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Special LPBA 50th Anniversary Commemorative Issue

FROM THE COCKPIT

Greetings from the carnuba-tipped end of Flagship LPBA as we prepare to take a late summer flight together. There actually isn't any wax on the pointy end of our craft, but the surf-board imagery was springing to mind because these are, after all, the waning days of summer and those tied to the academic schedule are getting ready to shift gears after a few more tantalizing days of summer's charms. We airpersons, of course, can soar far above the surf and watch the delicate tracings that those on its surface leave behind them and even occasionally glimpse the underwater companions or predators who may on occasion shadow them. Those without a coast or shoreline nearby are doubtless enjoying the last long days of summer aloft, possibly tinged with a touch of weariness from the heat and looking forward to that first fall cold front. Though summer in the mid-Atlantic has generally been temperate, I have asked First Officer Riddle to keep the A/C cranked up since the crisp days of autumn are, at this point, merely a promise.

Those with a sharp eye for the calendar may have noticed that our trip seems to be off to a late start, since we normally launch earlier in the summer. Since we had the grand Golden Anniversary Celebration of our line at that very time on beautiful Mackinac Island, it seemed appropriate to delay our departure for this trip so we can properly celebrate and commemorate that auspicious occasion and, simultaneously, move up the next departure. Yes, just like the other carriers, we are combining two flights, our Summer and Fall issues into this one; we'll move our scheduled holiday departure up by about a month so that you won't be singing Jingle Bells on these pages about the time you're throwing away the holiday gift wrappings in mid-January of next year. This seasonal adjustment will be very helpful in pacing our departures without the necessity of jamming two flights together and unduly fatiguing

your faithful flight crew. We hope you find this suitable.

Aerostar the Aero Star

"I've got to hop over to Pellston tomorrow and pick up some fuel for the return trip to Houston," fellow member Gary Evans said to me as I sat Friday morning with my face buried up to my ears at the breakfast buffet in the graciously-genteel dining room of the Grand Hotel. "Judge Mullins is riding along. Would you be interested in coming too? It's about 20 miles, not much of a trip but . . ." My pulse quickened as though I'd just received a wake-up cocktail from Michael Jackson's doctor. Why sure, I said as I mentally calculated whether I could physically wrestle the good Judge out of the right front seat if it came to that, I'd love to. I didn't tell Gary I would have eagerly signed up if it were just for a hop around the patch. Or, for that matter, just sitting in the cockpit making airplane engine noises.

This enthusiasm was born not only of a gentle affection for my fellow Gary (not to mention his gracious LPBA bride Penny), but of an appreciation bordering on lustful covetousness for his brace of beautifully restored Ted Smith twins which have been featured before in our in-flight magazine. I have great respect for anyone who takes a classic piece of machinery and restores it not for museum display, but for careful, prudent everyday use of the sort for which it was intended. And there is never any question about what a Ted Smith design was intended for: flying far and fast, and looking darn good doing it. His Aero Commanders and Aerostars have, to my eye, a grace and economy of line that have simply improved with age. And from Bob Hoover's legendary Commander airshow exploits, we know that all the right stuff lurks beneath that svelte designer silhouette.

And so it was that on the Saturday afternoon before the gala banquet,

two Garys and a Roger found themselves behind the business end of a horse, clop- clopping their way up

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FROM THE COCKPIT

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the island from the Grand Hotel to the pristine and a surprisingly well-populated ramp of the Mackinac Island Airport. The Evans' Aerostar, a pressurized Piper-built model 700P, sat resplendent in the unfiltered Michigan sunlight, iridescent in its custom scarlet and gray paint scheme which, I knew, saluted the Buckeyes of our shared alma mater. A smart and bracing breeze was blowing off the lake, which added spice to the efforts of Gary and Roger to remove and secure the cabin cover and, as I shivered for the umpteenth time of the trip, reminded me how hard it is to pack for weather conditions that you are not experiencing at home when you leave.

We waved at Jack and Ann McNamara as they departed eastbound in their Aztec, bound for a thoughtful encounter with a known line of boisterous weather draped across their route home to New Jersey, and then climbed aboard the Aerostar, with the Judge graciously heading for the cheap seats in the back. This saved me from delivering a prepared whiney monologue about how HE could ride up front all the way back to TEXAS, fer cryin' out loud, that might have otherwise soured the occasion.

When the airplane is an Aerostar, of course, it is probably more appropriate to say that you put it *on* as opposed to climb *into* it. The contrast with the mode of transport in which Marie and I had journeyed to the meeting – the venerable A/Bus, our 35-foot diesel pusher road leviathan – could hardly be sharper. From their respective seats, the A/Bus captain and copilot can barely touch fingertips and cannot reach the cabin ceiling. But in the Aerostar, you sit shoulder to shoulder, the tubular shape of the cigar-like fuselage intersecting the First Officer's noggin at about the 1:30 position, especially wearing noise canceling headphones, a contemporary affectation that

designer Smith probably would have sneered at. But Ted thoughtfully provided "eyebrow" windows in the overhead for peering into turns which, when their sunshades are retracted, provide about an inch of additional headroom, and a critical inch it is, too.

Checklists completed, Gary announced our intentions, took the active runway, and proceeded to advance the throttles to the firewall. The engines answered the call with a hard-edged metallic roar and we began the hurtling down the runway as though drawn by some giant airplane-attracting magnet planted at the departure end. Like its high-winged Aero Commander cousins, the Aerostar puts the cabin occupants fairly low to the ground, and so the sensations of acceleration and speed are gratifyingly magnified. As we broke ground and vaulted skyward, the stunning panorama of the Mackinac Straits unveiled itself outside our windows, with azure skies topping crystalline waters and verdant green landforms. Once the airplane was cleaned up and well on its way to our modest cruise altitude, Gary asked if I would like to take the controls. Well yes, I replied, secretly relieved that I would not have to club him into submission in order to achieve this heartfelt objective.

In my experience, good machinery often behaves the way it looks, and that proved to be the case with the Aerostar. I expected responsive but not sporty handling, a pleasantly firm touch on the controls, and the sense that the airplane was responding to my thoughts as much as my clumsy control inputs. In no respect was I disappointed. There wasn't much I could do to prolong this simple point to point flight but I relished every moment until handing it back to our Master and Commander on downwind to Pellston's runway 31. Gary squeaked it on despite the stiff breezes and we taxied in among some recession-defying executive

transports which might well have been parked at Mackinac were the runway there a couple thousand feet longer.

The fuel truck arrived, a venerable Ford that had come off the assembly line at about the time I graduated from high school, and Gary oversaw the placement of 80 gallons of avgas among the Aerostar's fuselage and wing tanks. With this task accomplished, we reboarded and launched for the return hop to Mackinac. "You got it," came the magic words and once again I sampled the fruits of Ted Smith's abundant talents. I was also intent on snapping some aerial photographs but was not about to relinquish the controls, so I held the little Nikon digital camera up with my right hand and took random shots as my NTSB overseer in the back chuckled at my multitasking. I doglegged a bit towards the delicate-looking Mackinac Bridge and dipped the right wing to do a quarter-circle around the ferry long-term parking lot where the A/Bus slumbered peacefully, awaiting its far more leisurely homeward assignment. I adjusted our downwind entry leg slightly so as to maximize the view of the Grand Hotel, perched in its Victorian splendor on the surprisingly cantilevered sides of Mackinac Island. That sight alone would've been worth the price of the avgas — had I been paying for it which, thankfully and cleverly, I wasn't.

Gary took over on downwind and masterfully wrestled us down through several layers of crisscrossing windstreams coming off the slopes and trees ringing the airport. With a very substantial crosswind component, our touchdown speed was sprightly and while we very comfortably stopped well within the confines of the runway, the brakes did get the opportunity to show a bit of their stuff.

The Judge and I helped redeploy the protective fuselage canopy in the breeze and walked away with a num-

ber of the backward glances that a good flying machine always generates, bound for our return trip to the Grand Hotel by horse and carriage. It seemed fitting to celebrate our line's 50th with a flight in one of the more significant and unique designs of that period, and to commend one of our captains who has devoted the time and resources necessary to keep his oft-admired example flying forward into the future so beautifully preserved.

Our route of flight

Our flight today will be a special one, celebrating our Golden Anniversary Celebration in words and pictures while treating topical information that will serve you well in the cockpit. Of course, the 9/11 attacks



Aerostar awaits fuel at PLN.

forever altered the public's and the government's view of aviation security; Alan Armstrong reports on a significant milestone in setting the record straight about the hazard vel

non posed by GA operations. Kathlynn Fadely and Steve Kirsch presents a compendium of significant areas of government aviation litigation while Charles Finkel and Mike Holland give their perspectives on plaintiffs and defense practice, respectively. Cecile Hatfield keeps our legal charts up to date and Ken Stein tells you what your clients need to know about employee investigations.

It's bound to be an enjoyable and even historic flight. So sit back, relax and . . . let's start the next 50 years.

Gary W. Allen



350 horsepower; no waiting . . .

