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FEBRUARY

2020

Time Traveling: Part 2

(Fifty years ago Midwest Flyer writer Jim Hanson traveled from Minnesota to Hayti, Missouri to deliver a Piper Cub and pick up a Stearman from Mid-Continent Aircraft. Before making the ferry flight back to Minnesota, he was checked out in the Stearman by Mid-Continent President Dick Reade, a pilot who made a lasting impression upon him. This is the second of a two-part series about that adventure.)

by JIM HANSON

After 3 days with old friends, I started northbound. The temperature was 60 degrees, so I didn't even wear my snowmobile suit. I stopped for fuel at Perryville, Missouri, and was surprised to see rows of Sabreliners on the airfield. It's where they built them. In later years, I bought and sold nine of them.

Changing to my snowmobile suit, I headed north and again followed the Mississippi, flying past the then-almost-new Arch in St. Louis. I took out my Kodak, and snapped a photo of it (there was no "Alphabet Airspace" in those days.) I thought about taking a photo on top of a roll, but didn't want to chance negative Gs, so I settled on a loop instead. (A careful examination of the photo shows the camber of the airfoils while at the top of the loop.)

I proceeded north—it was notably colder—and ducked as deeply into the cockpit as I could to keep out of the wind. Looking at those cylinders exposed to the wind, I knew that there had to be some heat coming off them but couldn't feel any. Worse than that, the ceilings were getting lower. I stopped for fuel at Independence, Iowa and called Flight Service. They read the forecasts—deteriorating ceilings and visibilities in snow showers for the rest of my trip to Albert Lea. It didn't look good, but then I remembered that our company used to do Powerline Patrol from near Austin, Minnesota (only 22 miles east of Albert Lea) to Independence, flying 20 feet above the line and 20 feet to the side. I was very familiar with the line—and the towers along the route. There were several airports enroute; I'd go as far as I could. The weather deteriorated, but I did make it into Austin with "one mile and clear of clouds". The ceilings were so low,



A Stearman has unique flying characteristics as author Jim Hanson discovered after being checked out in one by Mid-Continent Aircraft President Dick Reade 50 years ago.

however, that I couldn't make the 22 miles home. Time to call it quits. That was January 24, 1970—50 years ago.

THE RETURN

I had often thought about the owner of Mid-Continent. In 1976, famed *FLYING* magazine columnist Gordon Baxter did an article on him; I hadn't known what a personality Reade was. I had a three-day trip scheduled to St. Louis recently, and rather than stay in the city, I thought about going back to Hayti. I called Mid-Continent and asked about Reade and was told the he still comes to the office every day. I HAD to go.

Reade was an Iowan and received a degree in agriculture from Iowa State. He enlisted in the Air Corps and flew stripped-down and unarmed P-38s in the Pacific doing photo-recon work. The airplanes flew at their max altitude (about 35,000 feet) and at long-range cruise (barely above a stall.) Missions could be 10 hours long.

After the war, he took up crop-dusting in Iowa, later moving south to Missouri. An inventive mind, he looked for ways to improve the airplanes and the industry. In 1967, he was a co-founder and President of the National Association of Aerial Applicators (now a worldwide organization that advocates for safety and best

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1994 Ayres, S2R-T34, N94PR

7835.9 A/F TT, 750 HP, Avenger Spar Caps, GPS Bantam-Intelliflow, CP-09s, Vortex Generators, Hopper Rinse, Spreader, Harbor, Air Conditioner, Electric Fan Brake, Bottom Load Fuel, Kawak Quadrant, Smoker, New Landing Gear, Wingman, Winglets



2013 Thrush, S2R-H80, N3025Z

3095.61 A/F TT, 0.0 Siran, Smoker, G4-SATLOC, Flow Control, Lane 111F Fan, Stainless Booms Exchange, MC Bottom Fuel, Left Landing Lite, Hydraulic Gate, Fresh Annual



2017 Thursh, S2R-H80, N813MC

1500.0 A/F TT, CP Nozzles, Zee System Inc. A/C & Heating, Vortex Generators, Par-200A Audio Panel, Intelliflow, Garmin, TXP GTX 335D-ADS-B, Load Hawg, Stainless Steel Boom, Hopper Rinse Tank, Right Side Boom Shut-off, Smoker, Bottom Load Fuel, MVP-50 Panel, G4, Air Repair Hydraulic Gate



1995 Ayres, S2R-G6, N3160M

11,024.0 A/F TT, Stainless Booms, Transland Slim Line Spreader, Bantam w/ 9" Screen and Flow Control, Load Hawg, 2" Load Valve, Pump w/ 4-Blade Electric Brake, 63 T Jet Check Valves and CP09-3P Nozzles



2020 THRUSH DUAL COCKPIT N705MC, 0.0 A/F TT READY FOR WORK!



2013 Thrush, S2R-H80, N3046N

2700.0 Engine & A/F TT, 0.0 SIRAN, Fresh Annual, 800 HP, Load Hawg, VGs, Bottom Fuel/Dual Load, Intelliflow with Smart Pump, Leading Edge Lights, Stainless Steel Booms, Hopper Rinse, Bantam, Smoker, Spreader w/ Kicker Plate, Radio, CPs,



2010 Thrush, S2R-T34, N5298F

4200.0 A/F TT, sprayer, nav lights, 228 gallon fuel system, Weath-Aero fan, intelliflow, smoker, G4, VGs, bottom fuel, additional equipment, New Glass, Fresh Annual



1989 Air Tractor, AT-402, N1012B

12623.4 A/F TT, Left and Right Bottom Load Fuel, Left and Right Loader Valve, Flow Control, Vertex Generator, Heat and A/C, Aluminum Boom, Satloc GPS, Less Spreader



1996 AYRES-41, S2R-T34, N2243J

8352.0 A/F TT, 850 HP, Satloc M-3 w/ Intelliflow, Lane Electric Fan Brake, Smoker, Cool Seat, Air Conditioner/Heat, Hopper Rinse Tank, Bottom Load Fuel, Stainless Steel Boom



1999 AT-402B, N51967

7922.0 A/F TT, PT6A-15AG, 8950 TT engine, Covington light OVH at 6500 engine hours, SATLOC Bantam with G4 screen, flow control, A/C, heat, Garmin G5 attitude indicator, CP 11 nozzles, smoker, very little fertilizer, Transland 10 vane, over-hauled FCU and fuel pump at 7322.0 TTAF, wing spars done in June 2019 at factory. One owner, always hangared



2018 Thrush, S2R-H80, N318SW

700 A/F TT, GE H80 (800 SHP engine), 510 gallon spray system with 41" stainless steel gatebox, leading edge lights, G4 and flow control, Load Hawg, smoker, plus much more.



2006 Thrush, S2RHG-T65, N41024

4194.0 A/F TT, 4287.4 TT SCAM, A/C & Heater, Satloc G4 w/ Flow Control, Fast Start, Transland 3" Pump, Stainless Steel Booms, CP-09 Nozzles, Stainless Steel SLK-41 Spreader, 228 Gal Fuel



1974 Grumman Ag Cat, G-164A, N9688

6042.6 A/F TT, 600 HP, Del Norte GPS, Smoker, Spreader, Transland Gate, Stainless Belly Skin, 80 Fuel Cap, CP 09 Nozzles, Stainless Steel Booms

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MID-CONTINENT AIRCRAFT CORPORATION

is located in Hayti, Missouri, 80 miles north of Memphis, Tennessee. Although Hayti is not the geographical center of our nation, **MID-CONTINENT** is the center for all ag aviation needs.

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practices from Ag Aviation).

Reade had “optimized” the Stearman, but to make ag aviation profitable, the industry needed purpose-built aircraft designed for the rigorous job of air ag. The airplanes needed good short-field capability with fast loading, easy maintenance, good flying characteristics and, most of all, they needed to be safe. Reade had input in that, as well, helping to design the Grumman Ag-Cat, and taking delivery of serial #1. He held the Ag-Cat dealership for most of the U.S. and all of Canada and picked up a Piper Pawnee dealership as well.

ABOUT THOSE STEARMANS

With the advent of safer, more capable purpose-built ag-planes, the Stearman ag era was coming to an end. Most operators would have simply scrapped them, but Reade recognized an opportunity. In the early-1960s, he placed small ads in aviation publications for the MCMD (Mid-Continent Maintenance Division) Custom Special Stearmans. These took a clapped out old Stearman totally apart—all metal work checked, corrosion-proofed and re-worked. Once again, Reade had read the market, turning unwanted aircraft into great sport airplanes.

VISITING A LEGEND

After calling to make sure Reade would be in his office, I pulled into the grass strip at Hayti. The place was busy with ag planes in the shop, on the ramp or tied down. I asked if I might see Mr. Reade and was ushered into his office. The office was

decorated with three quarters of a century of photos and artifacts befitting a man of his experience. Throughout the room were paintings and photos of the beloved P38, Steamans, Ag Cats and other ag aircraft as well as various pieces of memorabilia. I had been cautioned that Mr. Reade was hard of hearing—thousands of hours behind powerful engines and in open cockpits had taken its toll. He stood up from behind his desk to shake my hand as I told him of purchasing that Stearman 50 years prior.

I noticed several copies of *Midwest Flyer* magazine in the office, (Hayti, on the Arkansas border, is getting to the far south edge of its distribution range) and explained that I sometimes write for the publication and asked if I might have a photo of the two of us with the magazine? He obliged, and, with a trait shared by every good businessman, he made me feel that I was important to him.

As I took my leave, I had to marvel at this aviation innovator who ran an empire from a little grass strip in the middle of cotton fields in the Bootheel of Missouri.

Jim Hanson is the long-running FBO at Albert Lea, Minnesota and has flown 346 unique airplane types.

