





# THE BEAR



# IS BACK

*And it is more fun than ever.*

BY RICHARD L. COLLINS

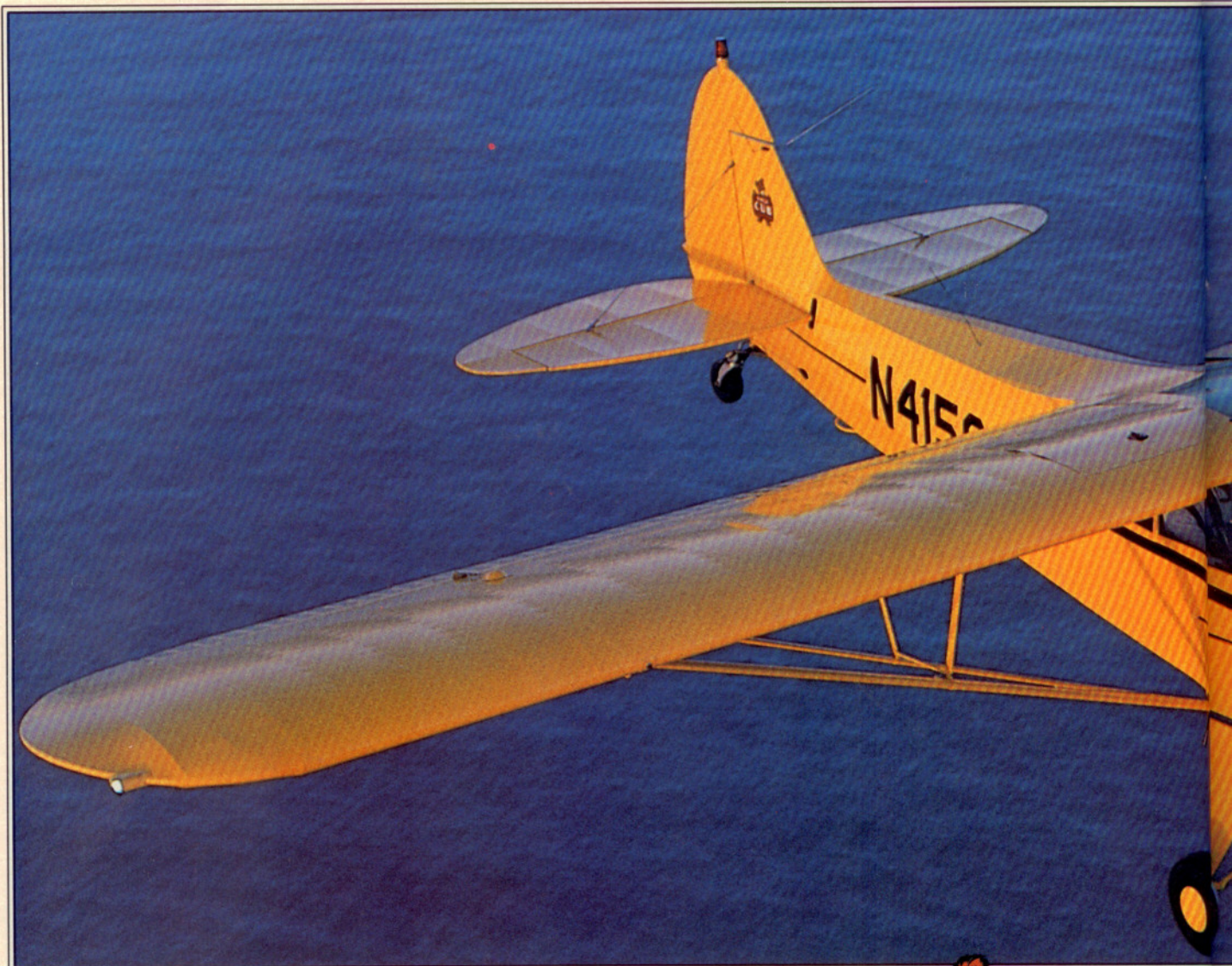
**P**

iper is building new Cubs again. So what, some say. So a lot, as everyone who learned to fly in the good old days will say. The Cub touched more pilots in the prewar and postwar era than any other airplane. This illustration has been used before, but it's always worth repeating: At a National Business Aircraft Association convention some years ago, the primary honoree was William T. Piper Sr. He wondered aloud why the folks who were flying heavy iron would honor him, the man who built Piper Cubs. At the banquet the emcee asked everyone in the room who had learned to fly in a Cub to stand. They all did, and Mr. Piper had his answer.

Learn is a key word when the Cub is mentioned, too. I was talking with a British aviator of my vintage and remarked that of course he had learned in a Tiger Moth. He came right back with "and of course you learned to fly in a Piper Cub." Correct on both counts.

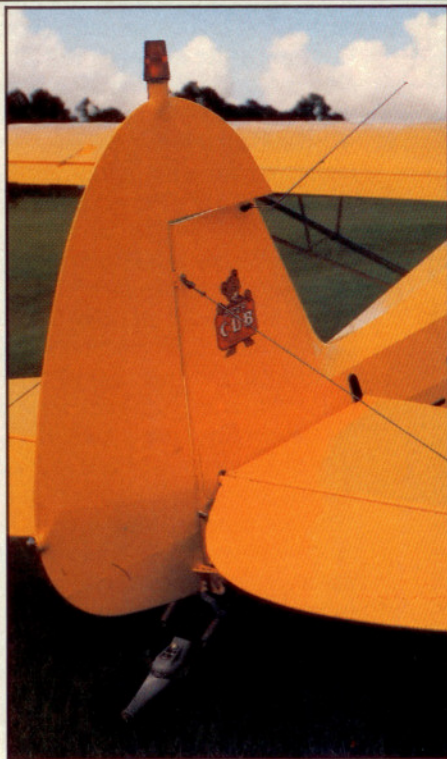
Piper did tout the Cub as a personal airplane in its advertising. May 1946: "Not a fast plane but fast enough to leave your friends far behind on the car-streamed roads to By-the-Sea." And it was good for a lot of things other than training. Its role as a liaison airplane in World War II is legendary and started in maneuvers in Louisiana just before Pearl Harbor. William Strohmeier, a Piper employee at the time and later Piper's ad agent, was the pilot who demonstrated the Cub to the Army. On one flight, he was assigned Lieutenant Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower. The colonel had gotten his private license a few years earlier but hadn't flown in a while. Flying out of a 100 × 800 foot clearing in the tall pines of Louisiana, Strohmeier offered Eisenhower the controls. He flew the Cub for several hours, navigating with a map, checking the effectiveness of camouflage at





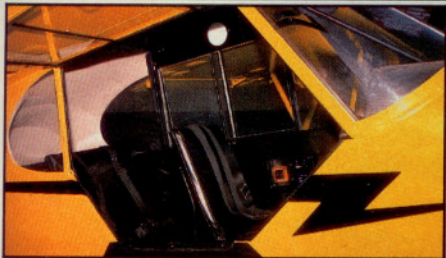
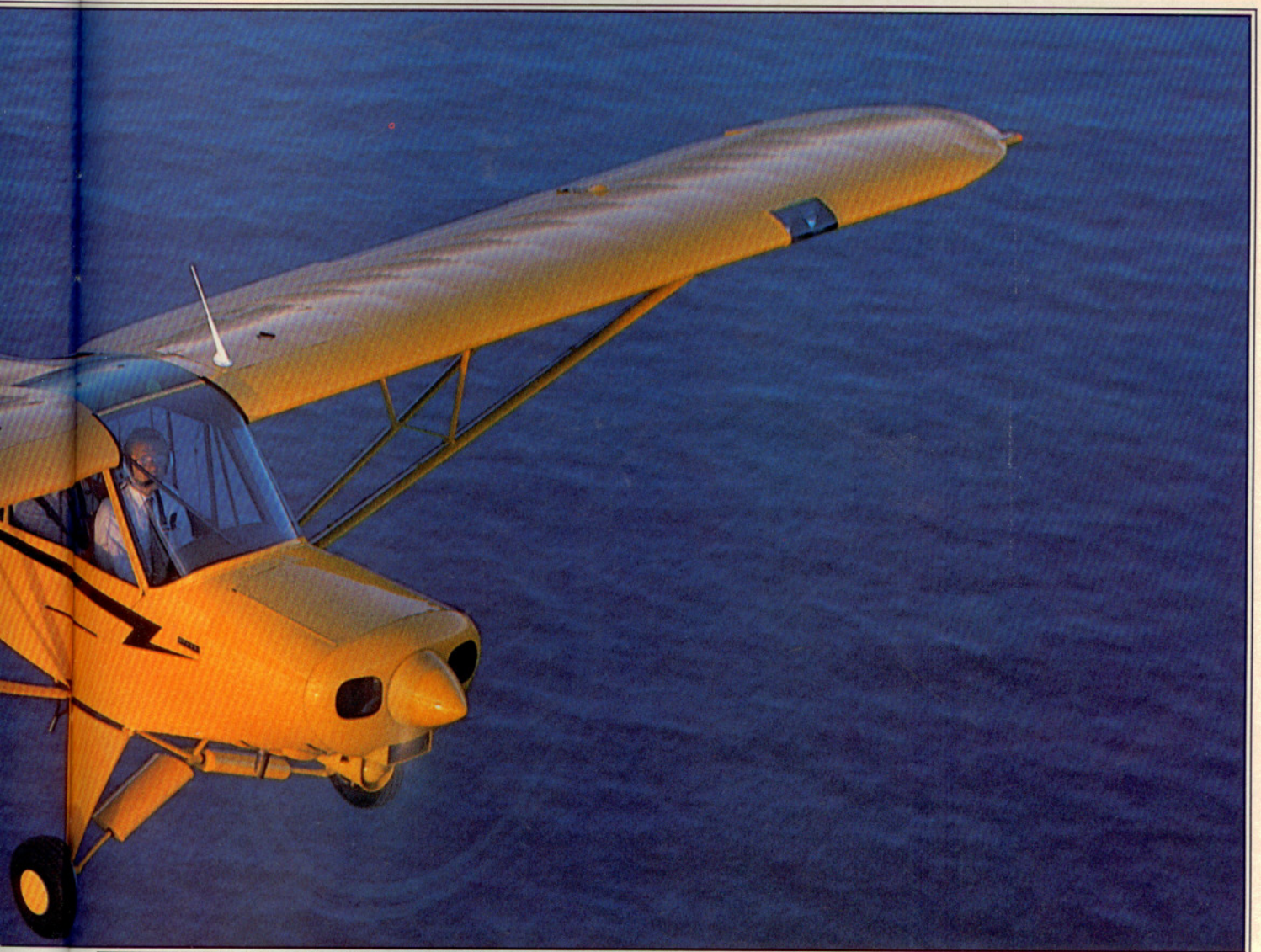
various bivouac areas, and landing on a road to get gas from a filling station. The day concluded with a gusty crosswind landing back at the short and narrow strip. Strohmeier wrote in *Air Facts* magazine of this, concluding with, "He handled it beautifully without any help. I wasn't surprised in future years to see where he wound up." Our only President with a pilot's certificate was a Cub pilot, just like the rest of us.

Almost every pilot from that era has tales to tell about things learned in and from the Cub. Almost invariably, the story is a tribute to the Cub's handling qualities or stamina. I learned more about emergencies in a Cub than in any sophisticated simulator or organized flight training course. I was instructing in a Cub, and in my only accident as pilot in command, we were involved in a midair collision. I didn't have to fly far before landing, but it was apparent that my Cub was not in good shape. It had to be handled very carefully. In fact, I



*If you neglect the steering and let the tail start accelerating in one direction, the result is an embarrassing little maneuver called a ground loop.*





made one of the few, if not the only, belly landings on record in a Cub because the landing gear was *hors de combat*. My student learned something from this about keeping airplanes separated: Jim Lewis is now manager, airspace and procedures, at the Houston Air Route Traffic Control Center.

The Cub was even widely used as a crop-duster, and the experience of a friend illustrates the economics of the time. He was doing a turnaround on a hot day with a heavy load and ran out of airspeed and ideas simultaneously. The Cub went through the motions of beginning a spin and hit the ground. Despite the fact that the hopper containing the dust was behind him and the Cub was well mashed, my buddy wasn't hurt. But he did endure some pain when he learned that the owner of the dusting operation would require him to fly for the rest of the summer without pay to compensate for the airplane he wrecked.

Cub war stories do abound, which is





one of the unique things about the airplane. While the other airplanes were good, there aren't a lot of Cessna 140, Aeronca Champ, Taylorcraft, or Luscombe war stories. The Cub, originally built in 1933 by the Taylor Brothers Aircraft Company, was the airplane of its day, and the fact that it was the original product of the Piper Aircraft Corporation, which is 50 this year and is still in production, means a lot to aviation and to all of us who learned to fly or first flew in Cubs. My first ride was 53 years ago in my father's Cub.

The 1988 Cub differs from the original in one primary way. Power is now 150 horsepower, where the original was 37 hp. More were built with 65 hp than any other engine. There are other differences, such as an electrical system, no more big, fat 800 x 4 tires, flaps, and some changes to the ribs and the means of attaching the fabric. But a Cub is still a Cub, and when Jess Krall, Super Cub sales manager, rolled the first new-pro-

duction Cub out of its shelter at Vero Beach, Florida, I was ready to renew an acquaintance with an old friend.

In this modern day, a person has to be careful when flying with someone in a tailwheel airplane. A pilot who hasn't flown one in years might remember the dynamics, but it takes a few circuits to get the touch back. A pilot who has never flown one has some basics to learn. One difference might best be illustrated by an anecdote involving Mike Fizer, who took the Cub photos. He wanted to move the airplane around on the ground for some different angles, and to do so he started pulling it by the prop. The Cub went in a direction not of his choosing, and I had to explain that when moving an airplane, you have to grab the end where the third wheel is located. That's why there are handles on the aft fuselage. When taxiing, taking off, or landing, you have to remember that the steering is done with the tail, not the nose, and that the airplane







*The Cub was the airplane of its day, and the fact that it is still in production means a lot to aviation and to all of us who learned to fly or first flew in Cubs.*



doesn't really want to go straight. If you neglect the steering and let the tail start accelerating in one direction, the result is an embarrassing little maneuver called a ground loop. The drill is to, with fancy footwork, keep it on the absolutely straight and narrow. I asked Krall to watch me closely. He said, "Don't worry, I will."

A unique Cub maneuver is in mounting and dismounting. I remembered how to get into the front seat of a Cub—right foot on tire, butt on door sill, left foot to the left side of the stick, grab the vee struts and lift butt into seat, pull right leg in—but the old bod didn't bend like it used to and the first time took some grunting and groaning. Once seated, I found the Cub comfortable and the visibility out front reasonable.

There aren't a lot of switches and knobs to deal with in a Cub, but I managed to miss a check list item on the first start. There's a mixture control, something that we didn't have on 65-hp





Cubs, and I forgot to push it in. So the engine started and died. Blushing, I reminded myself that you check everything in every airplane.

The Cub has a steerable tailwheel and brakes that you work with heel controls, more closely spaced than the rudder pedals. (Perhaps that explains why all Cub pilots are slew-footed.) The primary point is that heel brakes are unnatural to most pilots. Use with care. It's better to rely on the rudder and the steerable tailwheel for directional control with the brakes used only for stopping and for tight turns at very low speeds. The first Cubs didn't even have brakes, so the airplane is manageable without them.

Ready to go, the Cub accelerates rapidly and almost seems to fly away as soon as you get the throttle opened, raise the tail a bit, and then add back pressure. With the first notch of flaps, it launches even more quickly. Piper is using airspeed indicators with miles per hour, and the Cub hangs nicely on its prop, as folks used to say, at 50 mph.

Shooting landings in the Cub is great fun, and I made three-pointers and wheel landings. None were as soft as I wanted, which I blamed on the small tires, but eventually I got a nice one. We flew over to a grass strip to take some pictures where I was reminded that five



*Riding around, looking at the scenery go by below was a fine trip as well as a reminder of pleasant times.*

mph of extra speed equates to a long float before touchdown.

The new Cub does have flaps, but the airplane is fine without them. If an approach is too high, the Cub slips beautifully. For really tight operations, the flaps do lower the stalling speed by a few mph, to 47, but that is begging a point. It lands better with the flaps up, and if you have the approach speed right, there's not a lot of float.

No vertical speed indicator in this Cub, and I found myself letting the altitude drift up in the pattern. It took a few

times to remember that to fly level you put the flat bottom of the wing parallel to the horizon.

Riding around in the Cub, looking at the scenery go by 1,000 feet below and rather slowly, was a fine trip as well as a reminder of pleasant times. I couldn't help but think that the airplanes we travel in today are a lot different than the airplanes we use just to go flying.

It was a fun afternoon with a Cub, and we were back at the field early the next morning to take air-to-air pictures. I had my required landings and harbored an overwhelming desire for Krall to stay home and let me really command the Cub. He did, and I took Tom Haines of AOPA Pilot, who hadn't ridden in a Cub or any other tailwheel fabric airplane, along for the ride.

It seems silly to say, but I got as large a charge out of that flight as I have gotten out of any flight. I had forgotten how, when in command of a Cub, you feel more like part of the airplane than you feel when droning along with microchips doing all the work. Keep the airplane coordinated, keep the heading bang-on. Hold the airplane level. You can fly one of these puppies without a panel full of devices, by the seat of your pants if you will.

The Cub is available new for only \$42,595, or you can buy a kit for \$31,395



and build it yourself, winding up with an airplane that is licensed in the Normal category. The difference in price is small enough that a person buying a kit would have to want the pleasure of the project. A Cub makes a nice personal possession, and having built it yourself would add a lot to the bond between airplane and pilot.

I hope the Cub will find a home in the training fleet as well as being a lot of pilots' substitute for a mistress. Not that there's any desire for the good old days to come back, but the Cub could play an important role in flight training today. The simple fact is that the teaching system evolved into one where the cart is before the horse. The total emphasis has been on learning to operate the airplane in the system, with basic airmanship downplayed. At one point the slogan was even: "Take a drive in the sky." The system part is necessary, but first you have to learn how to fly. And, in reflection, I learned more about basic flying in a Cub than in all the others put together. If I were running a flying school, my order to Piper would be for half Cubs and half IFR-equipped Cadets. □

---

### Piper PA-18-150 Super Cub

Base price: \$42,595

#### Specifications

Powerplant	Lycoming O-320, 150 hp at 2,700 rpm
Recommended TBO	2,000 hr
Propeller	Sensenich fixed-pitch, 74-in dia
Length	22.5 ft
Height	6.7 ft
Wingspan	35.3 ft
Wing area	178.5 sq ft
Wing loading	9.8 lb/sq ft
Power loading	11.7 lb/hp
Seats	2
Empty weight	1,062 lb
Useful load	688 lb
Max takeoff weight	1,750 lb
Fuel capacity, std	38.5 gal
	231 lb
Baggage capacity	50 lb

#### Performance

Takeoff distance, ground roll	200 ft
Takeoff distance over 50-ft obst	500 ft
Rate of climb, sea level	960 fpm
Max level speed, sea level	113 kt
Cruise speed/Range w/45-min rsv, std fuel (fuel consumption)	
@ 75% power, best economy	
5,000 ft	100 kt/325 nm (54 pph/9 gph)
Service ceiling	19,000 ft
Absolute ceiling	21,300 ft
Landing distance over 50-ft obstacle	885 ft
Landing distance, ground roll	350 ft
V <sub>so</sub> (stall, in landing configuration)	37 KIAS

*All specifications are based on manufacturer's calculations. All performance figures are based on standard day, standard atmosphere, sea level, gross weight conditions unless otherwise noted.* □

---