

Dominion Flyer

For Customers and Friends of Dominion Aviation

MARCH 2017

The End of an Era

Gordon Bowers had Chesterfield's coolest ride – a T-28; now he's turning the page

It started with a twenty-minute ride in the back seat 23 years ago. And it ended – after 21 years of ownership, 1900 hours in type, several hundred airshows and more fun than most people can dream of – with a final takeoff from KFCI this past January.

Gordon Bowers' T-28, a 1955 Navy trainer with a growling radial engine, high stance and military livery, is now history at Chesterfield County. But it's a history he delights in telling.

"Insanity is the basic concept," he laughed, seated in the office-workshop he's built in his hangar, amid the parts for his next project. "Dave Hudson, my AME and a friend, called me up and said, 'Would you like to go for a ride in a T-28?' I said, 'What's a T-28?'"

At that point Bowers had been flying for 20 years and had logged 1,400 to 1,500 hours. A Maryland native educated as a mechanical engineer, he'd moved here to escape the Washington traffic and launched a financial planning practice. Prior to the T-28, he recalled, "I'd never flown anything with a canopy, or a control stick, or more than 300 horsepower, or a supercharger. It was culture shock."

But after that one 21-minute ride, he was hooked. He spent the next year and a half finding the one he would buy.

"The T-28," he explained, "is arguably the most complex piston-powered, single-engine airplane ever made. It has ... four separate DC buses plus an AC bus, with automatic load shedding, on-board oxygen, an extensive hydraulic system, even plumbing for anti-G suits – all 1950's technology. The engine, a Wright R-1820, has a



two-speed supercharger and ... it'll take you to 37,000 feet. To fly it is indescribable."

It's an absolute delight, Bowers added. "It's like a great big Cherokee, stable and forgiving. It's designed to be a trainer, not to kill the students. The complex part is to maintain control of

all the systems and to manage the powerplant. It's reliable, but it's not tolerant of abuse ... and it's easy to abuse."

"If you get 1,000 hours from the engine in the real world, you're doing well – but you should get 2,000. The problem is that these planes change hands and there's always somebody on the wrong side of the learning curve."

For three decades, the T-28 was the primary trainer for the Navy and Marines. "Every naval aviator from the mid '50's to the

mid '80's did his carrier qualifications in the T-28," Bowers said. It saw combat in Southeast Asia "before we admitted we were there." Almost 2,000 were built, of which perhaps 200 – "nobody knows for sure" – are still flying.

"It's an overpowered airplane," Bowers explained. The A model had an 800-hp engine. "But the Navy wanted to deck launch without a catapult, so they upped

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A Memo from Mike By Mike Mickel, CEO, Dominion Aviation Services, Inc.



Welcome to the first edition of *Dominion Flyer*, our newsletter for customers and friends of Dominion Aviation. We've designed this to keep you up to date on events and interesting people at Richmond Executive Airport, and to share ideas to keep your flying safe and fun.

We also want to introduce you to the professional team here at Dominion Aviation. Now in our 34th year, we're the largest General Aviation firm in Central Virginia and – we think – the second oldest GA firm under continuous ownership in Virginia. Safety is serious business here, and we want to make you safer by sharing our ideas and practices.

The idea for this project came from one of our customers, Reid Ashe. Reid has been studying the challenges facing mid-size businesses and found that most could improve their customer communication. He approached us to try out some of his ideas.

You might have seen Reid around the airport. A lifelong flying enthusiast, he now owns a Cirrus SR-22, N122GH. Before that, he had a Cessna 340A. In 41 years he's owned six airplanes and collected 7,300 hours and an ATP certificate. Before retiring as *Media General's* Chief Operating Officer, he used his airplane to visit the company's newspapers and TV stations around the southeast. Now he flies for fun and to support his volunteer and consulting work.

Reid and I will work together on this newsletter. We want it to be interesting and useful and we'll welcome your suggestions. Contact me (mmickel@dominionaviation.com) or Reid (reid@alum.mit.edu) with your ideas.

Thank you for reading – and thank you for your business!



Reid Ashe

Seminars Aim for “V safe”

By Bryan Smith, Director of Cirrus Operations

In the world of aviation, we use the term “V speeds” to define the “Velocity” at which we can achieve a particular aspect for our aircraft.

A fun fact about the term itself: Most native speakers of English assume that “V” is for velocity. Technically, though, “V” stands for “vitesse,” – the French word for “speed.”

In my world, “V” also has another meaning.

I have been a Certified Flight Instructor, CFI, CFII, and MEI since 2000. I did my primary flight training at Chesterfield in 1999.

With the help of Dominion Aviation, I enrolled in a professional flight school in central Florida for my additional ratings. I returned to Chesterfield because I am from here and I wanted to be an resource to my friends and community. I spent several

years as a flight instructor under Becky Luther and was moved up the ladder to charter.

Today I fly a jet! My love, however, is still with instruction. I do not have the available time to fly with everyone I want, but I find I can reach more aviators through a new FREE ground-based learning system.

The “V” Series

The “V” Series is at 6 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month, and together we can keep our community safe while growing our aviation knowledge.

The “V” Series was started as a “Voice Series.” The voice may be heard or spoken, from an experienced instructor or from a pre-solo student. The voice may be an invited guest or it may be a video.

The programs are open to all; those at Hanover, Richmond, Farmville and anyone else transiting through our airspace.

The “V” Series is designed to be interactive and spirited, fun and enlightening. It also could just be an excuse for us to sit around and talk about airplanes, flying or how to tighten a loose wing nut, while looking for that bucket of prop wash that keeps going missing.

Join us each month in the Chesterfield Terminal Building as we talk about subjects

such as icing, risk management, the new ACS guidelines, avionics systems, weather and hazards, ATC stuff, aircraft performance, systems and maintenance, ADIZ, Cirrus safety, aircraft calculations, and even..... drones!



VA to Lift Tax on Air Parts

As this edition went to press, the General Assembly had just sent to Governor McAuliffe a bill to exempt aviation parts from sales tax, potentially saving owners thousands of dollars on overhauls and upgrades.

Dominion's Mike Mickel, as Chairman of the *Virginia Aviation Business Association*, joined *NBAA*, *AOPA* and others, in pressing for the change.

In a compromise to protect this year's tax revenue, the exemption takes place July 1, 2018. It expires June 30, 2022, but if it works as hoped, it's likely the legislature will make it permanent.

The measure aims to erase Virginia shops' competitive disadvantage and to incentivize investment.

Maintenance Matters By Tony Nunes, FBO Manager and Director of Maintenance

We're happy for owners to come get their hands dirty

Customers often ask if an owner-assisted annual is a good idea. Will I learn from it? Will I save money?

The answers are definitely “yes” and “it depends.”

The more you're involved in the maintenance of your airplane, the more you'll learn and the better you can manage your airplane between its visits to the shop. It will make you a smarter and safer pilot.

In the shop, you might save us some time by opening cowlings and inspection panels, but remember it takes us time to look over your shoulder and answer your questions. Your involvement can push the cost either up or down.

We do four or five owner-assisted annuals a year, and they vary widely. We have a customer who is truly a student of his airplane. He comes with his airplane every year, he knows what he's doing and he definitely saves money. On the other end of the scale, we have a partnership where all the partners participate. We spend a lot of time with them – actually more than we bill – and they spend more money than if they just stayed home. But they learn a lot in the process.

As a customer, you're always welcome in our shop. We won't



cut corners, but we'll go to great lengths to work with you the way you want to work.

New in the Shop

Soon we'll be offering dynamic propeller balancing. The equipment has arrived, and we're underway with training. The point is not just a smoother-running, quieter combination of engine and prop, but also one that's longer-running and less prone to cracking. The job will take less than a day and cost about \$300 for a piston engine and a bit more for a turbine.

With transponders now sending ADS-B-out, we've invested in new test equipment to certify them. We can do all the work required by FAR 91.411 and 91.413, the every-other year transponder, static and altimeter checks, in-house.

You might have noticed our new bright orange, egg-shaped GPU on the ramp. Any time an airplane – from the smallest to the largest at FCI – needs electric power on the ramp, the GPU (ground power unit) can provide it. Like a modern automobile, the new one is fully automated, so the line staff just has to press a button to operate. And with nothing for the operator to adjust, there's much less room for error.



Meet our CFO

Kim Kessler knows the numbers, but her mission is to solve your problems

Kim Kessler wants you to know she's here for you. Her title at Dominion Aviation is Chief Financial Officer, but

her self-described mission is to solve problems.

“If you have a question or a concern,” she said, “give me a call. If you have a question and don't know whom to call, call me. I'm not your typical back-room accountant. I'm not afraid to take the lead and help people with an issue.”

Kim is a career accountant and a CPA, but she's new to aviation. She joined Dominion three years ago as CFO and head of human resources for the 60-person staff. You'll usually find her upstairs in the terminal building.

What surprised her about aviation? “The large number and wide variety of people who fly – and the passion they have for it,” she said. “Pilots are special people.”

Aviation is an up-and-down business, and Kim said she's happy to see the growth in Dominion's charter business and its flight school. “The Cirruses are a huge asset. They make flying more

affordable and safer. And I hear really good things about our flight school. I have a friend who's learning to fly. He had gone to another local airport first, but found the school here is much better than what he'd found elsewhere.”

And will she learn to fly? “I'm thinking about it,” she smiled.

Kim describes herself as a family person – with four children, a son-in-law and two grandchildren. She loves to spend time outdoors, kayaking, camping and hiking. She and her 15-year-old son recently hiked Old Rag Mountain in the Shenandoah National Park.

Let's talk safety

Join Bryan Smith for a free safety meeting at 6 p.m. every third Wednesday in the terminal building conference room. Coming topics include: ...

► **March 15:** the FAA's new testing standards

► **April 19:** Garmin Perspective avionics

► **May 17:** Thunderstorms

Save on Fuel

Maintenance Plus customers enjoy a 75¢ per gallon fuel discount, a 7.5% discount on shop labor and more. Learn more at <http://www.dominionaviation.com/maintenance-plus> or call 804-271-7793 and ask for Maintenance.



Pictured clockwise from above are Gordon with an Ercoupe (he's actually trading this one so that he can have a matched pair); Becky Luther, who has done much of the flying of the T-28; drawing crowds at an airshow; and in a formation of 16 T-28's at Oshkosh.

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it to 1,425 hp in the B model [which Bowers flew]. The C model added a tailhook. It would out-climb the jets of its day and it will out-climb and out-turn a P-51 Mustang."

Maintenance was what you'd expect for such a complex airplane. Bowers recalls five hours in the hangar for every hour flying.

"But the basic stuff is off the shelf," he said. "I have all the manuals, and they take you step by step through everything that needs to be done. I did the simple stuff myself, and we'd go to Punta Gorda, Florida, for the heavy maintenance. There's a shop there that does nothing but T-28's and they have the largest inventory of spares on the planet."

For the last 13 years, Becky Luther, formerly head of Dominion Aviation's flight school, has done much of the T-28 flying. Now she's joining Bowers in his next aviation adventure.

From the complex and powerful T-28, the pair are transitioning to Ercoupes – two of which they're refitting and dressing up for their return to the airshow circuit. One will be painted like Bowers' T-28 and the other like a current Air Force trainer. Instead of aerobatics, "we'll have static displays and tell people about the planes," Bowers said.

Why the Ercoupe? "It started as a backup to potentially losing

my medical," Bowers explained. "We all lose it eventually. I wanted a vintage airplane that could qualify as a Light Sport, and I didn't want a taildragger."

The Ercoupe is a unique airplane. Designed in the 1930s, it has no rudder pedals, it can't spin and the stall is "a non-event," Bowers said. "The systems are stone simple."

"I'm 71 and I have other things I want to do besides live at the hangar. The Ercoupe will help me do that. You can go fly, push it into the hangar and go home."

"The two Ercoupes, running at full cruise power, will burn three-quarters the fuel that the T-28 burned idling on the ground. In total displacement, the Ercoupe's whole engine is smaller than one cylinder on the T-28 and produces two-thirds the horsepower. Each Ercoupe when fully restored – including entirely new instrument panels – will have cost about what it costs just to overhaul the engine on the T-28."

And both will fit into the hangar that until recently was home to the T-28.

Though it's finished now, Bowers clearly treasures his T-28 adventure. "It was an intense activity, but it was also a privilege. We were flying a piece of history."

Ask us

Have you been wondering what, why or where about something at the airport, but don't know whom to ask? We'll find you an answer, and we might use it in the next issue of *Dominion Flyer*. Write to mmickel@dominionaviation.com.

Contact Us

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