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Hopping Into The Ag Industry

by JOSH RITTENBERRY



Dan Tonner's awareness of aviation came at almost infancy. In fact, there is photographic evidence of that very moment; it was when his Air Force Pilot uncle flew his jet from Del Rio, Texas to see Dan and his family at the airport in Sioux City, Iowa.

"He put me up in the cockpit for a picture with him, and I'm pretty sure that was the start of my interest in aviation," Dan recalls.

Uncle Henry transitioned to civilian life, and for 30 years was a pilot for Delta Airlines. Throughout much of that time, Dan had in Henry a close aviation connection to guide him even before he set foot in an airplane.



Dan Tonner and his uncle, Henry Tonner

"One of my best aviation memories as a pilot, myself, was a time while I was flying a DC9 freight plane out of Memphis. I checked in with Memphis



Center as we were climbing to altitude, then I hear my uncle on Center frequency say, 'Is that you, Danny?' I knew it was him right away because no one called me Danny unless they knew me when I was a kid. So we both ended up in the same airspace at least once."

After flying cargo, Dan eased into corporate flights, but was eventually laid off. It was when he took a contract job flying in Iraq that his brother-in-law, Roy Sharp, who had worked with a local Iowa

operator named Willie Hoppe, learned that Willie was ill. Willie approached Roy, a farmer, about buying Hoppe Airspray.

"Over the course of a year or more, we discussed buying Willie's business," Dan says. "And then in June 2009 we signed all the paperwork and bought Hoppe Airspray. I had never really been involved in owning a business, especially in agriculture, so it was more Roy who had the confidence to pull the trigger on what looked to be a large undertaking. I'm glad because it has been a great experience."

While Dan was an experienced pilot, he had never flown ag. But after the business was purchased, he attended a course at Riggan Flight Service in South Dakota to learn the ropes and soon planted himself on the operation's roster of pilots.

Willie Hoppe remained involved with his namesake flying service for two more seasons, but sadly passed away in 2010. At that time, the operation had about 10 seasonal employees. Today, there are three full-time employees and 12 seasonal staff.



Roy Sharp on the wing and Willie Hope in the cockpit



"We also hire several contract airplanes from other operators to help with our season, and we couldn't do it without them," Dan explains. "Some of them have been sending planes to help us since we bought the business in 2009."

Dan's wife of 31 years, Jeannie, an elementary school teacher, also pitches in when the business needs her. The couple is not only proud business owners, but also proud parents of two daughters who have made successful lives for themselves in Des Moines and Chicago.

"I think the outlook for ag aviation is still very good for the future. There will obviously be changes, such as the use of drones. Overall, I believe manned aircraft will still do the overwhelming majority of applications for many years to come."

Part of that good future hinges on what Dan believes is key to continued success and growth: new ag pilots.

“Transitioning new pilots into the aerial application industry is very important. I also believe these pilots need to be mentored and supervised as much as possible. We all know how quickly things can go wrong when we first start flying in the ag aviation environment. Any extra efforts we as operators and experienced pilots can do to help a new pilot to be trained and safe is well worth it.”

Although Dan’s journey through aviation has carried him to the world’s furthest reaches since he sat on the edge of a T-38 jet as a toddler, he can now look back to see that the journey has taken him full circle.

“There weren’t many ag operators in Western Iowa when I was growing up, but I did know Rodney Hughes, who flew an Ag Cat from the Primghar Airport. He was always nice to me as a kid when I rode my bike out to his hangar to look at his airplane. I was always amazed at how loud his plane was when it took off. Fast forward 40 years, and now I fly a turbine Ag Cat from the same Primghar strip every season.”



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Mid-Continent is proud once again to sponsor a youth t-ball team with the coaching assistance of parts division's Casey Haywood (pictured back, right).



Insurable Interest

by Josh Rittenberry

Stake Your Claim

Summer is upon us, and ag season is getting into full swing. But with more activity comes the increased risk of claims.

There are a lucky few operators who pride themselves on never having had a claim. Nearly everyone else is not that fortunate. Whether you have or haven't, now is a good time to think about why you should turn in a claim and what to expect if and when you do.

Is everyone ok? That's the first thing your agent should ask if you or one of your pilots has had an accident. The well-being of the pilot is of the utmost importance. Maintaining good records is critical in this circumstance because claims adjusters will likely want copies of the pilot's log book, medical, the last completed pilot history form, etc.

Do I need to turn this in? That's a question we producers get more often than you might think. Our guidance is always to turn in the claim. Some operators opt to take care of it themselves, but be warned that the cost of either a hull or liability claim could easily get out of control. If that's the case and you later have a change of heart, you cannot assume your insurance company will defend you if the claim isn't reported in a timely manner.

What's my deductible? Take special note of your deductibles when you receive your renewal quote or policy. In a majority of policies, there is no deductible for liability claims. For hull claims, however, a relatively small Not In Motion deductible is tied to an In Motion deductible that is, in many cases, equal to 5% of the aircraft's insured value if it is a turbine. Some insurance companies provide the benefit of a waiver of the In Motion

deductible for the first covered hull claim. You would avoid paying several thousand dollars out of pocket if the first hull claim of your policy period is a costly prop strike.

I've got a drift claim. Chemical drift claims happen every year; some more than others. If there's even a suggestion that you drifted to someone's hedgerow, call your agent so they can at the very least put the insurance company on notice for the potential of a drift claim. Operators are fortunate that most growers are reasonable and only ask to be made whole. But there are situations when contact with a grower isn't pleasant. That's why it's good for an operator to have the even hand of the insurance company on their side to negotiate a settlement that all parties can live with.



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Pictured L-R: Dennie Stokes, Mark McDonald, Chris Cobb

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5,899 TT, 1,120 SMOH, 90 Gallon Fuel, Avionics Master, Garmin 530 GPS Nav/Com, King KX-155 with Glide Slope, Piper Auto Control Autopilot with S-TEC Altitude Hold and Vertical Speed on Climb and Descent, Stratus ADS-B Out, Four Place Intercom

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2010 Dream Tundra, N523MM

90.0 A/F TT, Aerosport IO375 210 HP, PMA-8000B Switching Panel with 4 Place Intercom and Three Light Markers, Garmin SL-40 Com, Garmin 430 GPS, Garmin GTX-330 Transponder, Garmin 496 GPS (Panel Mounted), Digiflight II Autopilot w/ Altitude Hold, PFD/MFD

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1938 BOEING STEARMAN A75 N1 N54284

6,080.7 A/F TT, 520.4 TSMOH, 450 HP, Garmin SL-40 Com, PS Engineering PM-1200, Oilomatic Preoiler, Airwold Remote Oil Filter Smoker, Speed Ring, 46 Gal Fuel, Redline Brakes, Garmin GDL 82 ADSB-Out

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**1974 CESSNA 150
N3011V**

5,470 A/F TT, 2,100 SMOH, Continental 0200A, Cessna MX300 Nav/Com, Narco AT-50 Transponder w/Encoder, Two-Place Intercom, Spin On Oil Filter, Brackett Air Filter, Auto Gas STC, Nice Pain

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**1966 PIPER PAWNEE
N4484Y**

3,513 A/F TT, 780 TSMOH, 235 HP, Bantam GPS, Intelliflow, Smmker, Spreader, Completely Recovered, Replaced All Cables, Pulleys, Shocks and Windows, Repaired All Metal Parts. Very Clean Western Airplane.

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**2013 THRUSH S2R-H80
N3046N**

3,600 A/F TT, 800 HP, Load Hawg, VGs, Bottom Fuel/Dual Load, Intelliflow with Smart Pump, Leading Edge Lights, Stainless Steel Booms, Hopper Rinse, Bantam, Smoker, Spreader with Kicker Plate, CPs, MVP 50T Glass Panel

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**1978 PIPER PAWNEE
BRAVE
N3787E**

4,559 A/F TT, Lycoming TIO-540, 1851.0 TT Engine, 446 Hrs on New Carbine, Cylinders Top OH, Spreader, Boom & Nozzles, 86 Gal Fuel, Satlock GPS, 3656 Hrs Left on Wing Spars

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**1981 CESSNA A185F
N61955**

7,300 A/F TT, 770 SFRM, Continental IO520, 285 HP, Audio Panel w/ 3 Light Markers, Garmin 430 WAAS, Garmin 255 Com, Garmin GTX 345 w/ ADSM In and Out, Glide Slope, Stormscope, S-TEC-50 Auto Pilot with Altitude Hold, Rosen Sun Visors, VG Kit, Horton STOL Kit, Float Kit, Cessna Turbo Vents for Cabin Cooling, Backup Altimeter, Backup Artificial Horizon

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**1996 AIR TRACTOR
AT-402B
N60998**

7,166 A/F TT, 10253 Engine TT, 680 HP, Load Hawg, Heat & A/C, Comm Radio Hand Held, 1034 Hrs Left Before Wing Spar Due, Light Star SatLoc, Bottom Load Fuel, Boom w/ CP03 Nozzles

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