

The Alameda Aero Club Newsletter

September 2005

Membership Meeting and Election of Board Members, September 14th, at WAM

At this meeting we'll vote on a slate of Board members for the next year. Plan to attend, and consider standing for election to the Board of Directors. There are no specific duties until you are elected; then we decide among ourselves who will hold what position. So, if you are interested in the not-so-secret workings of the club, have ideas to contribute, or just want to give a bit back, consider running for election. To indicate your willingness, please contact Stan Klezmer, our election slate coordinator, at klezman@netscape.net, or through the scheduler. See you all at the Western Aerospace Museum, 7:30 PM!

Ginny Wilken

President's Corner

The Brutal Economics of Airplane Ownership, Part of an On-Going Series

Years ago, the club sold its old, sixties-era, Piper Cherokee 140, 3779K. Many of you remember the beast. It had shortcomings: a nightmarish panel layout, #2 Escort VOR was of little use (the lens so scratched you could barely make it out), the cabin seals leaked air, uncomfortable seats, CG with two people and full fuel was a problem, feeble rate-of-climb, worn paint, and it had the habit of sagging on one or more oleo struts if left sitting for awhile. It wasn't popular in the club. At least one pilot couldn't get the hang of the "left-off-right" layout of the fuel selector valve, "Off" in this case being where "Both" are in a Cessna.

You can guess the consequences of this misunderstanding. This plus its poor climb rate, the inability to seat four FAA persons, and the awkwardness of entry by a single door meant 79K didn't have the following of our Cessnas. Me, I liked it. It was always available. My wife and I flew to Southern California on one expedition, to Albuquerque N.M. on another: zero squawks. I liked the visibility in a low wing air-

plane; I liked its ruggedness; I liked the stone-simple mechanical flaps. When the club sold the airplane, I understood the economic rational, but I was sad to see it go.

My wife and I discussed purchasing 79K from the club. We checked the economic realities: an estimated \$2K for annuals, \$2K for insurance, \$90 tie-down charges per month (then), possessory taxes from Alameda County, and a \$6-8K paint job looming on the horizon. The airplane—as much as we liked it—started looking like a financial sinkhole. Then we thought of leasing it back to the club. We'd have to pay about three times the amount of insurance; and, we'd have to pay for full-bore 100-hour inspections on an airplane that wasn't that popular in the first place. It just made no financial sense, so we didn't buy 79K.

I note this because as of September, we've lost Will Bartlett and Stephen Ashley's airplanes. They could no longer afford to lose money at the rate it was leaving their wallets. They were hit with overwhelming maintenance expenses while bad weather kept their airplanes on the ground through much of an abnormal spring. I understand and sympathize with their decisions. They're both also fine people and I hope they remain with the club.

I try to tell owners who put airplanes into the club to consider the leaseback as a subsidy underwriting their real passion: owning an airplane. The insurance will be more; the 100-hour inspections are onerous compared to that required of a private owner, and the inevitable repairs, overhauls, painting, etc. will come at shorter intervals. To be fair, given the fixed costs, keeping an airplane flying is generally cheaper than allowing it to sit. This is small satisfaction to an owner faced with an engine replacement, repainting, or other massive repairs: the same owner who hasn't seen any income in months. Fixed costs and unexpected repairs on top of zero income can eat alive any owner. Airplanes are expensive toys and lease-back owners should have their eyes wide open and realize they probably won't make money leasing the airplane to the club. Sometimes an airplane can make sense as a "losing" investment for tax purposes, but that's something you should discuss with your tax accountant.

In the meanwhile, many thanks to Will and Stephen for letting AAC members fly their beautiful airplanes for a while.

Steve Bevitt, President

First Solo - What a Relief!

As we age our bodies change, not always for the best. Approaching sixty, I had quite a list of age and lifestyle related maladies - high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high blood sugar, and a lens implant, the result of successful cataract surgery.

Since I needed a third class medical certificate to solo as student pilot and for a private pilot's license, I went to an AME in December 2004, well in advance of my flight training. He told me that based on the results of his examination, he couldn't issue a medical certificate. The results would be sent to FAA headquarters which would require more information for consideration. After additional tests, plus letters from my doctors on the status of my health, information requested by the FAA was sent in early January 2005.

I began flight training with John Ewing in February 2005, knowing my application just needed to cross the right desks in Oklahoma City. The first week of April I contacted AOPA's medical specialists, who said that sixty days wasn't enough time for my application to make it through the system. They'd check on my application and get back to me when they had word.

By the end May I had nearly 40 hours of instruction, no medical, and no solo. With John, I made long cross-country flights to Bakersfield and Fresno. When Ben Freelove became my instructor, after John found a real flying job, we did cross-countries to Long Beach, Fresno, Bakersfield, Modesto, and Yolo County.

By the end of June I was desperate. I had about 50 hours, no word on the medical and five months since the paperwork had been sent. I called the AOPA again, asking what I could do to speed up the process. The medical specialist said, "Call your Congressman." After visiting my congressional representative several times, I called Representative Woolsey's San Rafael office. I sent her staff a fax of my request and other information needed to make an inquiry to the FAA. On July 5th the Congresswoman's office contacted the FAA. Two days later I received a phone call from the FAA's Washington, DC office telling me that my medical certificate had been issued!!! Glory hallelujah!!!

The day after receiving this news, Ben and I flew a cross-country to John Wayne airport. The flight was great fun and transiting the Los Angeles airspace is

always exciting. Our next lesson I practiced basics, stalls, steep turns, etc. Next lesson, Ben and I practiced landings and go arounds, and then it was time for the big moment. After Ben jumped out of the plane at Kaiser Air, I taxied out to 27R, did the run up, and took off. The plane jumped into the air--two touch-and-gos, and a full stop later, it was over, my first solo. I was flying solo just like I knew what I was doing! So on July 19th, nearly seven months after seeing the AME for my physical I had earned a tail trimming, which Ben performed with style.

It just goes to show that you can obtain your goals if you are persistent.

Ed Laski

Schedule Our Planes Carefully

As most of you know, we are back to four planes. Will we find our planes flying more because of demand, will they require maintenance more often, or will folks just stop flying because booking is more difficult?

While we try to improve our maintenance procedures, we can improve plane availability by reserving planes carefully and considerately. Awhile ago it was advised that instructional flights be limited to 2 or 3 hour slots. This is still good advice: student and instructor should be on time, be concise in the air, and do adequate ground preparation for each lesson. However there still seem to be preemptive reservations. Recently a long-scheduled weekend trip was foiled by an unexpectedly long 100-hour inspection. Another aircraft was reserved this weekend for a trip. The member forgot the reservation, and didn't to cancel until it was too late for the disappointed party to step in. There have been times when it's obvious a plane has been provisionally booked for a number of sessions that probably won't happen. So, cancel in a timely fashion, for others' sake.

There's no hard and fast rule, nor an intent to question anyone's decisions, only a sort of moral obligation. No member should mind if another politely asks about a reservation to facilitate planning or backup reservations. Perhaps the flight comments could be a bit more specific. Please, do your best to ensure the most efficient use of our remaining resources, and we'll do our best to keep them all running in top shape.

Ginny Wilken, Maintenance Officer

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