicator in the cockpit.

As the reader may imagine, all those airframe updates without touching the avionics would be a huge let-down. So, let's dig into the wonders up front on this Navajo's panel.

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Fraternity brothers reunited at Zippy's Scamp during AirVenture. Lance Phillips, Dan Fagnoli, Zippy, Jim Berry (L to R)

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- Electric International OAT/Timer

It's exciting that an airplane that rolled off the assembly line just a couple of months after I was born can be well-maintained and upgraded through the years and be just as viable a transportation machine as it was when it first received its airworthiness certificate. I asked Dan if he and Jim wanted to do more with the Navajo than just flying back and forth from Florida to Oshkosh or visiting Caitlyn in college. He said that they have lots of aspirations for the plane. "From instruction to possibly

charter and maybe even cargo, there is a lot we can and want to do with the airplane," explained Fagnoli.

Dan's career takes him all over the world in an intercontinental business jet. Jim is one of the most senior international captains at a major airline. With their careers and schedules solidly stable, they have the opportunity to utilize their Panther Navajo to the greatest extent possible. So, it will be fun to check back in to see what all they have been accomplishing and what they may have in store for the big PA-31.

We laugh about the crazy antics of our college days, but we all agree that safety of flight and making pilots more proficient are goals we can be proud of. If those are ways Dan and Jim can use the Navajo to create a safer aviation environment, they'd be happy. Unlike our fictional friends at Faber College, Faber LLC intends to promote aviation and provide excellent transportation opportunities in Florida and across the country. There's not a lot these PA-31 veterans can learn about their aircraft, but they can certainly provide their insights to others. Because, of course, knowledge is good. **T&T**

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16	EMBRAER LINEAGE
379	EMBRAER PHENOM 100
580	EMBRAER PHENOM 300
113	EMBRAER PRAETOR
57	FALCON 10
21	FALCON 100
15	FALCON 200
272	FALCON 2000
5	FALCON 2000DX
23	FALCON 2000EX
162	FALCON 2000LX
148	FALCON 2000LXS
25	FALCON 20C
15	FALCON 20C-5
17	FALCON 20D
1	FALCON 20D-5
1	FALCON 20E
48	FALCON 20F

75	FALCON 20F-5
182	FALCON 50
5	FALCON 50-4
8	FALCON 50-40
115	FALCON 50EX
282	FALCON 7X
70	FALCON 8X
173	FALCON 900
28	FALCON 900C
21	FALCON 900DX
351	FALCON 900EX
99	FALCON 900LX
22	GULFSTREAM G100
130	GULFSTREAM G150
238	GULFSTREAM G200
305	GULFSTREAM G280
13	GULFSTREAM G300
11	GULFSTREAM G350
324	GULFSTREAM G450
131	GULFSTREAM G500
641	GULFSTREAM G550
465	GULFSTREAM G650
16	GULFSTREAM G-I
15	GULFSTREAM G-II
12	GULFSTREAM G-IIB
87	GULFSTREAM G-III
175	GULFSTREAM G-IV
319	GULFSTREAM G-IVSP
202	GULFSTREAM G-V
113	GULFSTREAMG 600
32	HAWKER 1000A
5	HAWKER 1000B
7	HAWKER 125-1A
2	HAWKER 125-1AS
1	HAWKER 125-600A
55	HAWKER 125-700B
66	HAWKER 4000
216	HAWKER 400XP
53	HAWKER 750
142	HAWKER 800A
16	HAWKER 800B
408	HAWKER 800XP
44	HAWKER 800XPI
100	HAWKER 850XP
176	HAWKER 900XP
213	HONDA JET
4	LEARJET 23
44	LEARJET 24
64	LEARJET 25
3	LEARJET 28
614	LEARJET 31
22	LEARJET 35
56	LEARJET 36
140	LEARJET 40
470	LEARJET 45
102	LEARJET 55
418	LEARJET 60
17	LEARJET 70
158	LEARJET 75
294	PREMIER I
6	SABRELINER 40A
2	SABRELINER 40EL
2	SABRELINER 40R
5	SABRELINER 60
9	SABRELINER 60ELXM
48	SABRELINER 65
11	SABRELINER 80
1	SABRELINER 80SC
1	SUKHOI SBJ
3	SYBER JET SJ30
52	WESTWIND 1
14	WESTWIND 1124
47	WESTWIND 2

TURBOPROPS - 16,319

CHIEF PILOTS & OWNERS

COUNT	AIRCRAFT
210	AVANTI
1	AVRO RJ70
483	CARAVAN 208
2275	CARAVAN 208B

37	CHEYENNE 400
140	CHEYENNE I
21	CHEYENNE IA
218	CHEYENNE II
49	CHEYENNE III
39	CHEYENNE IIIA
58	CHEYENNE IIXL
238	CONQUEST I
292	CONQUEST II
77	DAHER TBM-700A
96	DAHER TBM-700B
113	DAHER TBM-700C
383	DAHER TBM-850
134	DAHER TBM-900
70	DAHER TBM-910
102	DAHER TBM-930
138	DAHER TBM-940
66	DAHER TBM-960
165	DE HAVILLAND DHC
49	EPIC E1000
1	FOKKER 70
37	JETSTREAM 31
70	JETSTREAM 32
64	JETSTREAM 41
32	KING AIR 100
474	KING AIR 200
21	KING AIR 200C
8	KING AIR 200T
261	KING AIR 250
46	KING AIR 260
190	KING AIR 300
10	KING AIR 300LW
695	KING AIR 350
91	KING AIR 350C
35	KING AIR 350ER
397	KING AIR 350I
6	KING AIR 350IER
73	KING AIR 360
7	KING AIR 90
7	KING AIR A/B90
65	KING AIR A100
155	KING AIR A200
32	KING AIR A90
89	KING AIR A90-1
93	KING AIR B100
1154	KING AIR B200
118	KING AIR B200C
121	KING AIR B200GT
6	KING AIR B200SE
8	KING AIR B200T
46	KING AIR B90
306	KING AIR C90
40	KING AIR C90-1
193	KING AIR C90A
402	KING AIR C90B
78	KING AIR C90GT
112	KING AIR C90GTI
165	KING AIR C90GTX
18	KING AIR C90SE
257	KING AIR E90
172	KING AIR F90
29	KING AIR F90-1
5	MERLIN 300
14	MERLIN IIB
5	MERLIN III
27	MERLIN IIIA
45	MERLIN IIIB
14	MERLIN IIIC
4	MERLIN IV
11	MERLIN IV-A
34	MERLIN IV-C
91	MITSUBISHI MARQUISE
16	MITSUBISHI MU-2F
1	MITSUBISHI MU-2G
11	MITSUBISHI MU-2J
28	MITSUBISHI MU-2K
10	MITSUBISHI MU-2L
18	MITSUBISHI MU-2M
23	MITSUBISHI MU-2N
25	MITSUBISHI MU-2P
46	MITSUBISHI SOLITAIRE
70	NEXTANT 400XT
1	NEXTANT G90XT

1081	PILATUS PC-12 NG
836	PILATUS PC-12/45
216	PILATUS PC-12/47
300	PIPER JETPROP
91	PIPER M500
263	PIPER M600
601	PIPER MERIDIAN
292	QUEST KODIAK 100
3	QUEST KODIAK 900
15	ROCKWELL COMMANDER
6	STARSHIP 2000A
54	TURBO COMMANDER 1000
21	TURBO COMMANDER 690
134	TURBO COMMANDER 690A
136	TURBO COMMANDER 690B
80	TURBO COMMANDER 840
27	TURBO COMMANDER 900
26	TURBO COMMANDER 980

TWIN PISTON - 7,649

OWNERS

COUNT	AIRCRAFT
37	BARON 56TC
1677	BARON 58
428	BARON 58P
119	BARON 58TC
3	BARON A56TC
355	BARON G58
108	CESSNA 310
167	CESSNA 340
552	CESSNA 340A
50	CESSNA 402B
124	CESSNA 402C
27	CESSNA 404
317	CESSNA 414
452	CESSNA 414A
42	CESSNA 421
28	CESSNA 421A
309	CESSNA 421B
707	CESSNA 421C
59	CESSNA T303
112	DIAMOND D42
20	DIAMOND IA
186	DUKE B60
80	PIPER 600 AEROSTAR
3	PIPER 600A AEROSTAR
45	PIPER 601 AEROSTAR
4	PIPER 601B AEROSTAR
201	PIPER 601P AEROSTAR
24	PIPER 602P AEROSTAR
589	PIPER CHIEFTAIN
26	PIPER MOJAVE
301	PIPER NAVAJO
255	PIPER SENECA
74	ROCKWELL COMMANDER
168	ROCKWELL SHRIKE

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OWNERS

COUNT	AIRCRAFT
393	BEECH BONANZA
441	CESSNA 182
55	CESSNA 206
428	CESSNA P210N
22	CESSNA P210R
58	CESSNA T182
1220	CIRRUS SR20
3733	CIRRUS SR22
2048	CIRRUS SR22T
121	MOONEY ACCLAIM
37	MOONEY ACCLAIM ULTRA
407	MOONEY OVATION
12	MOONEY OVATION ULTRA
263	PIPER MALIBU
199	PIPER MATRIX
565	PIPER MIRAGE

The Death of Seabiscuit

by Lawrency Searcy

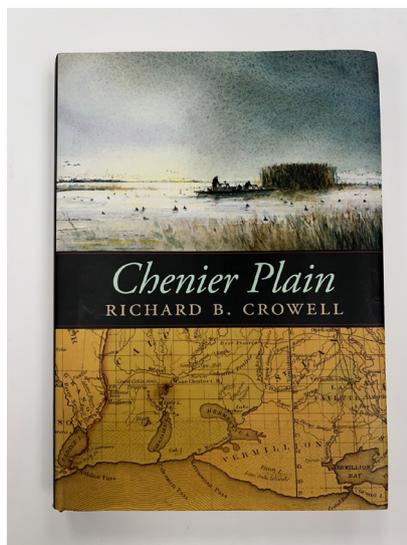


December 27, 2025, sunrise from the duck blind at the Coastal Club, Bell City, Louisiana

With every new year I can jokingly look at myself in the mirror and self-deprecate that I am old, grey and have a little more paint chipped off than the year before. That is also how I would have described my first “girlfriend” - also known as N739SB. Seabiscuit, as she was known to all of the local renters, was a 1978 Cessna 172N that was my primary trainer for my Private Pilot’s License. She was well used and not very pretty to look at, but she got the job done for current and aspiring pilots that flew her. I’m not sure if the moniker was simply because of her tail number or because, like the horse in the movie, she wasn’t very pretty. She was never destined to win any awards like the real Seabiscuit, but she did perform her primary job for many years and for many would-be pilots.

Some of my favorite flying memories occurred while sitting in Seabiscuit’s left seat. Unfortunately, Seabiscuit died December 23, 2019, at 3:30 p.m. local time when a renting pilot attempted a go around after a botched landing and struck a tree. Luckily the pilot and passenger only suffered minor injuries, but it was a great airplane’s last flight. Those of us who flew her mourned her loss.

For almost thirty years, our post-Christmas routine is the same. My brother-in-law, my father-in-law and I go duck hunting with friends in the south Louisiana marsh while my wife hosts her sister and her children and her mom’s house. After the hunt, the cousins leave and we pack up and travel somewhere for the new year’s holiday. On my last flight every year, I take a thick sharpie



and draw a solid line across my logbook to separate the current year from the one coming up. The solid line helps me identify different years when flipping back through logbooks. And yes, I still use a physical logbook (see T & T article September 2025.) This year, after adding my last flight of 2025 to Alpine, Texas (E38) into my logbook I decided to flip back to some of my earliest flights and reminisce. And there she was - Seabiscuit strutting proudly across the pages.

Seabiscuit took me to what some people would think of as ordinary places, but back then they were all magical to me because I was in the air. I had several years of flying under my belt, I had passed my instrument check ride and I was doing a lot more cross country flying than pattern work.

Late in 2013, a friend asked if I could assist in getting some pictures for a book he was writing. He needed some ariel shots, and I was more than happy to oblige him with his request. After all, it was another chance to fly for a little while. The author, Richard B. Crowell, was an amateur author writing his first book as a passion



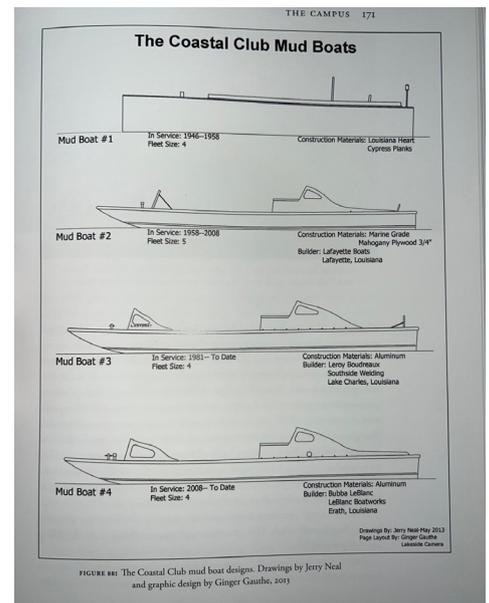
FIGURE 73: The Coastal Club campus, January 7, 2014. Photograph by the author.



FIGURE 112: The Coastal Club/Gayle pump station, originally built in 1955, and marsh boat houses. Photograph by the author.



A flock of geese taking flight out of the Lacassine Wildlife Refuge on January 7, 2014



project on the history of the hunting club where he grew up hunting ducks in the south Louisiana marsh. This is the same hunting club where I have been lucky to be invited after Christmas for the last 30 years.

Initially, Mr. Crowell simply wanted to document the history of Louisiana's oldest continuously operated hunting club. During his research, he decided to broaden the scope to include discussions of the history of the

Chenier Plain (pronounced CHEN-EAR). The Chenier Plain is defined by Mr. Crowell as "geologic formations found only in Southwest Louisiana...It's wetlands are strategically positioned beneath the Mississippi Flyway, the most prominent migratory highway in North America." In *Chronicling the history of this "duck club"* the book explores how hunting is intertwined with the people and economics of the southwest portion of Louisiana and its

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marshes. It further traces the histories of the Louisiana duck clubs and their role in stewarding resources to protect the vital Louisiana marshes that are home to such vast ecological wonderlands.

The book, published in 2015, is a beautiful biography of the land and people who made up this area of Louisiana from its earliest settlers. There are hundreds of photographs of the region, its duck clubs, the members and guides of these clubs and the tools they used to navigate the marshes. There are sketches of the mudboats, maps of the marsh, the guide's piroguss and the lodges at some of the clubs.

In 2014, Mr. Crowell was wrapping up his book and needed some ariel photos of the south Louisiana marsh and a couple of the duck clubs in the area. Interestingly, his son is an accomplished pilot and could have taken him to do the photography himself, but at the time he was flying a Columbia 400. His son's plane was too fast, and the windows did not flip open to get the best images of the marsh and its clubs. I was happy to be asked but also silently jealous of the sleekness and speed of the Columbia.

Seabiscuit was just the ticket to get the job done. It was old, slow and the windows opened fully so that Mr. Crowell could reach out and take the necessary photographs. On a cold, January morning in 2014, Mr. Crowell and I departed Pineville Municipal Airport in Seabiscuit and pointed the nose south towards Lake Charles and Louisiana's southern marshes. He needed aerial photographs for a wide angel of the clubs and the marsh and drones for civilian use were not yet a popular or an economic option. On the other hand, a thirty-five-year-old rented plane from the local FBO with a forty-four-year-old IFR pilot who worked for free was a sound economic option for his photos.

We flew southwest at 4,500 feet over the timber plantations of central Louisiana until reaching the marsh and then dropped down to 600 feet for the photo shoot. I had never done anything like this before and was not sure how to tell the ATC what we were doing. I had heard pipeline pilots along the coast over the years talking to the various controllers about what they were doing so I tried to mimic those pilots when describing our flight path just outside the approach corridor for both Lake Charles Regional and Chennault International. We didn't have a grid pattern or route we were flying other than Mr. Crowell saying something like "go over there." In response I would initiate a call with the controller and advise which direction we were heading with our altitude. All the controllers were accommodating while we zig-zagged back and forth over the coast. After an hour or so, Mr. Crowell declared he had what he needed and we headed back towards Pineville. My logbook entry that day was concise - "Flight with Dick Crowell to fly over the Coastal Club to take pictures for his book - Photos from 600 feet. Beautiful day - 35 degrees." Total time in the air was 2.3 hours.

When the book was published, Mr. Crowell gifted a signed copy to me. I hurriedly flipped through the book



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Richard B Crowell at the Coastal Club, December 2019

looking for the photos from the day of the trip. Out of the hundreds of digital images he took that day, three made it into the book. I'm honored to have been a part of the creative process and to unofficially to have been published (although I did not take the photos, I feel I got him in the right place for the perfect shot).

What I love about flying is that each flying experience is unique, and the FAA requires us to document at least the basics of each flight. I have always been a fan of putting more down in my logbook than necessary so that during circumstances like this I can get a context of what happened on a particular flight. Combine that with the thousands of photos we all have on our phones and even the failing memory of an old, grey and paint chipped pilot can remember the intricate details of a flight twelve years ago.

Like most pilots, many of my flights are routine going from point A to point B. No amount of wordsmithing in a logbook can make those flights more interesting. They are just flights. But over a number of years and hundreds of flying hours, certain occasions have more memory

potential than others. Flying with a friend on a cold and sunny January day over the south Louisiana marsh to get the perfect picture for a book is certainly a flying memory that I won't forget. Seabiscuit, in all her ugliness, did her job that day and I'm sad she won't be delivering similar memories to future pilots. When looking at this logbook entry I was stunned to see the entry right below. Seven days after that flight to the coast, I purchased my first plane and took my first training flight in N700CW. I entered a new phase in my flying career with an endorsement for a retractable gear complex airplane. The purchase of N700CW, a Mooney M20J, would end my aerial photography career. Like the Columbia, the Mooney just wasn't built to go low and slow, or for passengers to open the windows and take pictures. While I miss my days puttering around in Seabiscuit, I cannot say I'm too upset with my new chapter making memories in the flight levels. Now I just take pictures with the windows closed.

*Mr. Crowell's book "The Chenier Plain" can be purchased on Amazon. **T&T**

Lawrence S. Searcy Jr recounts stories from more than 20 years of aviation experience. A 1,600-hour private pilot with an instrument rating, he is also an entrepreneur, attorney, rancher, and outdoorsman who flies himself and his family across the country for both business and pleasure in their TBM 700A. His previous aircraft include a Mooney M20J and a Piper Malibu Mirage.

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Danny Hughes

by Grant Boyd



Danny Hughes with his 1956 Aero Commander 560

Danny Hughes is a Merlin IIIB owner from New Orleans, Louisiana. He has been flying for over 48 years, and his family introduced him to aviation long before he ever took the yoke himself.

“I don’t remember a time in my youth when our family did not have an airplane. Our business was oil field contracting in South Louisiana, often in remote or environmentally sensitive areas, including marshes and swamps. I remember as a kid in grade school jumping in the plane and getting to fly in the right seat,” Hughes recalled.

“When I graduated from high school, my uncle Harold said he was giving me a pilot’s license for graduation. ‘If I

gave you money, you would just go buy beer or a stereo system’ he told me. So, I got my pilot’s license that summer and then joined a flying club when I went to college in Austin.”

The long-term value of Uncle Harold’s gift has been immense. Hughes explained that the decision-making skills gained in the air become an integral element of your day-to-day life. He believes that a lot of his success and enjoyment in life is directly attributable to aviation, and he has relied upon general aviation throughout the entirety of his career.

“At the time [early in his days flying for business purposes], we had a Cessna 182, which I mostly flew, and then our superintendent flew a Cessna 185 on floats. There was



Danny Hughes (left) and 'Magic Merlin'



Uncle Harold (right) after a flight in his amphibious Cessna 180

a depth finder on the bottom of that plane, which would allow us to see how deep the water was at a job site. This would let us know if we could use a 900-horsepower tug, two 600-horsepower tugs, or something else. That's how we would bid our jobs," he said.

"If you didn't have a plane, you'd get up at three or four in the morning, drive an hour to the crew boat, and take a few hour [long] boat ride to the job site, before turning around. But with the airplane, we'd get there in thirty minutes, taxi around, get the water depths and lay of the land, and be back before lunch time. It's just that fast."

In nearly five decades of flying, Hughes has owned and flown 13 aircraft, from a Cessna 182 and 185 Amphibian to a Navajo Chieftain and a Lear 24.

Hughes has cycled to new aircraft based on his needs at the time. One of the things he has enjoyed most about flying new aircraft is exploring the nuances of that particular model, as he believes every plane exudes its own special personality.

Hughes nicknames his aircraft as a reflection of their personalities. The case was a little different for the Chieftain he owned for 22 years, which had the tail number N16WC. "The Chieftain got the nickname 'Wild Child' not so much for its flying characteristics, because it's a docile aircraft," pointed out Hughes. "When an air traffic controller familiar with my usual routes found out I flew it to Havana in 2016, he started referring to my tail number as '16 Wild Child'. The name stuck."

Typically, Hughes varied business demands dictate which aircraft Hughes has settled on. Today, he splits time between Southern Louisiana, Key West, Florida, the Caribbean, and the northeast.



Danny Hughes and '16 Wild Child'



Danny Hughes and family after a flight in the Merlin



“I have an agreement with my Merlin. I’ll stay proficient and she’ll behave herself. It’s as simple as that.”

Magic Merlin at Little Cayman Airport (LYB)

“We have a couple of businesses up in New Hampshire, and it took two fuel stops to get there in the Chieftain. I was looking for something with versatility, that could go far, carry a lot of stuff, and land on a 3,000-foot-long runway without a problem, because we also had a house down in Little Cayman [in the Cayman Islands]. That’s where the Merlin came in,” Hughes explained, recalling what other aircraft he was considering at the time. He had flown many other models previously, both jets and turboprops, so had a good baseline of where he would go next.

“I have time in King Air 90s, 200s, and wasn’t afraid of Commanders – but the Merlin checked all the boxes,” he said. “I find that if you fly the Merlin the way it was designed to be flown, it’s an excellent aircraft. For me to get into a King Air 200, I’d spend 50% to 75% more money and then it burns more fuel,” he said.

“And passenger comfort is really high on my list, which the Merlin also excels at. It has a high wing load and is stable in rough air. The cabin is bigger [than some models of King Airs] and the windows are huge. The other great thing about it is that the Merlin has a seven PSI cabin pressure differential, meaning that I can hold a sea level cabin at 16,800 feet.”



A frequent mission for Hughes is the 550 nautical mile trip between Lakefront Airport (KNEW) and Key West International Airport (KEYW). This is just one of the real-world scenarios where ‘Magic Merlin’, as Hughes has affectionately nicknamed his plane of almost five years, demonstrates some of its tricks.

“I plan to burn 95 gallons an hour and it takes me, depending on the winds aloft, anywhere from two hours and ten minutes to two hours and twenty-five minutes to fly the KNEW to KEYW route. And the Merlin holds 642 gallons of fuel, so I tanker when coming from New Orleans because I can get fuel there cheaper than in Key West,” he explained.

Whether it's staying in the upper-teens burning only 85 to 90 gallons an hour while going 290 knots or getting up to 27,000 feet and going far – the Merlin can seemingly do it all. Its versatility has been beneficial in meeting Hughes’ varied mission.

“A great example of the versatility of the Merlin happened in early November when flying between New Orleans and Key West. The upper-level weather was terrible, including severe turbulence. In a Merlin, you can jump down to 12,000 to 15,000 feet and burn only 90 to 100 gallons per hour. The other aircraft had to stay in the 30’s for fuel consumption and got beaten up [by the poor weather].”

Range is another example of the Merlin’s versatility, he pointed out. “The trip from Key West to New Hampshire is a little over 1,600 nautical miles and it’s nonstop now. It takes a little over five hours, with my wife, my safe second [pilot], and our luggage. We have also flown it non-stop from Sedona, Arizona to Key West. And we could fly from Key West to Bermuda in only three hours and forty-five minutes.”

Hughes used the King Air 200 once again as a comparison for what makes the Merlin special, noting that its landing gear is on inspection (versus at a set interval). Maintenance costs have risen for all aircraft in the past few years, but he stated that the cost to work on Garrett engines have gone up slower than Pratt. Parts and service providers are also easy to come by for the Merlins, meaning that the almost fifty-year-old airframe is well supported.

Cabin comfort, tankering ability, economical operating costs, and long range are attributes that Merlin owners tout. Another thing that keeps their caretakers enamored, and turns heads on the ramp, is the aircraft’s distinct visual appeal.

“Merlins are downright sexy,” Hughes proudly stated. “I have gotten numerous compliments about ‘Magic Merlin’. One ground controller at KNEW even brought his son out on the weekend to see the aircraft. It really has a ramp presence.”

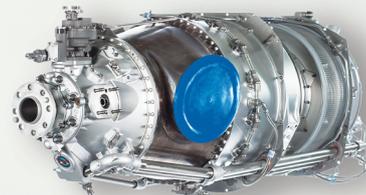
Of course, though, every plane has its downsides or nuances that potential owners should be aware of. For instance, in the Lear 24F if you get into a Dutch Roll, you better have your seatbelt on because it’s going to be a wild ride. Hughes mentions a handful of key points to be mindful of with the Merlin IIIB.



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Magic Merlin after a new paint job



Magic Merlin's panel

“The Merlins have four main problems. Number one is the batteries,” he said. “Because you’re turning a six-foot-long shaft, everything from 80-inch propellers, gearbox, turbine compressor – all the blood, guts, and feathers - to get it going. I carry a 40-pound lithium battery pack, which helps. There is actually an STC out to put a couple of tractor batteries up in the front, which also helps with the weight and balance.”

The second issue? The size of the brakes in comparison to the airframe. Reverse pitch is very beneficial when landing

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and the Merlin in full reverse puts out more thrust than a standard King Air 200 in takeoff. Hughes notes that he has landed with ease in less than 2,400 feet of runway. "Plus, with the Garrett engines, there is no hesitation going into reverse as with the Prattis."

"The third problem is the cabin door, as it does not have a frame in the fuselage. So, do not tow a Merlin with the cabin door open. And there are several bayonets [to keep the door shut] and they actually teach you that if the 'open door' alert comes on in flight to ignore it because there are so many latches. Not only that, but there is also only one person who can fix a Merlin door and they charge about \$70,000," Hughes explained.

"The last issue, which is why a lot of Merlins end up in snowbanks, is the nose wheel steering. They basically have electrical steering in the front, which is only activated if you have the switch "on", when you're at low RPM, and the squat switch is activated, such as after touchdown or during taxi. So, imagine a crosswind landing with winds coming from the left; you have left wing down with right rudder. If that switch is "on", once you land and go to low RPM, wherever your rudders are pointed is where the nose wheel will go. This means in this case you are going to make a quick right turn. So, my after-takeoff checklist consists of five things: brakes, gear, nose wheel steering "off", flaps, and yaw dampener."

This same mechanism allows the aircraft to make a 60 degree turn on demand while parking, where the inside main gear wheel ends up only 25 inches laterally from where it started.

Hughes has become accustomed to the various nuances of the airframe during his more than 600 hours flying it, out of a total of 4,000 hours in the sky. When asked whether he could see himself trading it for another plane in the future, he thought for a second before reiterating how versatile the plane is.

"The Merlin is an incredibly versatile aircraft. It is reasonable to acquire, reasonable to maintain, and very stingy on fuel burn. Passenger comfort is exemplary. And it's built like a tank. All that said, a pilot must fly the Merlin 'Chock to Chock' and fly it the way it was designed to be flown," he said. "I have an agreement with my Merlin. I'll stay proficient and she'll behave herself. It's as simple as that." **T&T**



Grant Boyd is a private pilot with eight years of experience in aviation business, including marketing, writing, customer service, and sales. Boyd holds a Bachelor's and a Master's of Business Administration degree, both from Wichita State University, and a Doctor of Education degree from Oklahoma State University. He was chosen as a NBAA Business Aviation "Top 40 Under 40" award recipient in 2020.

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Left: Chris Crisman/TNC/LightHawk; Right: Lincoln Athas/WCC/LightHawk



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On Final by David Miller



It's Contagious

Let's be honest. The safety record of light turbine aircraft is not particularly good. Too often, the evening news leads with a story full of video about a husband and wife who perished in their small airplane. Sometimes right after departure into weather. Sometimes in a snow-covered airframe right after liftoff. Sometimes on a botched missed approach.

If there is a common theme, it's that the PIC is simply not up to the task of planning the flight, flying the airplane, or understanding what is happening with the automation.

First to notice a real need to enhance the minimum training standards mandated by the FAA was the Citation Jet Pilots group (CJP). They partnered with the Presage Group of Canada, to study decision making during the landing approach phase of a flight. Their research led to the introduction of "Safe to Land™". It's a comprehensive program to reduce runway excursions by providing a template for Citation pilots to use on every approach.



On the set with Mike Nichols and Kim Coryat of PMOPA

Other owner-pilot organizations (OPA's) have taken note and are developing new safety initiatives as well.

The HondaJet Owners & Pilots Association (HJOPA) recently introduced their "Proficient Pilot Program" P3. One of their goals is to reduce the number of runway excursions in the fleet. HJOPA President, Tom Stacy says, "Our Safety Committee collaborated with ForeFlight, CloudAhoy, and AirSync to establish a delivery system for our Proficient Pilot Program. It provides a self-debrief and analysis of each flight that aims to significantly enhance flight safety, refine piloting skills, and cultivate a stronger, safer HondaJet community through shared knowledge and best practices."

The Safety Foundation for Piper M-Class Owners and Pilots Association (PMOPA) recently debuted a video series. Their CEO, Mike Nichols says, "Fly It Right: The M-Class Way was created to give our community clear, real-world

guidance on the safety challenges that are most relevant to them, based on past common accidents and incidents. These short vignettes aren't just theory; they show how good decision-making and proper technique can make our pilots safer."

Misty Stanistreet, Executive Director of the TBM Owner Pilots Association says their TBM Advanced Aviator Program (TAAP) is gaining traction. "TAAP is our commitment to raising the bar on TBM proficiency. We built it to give owners a clear path, professional training standards, and a way to measure their performance against the habits that keep people alive in this aircraft. It's not about adding hurdles. It's about giving pilots a framework that makes good decision making the default every time they fly."

These safety efforts have some common pillars including:

- Internal Safety Committees
- Formation of Safety Foundations
- Performance Monitoring
- Additional training opportunities
- Adherence to SOP's

Jeff Rhodes, Chief Aviation Underwriter, for 5X5 Insurance Services LLC says the industry is impressed. "We see that the two biggest mitigators of risk for owner pilot operations are:

- 1) Developing and strictly adhering to a set of standard operating procedures and
- 2) Regular training (more than the required minimum) with a school that specializes in your type of aircraft.

These things are more important than your total flight hours or time in the aircraft, and certainly more important than your age. The owner-pilot organizations are key to supporting, developing, and holding members accountable to these SOP's and standardized training programs. They are the experts on how to transition into, train in, and operate their aircraft. We designed our underwriting criteria around their recommendations rather than imposing our arbitrary requirements to them, as has been traditionally done."

These efforts are a win-win for all.

Fly safe. 

David Miller has owned and flown a variety of aircraft from light twins to midsize jets for more than 50 years. With 6,000 plus hours in his logbook, speaks nationally and writes on a variety of aviation safety topics. You can contact David at davidmiller1@sbcglobal.net.



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