



BETTER
THAN NEW

172

A WINNER

As they say on TV: "It could be you!"

BY THOMAS B. HAINES

Like his fictional colleagues on television's "ER" and "Chicago Hope," Marshall Stambovsky, M.D., is undoubtedly calm and collected—the man in charge—when he's in the familiar surroundings of a hospital emergency room. Award him one of the world's best-equipped and best-known Cessna 172s, though, and he seems a bit daunted. ■ "I took pictures all day long," he says after receiving the keys to AOPA's Better Than New 172 sweepstakes prize, "but when I got home I realized I'd forgotten to put film in the camera." ■ His befuddlement of the moment is understandable, given the odds of his being the lucky one from among more than 336,000 AOPA members vying for the airplane. In fact, he didn't quite believe it when he got the telephone call from Drew Steketee, AOPA's senior vice president of communications. ■ Once the computers at the accounting firm of Ernst & Young had selected Stambovsky's number from the tape supplied by AOPA, Steketee left a message for him at the community hospital in Athens, Tennessee. Stambovsky is an emergency room doctor there, having completed his residency a year ago. Steketee made it clear in the message that this was no sales call. ■ After some telephone tag, the two connected. "I'm glad I was sitting down," Stambovsky confesses. "I had no idea I'd win this airplane when I joined AOPA." Still not quite convinced, he verified Steketee's home telephone number with the telephone company and even called Steketee's wife at home to see if it all was legit. "It's sort of like Ed McMahon showing up at your door," he says. ■ Stambovsky joined AOPA last May after he stopped by Athens' McMinn County Airport. While at the FBO inquiring about flight training, he picked up an AOPA application from a counter display, filled it out, and sent it in. ■ He is a student pilot and has spent many hours flying with his brother, Robert, who is an instrument instructor at the Edwards Air Force Base Aero Club in California. Stambovsky's visit to the Athens airport in search of flight training information is just one of several attempts at getting his pilot certificate. He first picked up information about flight training in 1982 when he was a physician's assistant in a small town in Maine. The training then got shelved when he decided to go on to medical school. After medical school came residency. He finally became an attending physician about a year ago, at age 42. ■ "I guess I'm a late bloomer," he says of his circuitous route to the ER. "I've wanted to fly for a long time; I just couldn't afford it." With his own airplane now, money is less of an issue, but time could be the problem. Stambovsky works about 18 12-hour shifts a month in the ER. "For flying, I'll make the time," he says, noting that his house is just two miles from the Athens airport. ■ He has a commitment from an instructor, too. One of Stambovsky's patients in the ER was the wife of a flight instructor. The grateful pilot found out Stambovsky was interested in learning to fly and offered his services at a reduced rate. ■ About 10 days after Steketee first



contacted Stambovsky, an entourage from AOPA, including President Phil Boyer, showed up at Athens to present the sweepstakes prize. The late January Saturday dawned cold and rainy, the ceiling well below the 1,600-foot minimums for the NDB approach to Athens' 4,700-foot runway. Despite the weather, a crowd of more than 50 local pilots and members of the International Swift Association's board turned out for the presentation. The Swift association's headquarters and museum is located on the airport. Among the crowd were Stambovsky's brother, mother, father, and girlfriend. To fend off the weather, Charles Nelson, president of the Swift association, offered the use of the museum hangar for the event.

Boyer taxied N172B, which had been hidden away in a T-hangar, to the museum. Crews then pushed the highly modified Skyhawk into the hangar, where Stambovsky got his first look at it after reading all about the project in the pages of *AOPA Pilot*. The pristine 172 looked right at home among the

beautifully restored, gleaming Swifts scattered around the hangar.

As Boyer noted for the crowd, Stambovsky is typical of today's student pilots. Most are in their late 30s and early 40s and have an established career. Karen R. Detert, AOPA's vice president of membership marketing and herself a 40-something student pilot, presented Stambovsky with an AOPA Project Pilot student kit. Project Pilot is designed to encourage adults to learn to fly.

Within a few days of the ceremony, Stambovsky had obtained insurance on the airplane, was seeking out a hangar, and was impatiently waiting for his instructor to return from a trip to Germany so that the two of them could go flying.

Once earning his pilot certificate, Stambovsky plans to use N172B to make regular flights to New Hampshire to visit

Marshall Stambovsky (below, left) signs the bill of sale and aircraft registration with AOPA President Phil Boyer (below) to make the AOPA Better Than New 172 all his own.

his seven-year-old son and perhaps to start a part-time practice there.

While Stambovsky was just getting used to the idea of owning such a famous airplane, William E. Teschner already knows what it is like to own a crowd-pleaser. Teschner won N172GN, AOPA's Good as New 172 that was awarded in January 1994. The white, gray, and red airplane is still famous and empties the FBO at every stop he makes near his Fort Pierce, Florida, base. Since winning the refurbished 172, Teschner has flown it throughout Florida and to Indiana to pick up his father.

By early 1996, some other AOPA member who joins or renews in 1995 will know what it's like to win an airplane—or at least a certificate redeemable for an airplane. This time the prize is the first new 172 to roll off Cessna's soon-to-be-built final assembly line. The First New 172 won't be ready for delivery until late 1996, at which time the member will cash in his certificate for a new set of wings. □

