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BY STEVEN W. ELLS

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Leader of the pack

This airplane will command respect

BY STEVEN W. ELLS



Woe is me—my time as pilot in command of the 2005 AOPA Commander Countdown Sweepstakes airplane is drawing to an end. By the time you read this, N112WN and I will be saying our goodbyes. I can't speak for my/your transformed Rockwell Commander, but I'm sorry our partnership is ending.

Once upon a time the original N1169J was overlooked and underused. But now, after a yearlong process that moved at a dizzying pace, upgrades and modifications from more than 50 contributors have been integrated. Soon one pilot's life will change when AOPA President Phil

Boyer hands over the keys.

Commander 112s aren't well known, but what is known has been skewed by that curse of aviation—the airport rumor mill. These rumors are usually generalities such as, “Parts aren't available” or “They're just not good airplanes.” Commanders had further fallen out of favor by the time AOPA



bought N1169J because Commander Aircraft, the latest iteration of the parent company, had been mired in bankruptcy for two years. At no time did the Commander Countdown project ever bog down for lack of parts, nor was the “no good” rumor ever substantiated. The Commander 112 isn't very fast and doesn't have a big useful load, but it's a dependable and comfortable airplane.

The Commander Countdown sweepstakes began in November 2004 when AOPA purchased a 1974 Commander 112A with 2,041 hours on the airframe, peeling paint, 1974-vintage avionics, and a 30-year-old interior featuring tan Naugahyde trimmed with mustard-yellow fabric.

The frantic first quarter

The first steps in the transformation began in mid-January when the original instrument panel was removed and a new one was specially fashioned to accommodate the latest Chelton Flight Systems, Chelton Aviation, Garmin, PS Engineering, WSI, and Ryan International avionics.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FIZER

Additional equipment, such as the landing-gear warning system and Time-Trac from P2 Aviation Technology, a multifunction carbon monoxide detector from CO Guardian, a powerful engine monitor from J.P. Instruments, and an aileron trim system from Aero-Trim, was also added to the panel.

To maintain the ambitious schedule, especially during the first quarter of the year, AOPA asked installing agencies such as Howard Aviation and Master Aircraft Painters to leverage their time by multitasking. While the avionics techs at Howard Aviation were busy installing the new instrument panel and the latest in avionics equipment, Howard's airframe and powerplant technicians also were grinding away.

They completed the installation of a 200-horsepower fuel-injected Lycoming factory-overhauled engine equipped

with roller tappet lifters and a new three-blade Hartzell Top Prop that's dressed up with American Propeller's fancy Designer Prop paint job. New engine hoses from Air Pro and engine mounts from Barry Controls complemented the installation. Exterior changes included a complete set of side windows and a new windshield from LP Aero Plastics and a new dorsal fin from Globe Fiberglass.

In early March the sweepstakes Commander made its last flight as N1169J as it was flown east to Master Aircraft Painters in Wickenburg, Arizona. There the paint scheme from Craig Barnett at Scheme Designers was applied. Prior to the paint application, a set of Micro Aerodynamics vortex generators and aileron and flap-gap seals from RCM Normalizing were installed. Then the painters applied glass-smooth coats of Sherwin-Williams Jet Glo paint.

The Master Aircraft team put in a herculean effort to get this finished in time for the first of the long cross-country flights from Arizona to Florida in time for the Sun 'n Fun Fly-In in early April. This flight was detailed in "2005 AOPA Sweepstakes: The Big XC," in the June issue of *Pilot*.

Between Sun 'n Fun and AOPA's Fly-In and Open House in Frederick, Maryland, in early June, the interior experts at Air Mod in Batavia, Ohio, finished the interior that had been started at the paint shop. These touches included reconstructing damaged door trim panels and the custom fitting of a completely new set of Vantage Plane Plastics interior pieces and installing a set of Rosen sun visors and a set of Wemac cabin reading lights and air vents donated by Wilco, of Wichita.



Summertime flying

On the cross-country flight from AOPA headquarters in Frederick to Big Piney, Wyoming, the value of the WSI InFlight cockpit aviation weather service was driven home. Twice during that mid-June westbound flight across America's midsection I made in-flight decisions—once to land and wait for a storm to blow through and once to considerably alter my course—based on the WSI weather information displayed on the Garmin AT MX20 multifunction display (MFD). The details of this flight are covered in “2005 AOPA Sweepstakes: The Big XC II,” in the August issue of *Pilot*.

During the week I spent in Big Piney working with Robin Miley, we installed RCM Normalizing's STC-approved turbonormalizer system, which uses a turbocharger and oil scavenge pump from Kelly Aerospace. The turbonormalizer

New company

Commander Premier Aircraft decides on Cape Girardeau; hires senior staff

Commander Premier Aircraft Corp. (CPAC) announced that its new location will be at the Cape Girardeau Regional Airport in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Cape Girardeau airport was selected over 40 other possible sites because it best fit a series of selection parameters, and because the city made generous concessions to swing the deal. The decision was announced October 6, less than 100 days after CPAC bought all the assets of the bankrupt Commander Aircraft.

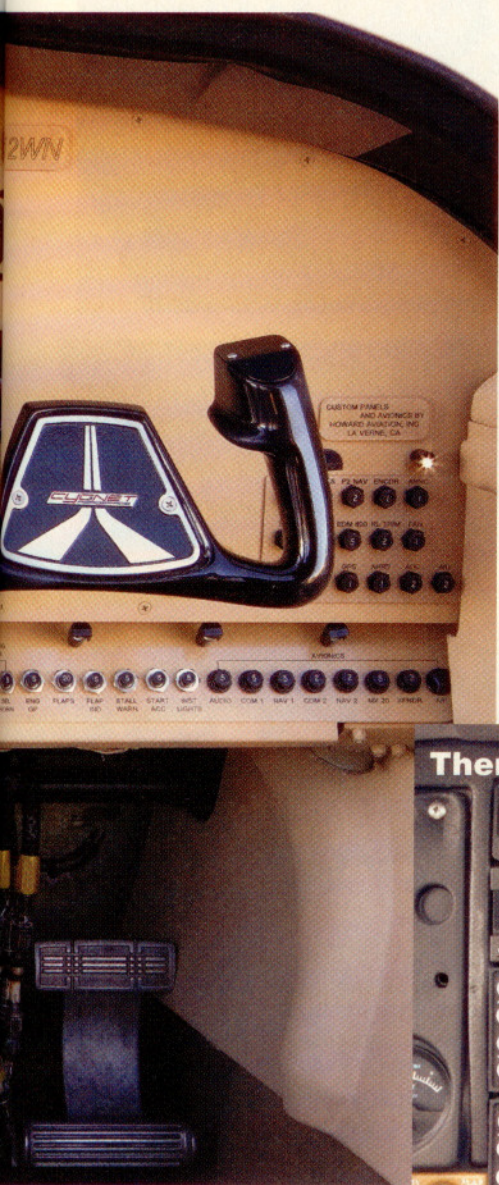
Joel Hartstone, chief operating officer of CPAC, released the airport information one day before the start of the eighth annual Commander Owners Group (COG) fly-in held from October 7 through 9 at the Sedona Airport in Arizona. A group of investors, made up mostly of Commander aircraft owners and COG members, voluntarily raised enough money to form CPAC and purchase the moribund company.

During the COG fly-in the AOPA Commander sweepstakes airplane was given the Inspector's Choice award for best instrument panel. The award will be passed on to the winner of the airplane when the presentation is made sometime early in 2006.

Hartstone also announced that Carl Gull, former chief financial officer and production-test and final-acceptance pilot at Commander, has agreed to join CPAC as chief operating officer.

Teddy Christy, who worked as an employee at Commander Aircraft and later as the FAA Oklahoma City MIDO (manufacturing and inspection district office) principal, providing production procedure approval and oversight for Commander Aircraft prior to the company's bankruptcy, will also join CPAC's staff in Cape Girardeau.

The company says that it will start shipping parts approved under the former owner's parts manufacturer approval to fill back orders with the current stock of parts within weeks. —SWE



installation added kick to the Commander. Now when an air traffic controller asked if N112WN was capable of climbing to an altitude above 10,000 feet msl, I no longer had to meekly answer, “Unable.” After the transformation the answer became, “How high do you want me and when do you need me there?”

After the installation I flew west at 14,000 feet listening to the humor channel over the Sirius satellite radio receiver, which is part of the PS Engineering PMA8000-SR audio panel.

I wore Lightspeed's Thirty 3G headsets throughout the year, and almost always decided to use oxygen administered through a Precise Flight portable oxygen system. This threesome—the

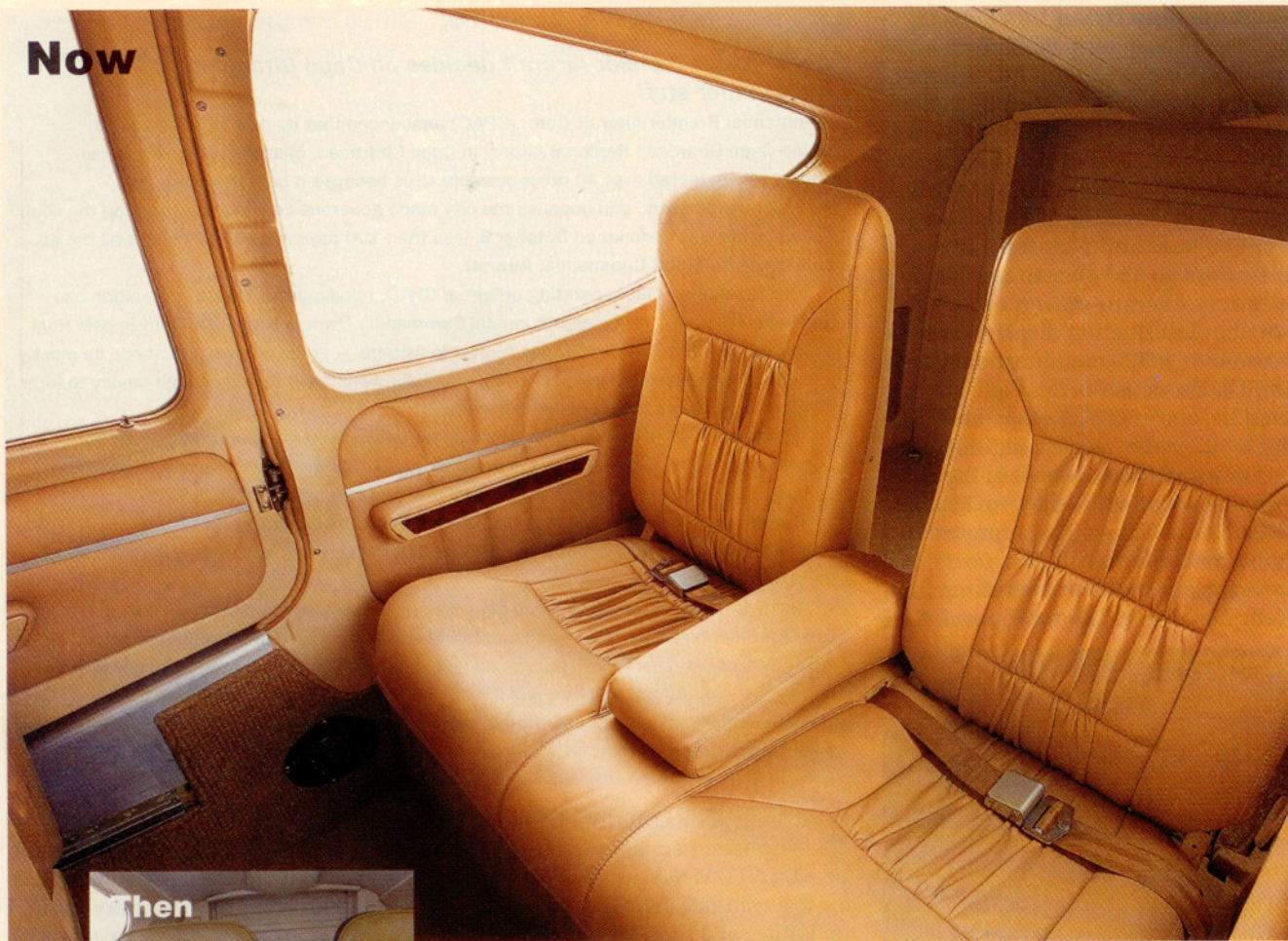
Sirius satellite radio, the Lightspeed noise-canceling headsets, and the Precise Flight oxygen system—is what I like to think of as my cross-country comfort combo. I no longer experienced undue fatigue at the end of a long day of flying.

On the next trip I again took advantage of the additional capabilities bestowed by the turbonormalizer to climb to 15,500 feet msl as I flew across the Rockies south of Denver en route to EAA AirVenture in Oshkosh in late July. The winner of the sweepstakes Commander will learn to enjoy the advantages of flying high. This flight was covered in “2005 AOPA Sweepstakes: Flying High and Breathing Deep,” in the September issue of *Pilot*.



Avionics from Chelton Flight Systems, Garmin, Ryan International, WSI, PS Engineering, and Chelton Aviation provide the winner with a forward-looking synthetic vision view of the approaching terrain. In addition, there's equipment that provides up-to-the-minute weather, terrain avoidance, and traffic information.

Now



Then



The AOPA sweepstakes winner will take command of the wide, comfortable cabin with outstanding visibility that's a hallmark of Commanders. The winner's new office features craftsmanship by Air Mod and Howard Aviation, cabin parts by Vantage Plane Plastics, and leather from Mayfield aviation leathers. LP Aero Plastics solar gray windows and windshield complete the package.

After AirVenture, N112WN was flown to Oklahoma City, where Mark Standrich inspected and serviced it for 11 days in accordance with an annual inspection. From there it was only a short hop to Chelton Aviation in Denton, Texas.

The last step in the Commander Countdown transformation has been



the installation of a Chelton Aviation AP-3C three-axis digital autopilot. This autopilot is the newest one on the market for general aviation airplanes, and it's a perfect fit with the digital navigation, attitude, and altitude platform the Chelton electronic flight information system (EFIS) lives on. The panel-mount con-

trol/annunciator unit has manual push buttons for small up/down and left/right changes, and three dedicated buttons labeled HDG, NAV, and REV control the lateral operations with two labeled ALT and GS controlling vertical operations. Both lateral and vertical buttons share a MAN button for manual operations.

The big prize

What does the winner of the Commander have to look forward to?

For starters, the winner will have to get used to a lot of attention at the local airport and at every fuel stop since the Commander is an eye-catching airplane. The winner also will have to get used to settling into a very roomy cabin with two large doors, the rich smell of leather seats featuring hides from Mayfield Aviation Leather, and the look of a skillfully crafted interior that's a mix of wool fabrics and touches such as individual reading lights and air vents.

Then there's the dependability of the freshly rebuilt Lycoming fuel-injected engine, and the smoothness of the engine-Hartzell propeller combination. The RCM turbonormalizing system will take a little getting used to. But everyone agrees that extra power is a good thing, and this system expands the performance envelope while being simple and dependable. The firewall-forward package is impressive.

Flight data recording

Before moving on to the avionics suite,

there are a few below-the-surface features that are worth pointing out. N112WN is equipped with two data recording devices. P2's TimeTrac records flight data such as takeoff and destination airport (by FAA designators), and breaks down operating time by time out, time off, time on, and time in. Since actual flight time—not engine-run time, which is what's recorded by Hobbs meters and mechanical tachometers—most closely fits the FAA definition of airframe and engine time, this feature will enable operators to accurately track engine time in service. Flight data are then downloaded into software that is designed to track times of pilots, airplanes, and components such as spark plugs and compliance times for service bulletins and airworthiness directives.

The other data-recording device is J.P. Instruments' EDM-800 engine monitor. This small instrument monitors and records a mind-boggling amount of engine

information. In-flight readouts include percent of engine power, all exhaust gas temperatures, all cylinder head temperatures, battery voltage, outside air temperature, and turbine inlet temperature. It also monitors and displays fuel flow and through an active interface with the GPS destination estimates fuel required to reach that destination.

All that data are stored and can be downloaded into J.P. Instruments' EZ Trends software. This software breaks down the data into flight summary pages, or prints charts of operating temperatures for each flight. Before and after installation, flight summaries from J.P. Instruments showed that the installation of the turbonormalizer narrowed the temperature spreads between the four cylinders.

Continued

Then



Now



Fly the Commander!



The "virtual Commander," software, which allows you to "fly" the Commander on your personal computer, was developed by Flight 1 Software for use with Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004. More than 16,500 people have taken a "flight" in the Commander—to download the program, visit AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/sweeps/fly).

The Commander avionics suite has to be seen to be believed. The Chelton EFIS incorporates 3-D synthetic vision, highway-in-the-sky technology, and a full-featured terrain awareness warning system (TAWS). Traffic information from a Ryan TCAD 9900BX traffic advisory system is overlaid on both the Chelton primary flight display and navigation display. The winner will have a real-time view of the terrain contours and traffic near the airplane.

Chelton's TAWS feature paints the terrain surrounding the airplane in different colors depending on its elevation relative to the airplane altitude. Don't fly toward red terrain—it may be higher than you are.

The MX20 MFD located at the top of the center stack displays the WSI In-Flight weather information. METARs, TAFs, sigmets, and airmets are available in this cockpit. WSI's NOW-rad weather mosaic also is displayed, complete with graphics and animation. This system is not intended as a primary source for tactical weather-avoidance decisions, but I can tell you from experience that it's comforting to look 100 or 200 miles down course and see a clear display.

I really enjoyed being a part of the 2005 AOPA sweepstakes. I know the new owner of N112WN will enjoy it too.

What's up for 2006? Stay tuned. You'll be surprised.

AOPA

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Contributors

AOPA thanks these companies that donated or discounted services to restore the 2005 AOPA Commander Countdown Sweepstakes aircraft.

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i Links to additional information about the 2005 AOPA sweepstakes may be found on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml).

A sweepstakes genealogy

Gifts that keep on giving

BY ALTON K. MARSH

1993 Good As New 172

The Cessna airplane that started the current series of sweepstakes airplanes continues to fly at Dean International Flight Training and Aircraft Rental at Kendall-Tamiami Executive Airport in Miami. N172GN is still identified as the



Robert Dean uses our first sweepstakes airplane to train Miami-area pilots.

AOPA sweepstakes airplane. It was won by a Fort Pierce, Florida, dentist who sold it after a few years to a Miami-area flight instructor. The instructor, who taught at Dean International, sold it, but the new owner left it in leaseback at Dean; then Dean International bought it. It remained at Kendall-Tamiami Executive Airport during both ownerships.

1994 Better Than New 172

One of three 172s that we gave away, N172B (the B is for "better") has stayed at Grandview, Texas, south of Fort Worth, since 1999. It has previously lived in Tennessee and Utah with other own-



Bulletin: While many of our previous sweepstakes airplanes have changed hands over time, they have always changed lives. In the end, all the owners have benefited, whether it was from the proceeds of a sale or the enjoyment of flying a new or amazingly restored aircraft. We'll not repeat the details in our 2002 report (see "Where Are They Now?" April 2002 *Pilot*), but instead give you an update on what happened to our airplanes.

Gregory Pinneo and the 182 in Seattle (right). The new 172's owner Edward Block (below).



ers. The current owners are still Edward and Ellie Block, and Edward is the AOPA Airport Support Network volunteer at the plane's summer home, Cleburne Municipal Airport, Texas. It goes to Cleburne because of summer temperatures that make the 2,100-foot-long grass runway (with obstacle) at his ranch some-

what challenging. Problems have been few and Block—a real estate agent—has done little more than burn fuel.

1995 First New 172

N172FN came new from the factory to the winner in San Jose, California, then to a dealer in Portland, Oregon, then to Niles Hanson, of Eugene, Oregon, who has had it since 1997. There it still is leased to an operator who checks logging sites from the air to assure that the day's logging activities have not started a forest fire. Two changes since our re-



port on this aircraft in 2002: 20-year-old Henry Hanson is using the aircraft to get his private certificate, and his dad, Niles, has bought and operates Rosen Sunvisor Systems located in Eugene, the high-quality sun visors now popular with pilots and manufacturers.

1996 First New 182

This Cessna aircraft has had only two owners—the Florida flight instructor who won it originally and Gregory Pinneo, of Seattle, who has had it since the year he became a pilot in 1999. Three years ago he was using N182FN (FN for "first new") as a vacation machine, but in 2005 it is a business machine. He has real estate clients over a wide area and also teaches acquisition-negotiation and finance seminars. The aircraft has served him flawlessly. It's not always

flown for work. He recently used it for a golf trip with former Seattle Seahawks quarterback-great Dave Krieg.



Norm Grant and the Ultimate Arrow.

1997 Ultimate Arrow

N97UA was won by a flight instructor in Massachusetts, who sold it to an owner in North Carolina, who sold it to Jason Wolfson in Massachusetts. Then Wolfson's head was turned by a Cirrus, so the Piper Arrow went to Norm Grant for use as a rental and trainer for the A&M Aviation flight school at Clow International Airport in Bolingbrook, Illinois. He's selling, but the price of \$217,000 is



intentionally high. The price was set intentionally high because he would like to keep it and hopes it won't sell, but he won't walk away from a nice profit, either. He has added an Avidyne EX500 multifunction display and enough Lo-Presti Boom Beam lights to make it look like a Boeing 747.

1998 Timeless Tri-Pacer

You'll agree that N198TP (98TP for "'98 Tri-Pacer") has a good home when you hear the story. Originally awarded to an Indianapolis pilot, the Piper Tri-Pacer shortly went to Bob Showalter, owner of Showalter Flying Service at Orlando Executive Airport. It then went to a sec-

ond Florida pilot who decided to sell it, and Showalter brokered the sale to Thomas Donnelly in Salome, Arizona. He built Tri-Pacer kits as a kid and now jokes, "It was my destiny to own that airplane." He lives at a fly-in community and takes frequent pleasure flights. "I just like fabric airplanes," he said.

1999 Cessna 206 Aero SUV

A for-sale ad appeared only two days after AOPA's award of N206SU (SU for "sport utility") to a Virginia pilot. It went to Fred Mugler, of Driggs, Idaho, beloved by his townspeople as the owner of Mountaineering Outfitters who died tragically during a fire in the living quarters of his store in 2003. Friends hope to rebuild the store. The airplane then went to Geoff Lynes, of Jackson, Idaho, who received instruction in it during a McCall Mountain/Canyon Flying Seminar. But he sold it after two years to actor Edward Norton, who plans to use it for pleasure flights in Idaho. Norton received Academy Award nominations for *Primal Fear* and *American History X*. He is in Shanghai making another movie.

2000 Millennium Mooney

Our Mooney 201 escaped getting sold when the current owner, attorney Gary Stoneking, started looking up the alu-

Our Tri-Pacer has had four owners—Thomas Donnelly is the current owner (left). The Bonanza's original winners, Norm and Joyce Elliott, kept it (below).

minum ladder at a twin but realized our Mooney fit his mission perfectly. N2014U (2014U for "201 for you") has brought him cases around Minnesota that he otherwise could not handle. Stoneking's son has finished law school and will take flying lessons soon, but not in his dad's Mooney. It originally was won in 2001 by computer executive Alex Thurber, of Puyallup, Washington, but went to Stoneking a few months later. He has put 800 hours on the airplane and has added TKS deicing.



Gary Stoneking now owns the Millennium Mooney.

2001 Bonanza sweepstakes

Here's one still with the original winner! Norm Elliott and his wife, Joyce, still enjoy our 1966 Beechcraft V35 Bonanza since winning N2001B in 2002, but have only put about 200 hours on it. The reason is that Norm has chased engine and avionics problems, and the aircraft was in the shop as we spoke. Will he sell it? No. He has been to several states from his Los Alamos Airport home base in New Mexico, and reports it still draws a crowd. Normally a 165-



knot airplane, we installed a bigger engine and a turbnormalizer and sent its V-tail scurrying at 190 knots.

2002-2003 Centennial of Flight Waco

Mark Zeller, of The Woodlands, Texas, (near Houston) went to the hangar daily after winning our restored 1940 Waco UPF-7 biplane just to admire it, but then he discovered that insurance for a non-

Roy Wilbanks, of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and he refused to sell. He completed his multiengine rating in N204WT (WT for "Win A Twin") at the Greenwood Country Airport, South Carolina, and plans on a commercial certificate from American Flyers next. "He'd bring it in the house if he could. I think he's at the airport now," his wife said. She was partially right; he was aloft in the Twin Comanche.



James Fox is the delighted owner of our Waco and his wife says he "flies it too much!" (left).

tailwheel pilot would be \$8,000 a year. That and other costs meant he had to sell. His kids will use the Waco's sale profits for college. When new owner James Fox, of St. Paul, Minnesota, was reached by phone his wife was heard to say in the background, "He flies it too much!" He was late for dinner because he had just flown NC29352 (the original 1940 N number). He uses it to unwind after a busy day.

2004 Win A Twin Comanche

OK, the Piper Twin Comanche was recently awarded and there hasn't been much time for the original winner to sell it. But it is possible to safely predict a sale is unlikely for years. Some of you know this because you called winner

2005 Commander Countdown

Your name here? The sweepstakes for N112WN (112WN for "112 win"), a completely refurbished Rockwell Commander 112A, closes December 31. All new AOPA members and those who renew before the end of the year are automatically entered in the sweepstakes. Learn more about this unique airplane on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/sweeps).

2006

We're already at work on the next sweepstakes airplane project. Stay tuned for details in early 2006. **AOPA**

E-mail the author at alton.marsh@aopa.org.



i Links to additional information about previous sweepstakes aircraft may be found on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml).

Roy Wilbanks would bring our Twin Comanche into his house if it would fit—and if his wife would let him.