

# Beaver fever



## Reliving boyhood adventures

BY MICHAEL MAYA CHARLES

**AS** a young lad growing up in Hopkins, Minnesota, Jon Strom and his father made annual treks across the Canadian border to fish for the wily northern pike. The father-and-son team admit that they never caught the biggest fish in Canada but it didn't matter to young Jon: "The trip in the chartered de Havilland Beaver was always the best part of the adventure."

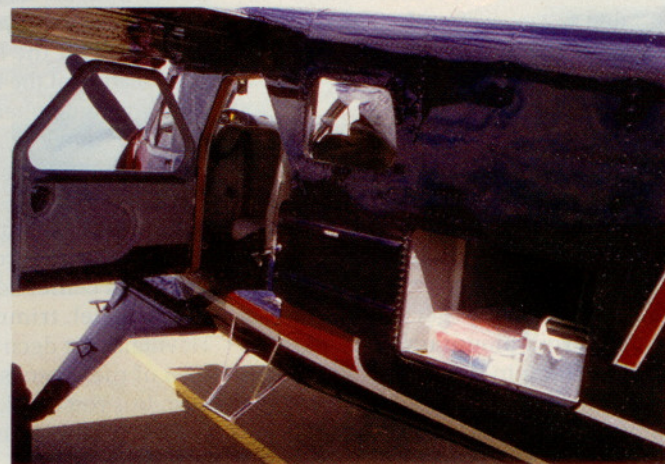
Some years later, at age 18, the younger Strom left Minnesota to attend the University of Denver, where he became a civil engineer. He eventually started an engineering firm in the Denver area. Even after nearly 40 years, though, Strom still remembers his trips into the wild North Country with quiet fondness.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FIZER









Strom learned to fly only about four years ago and didn't waste any time buying his first airplane, a Piper Super Cub. But the novelty of the new acquisition wore off quickly. "There's only so much you can do in a two-place Cub," he says. His wife and 12-year-old daughter wanted to go flying too, and the Cub left him one seat short. With a new private certificate, some Super Cub time in his logbook, a successful business, and those lingering childhood memories of magnificent Beaver flights, Strom developed a bad case of what's commonly known as "Beaver fever." He just had to have one. Though he justified the purchase decision with the four seats, he convinces listeners that the purchase was a good decision saying, "A Beaver does everything a Cub can do, and it has that great Harley-Davidson sound—and great history!"

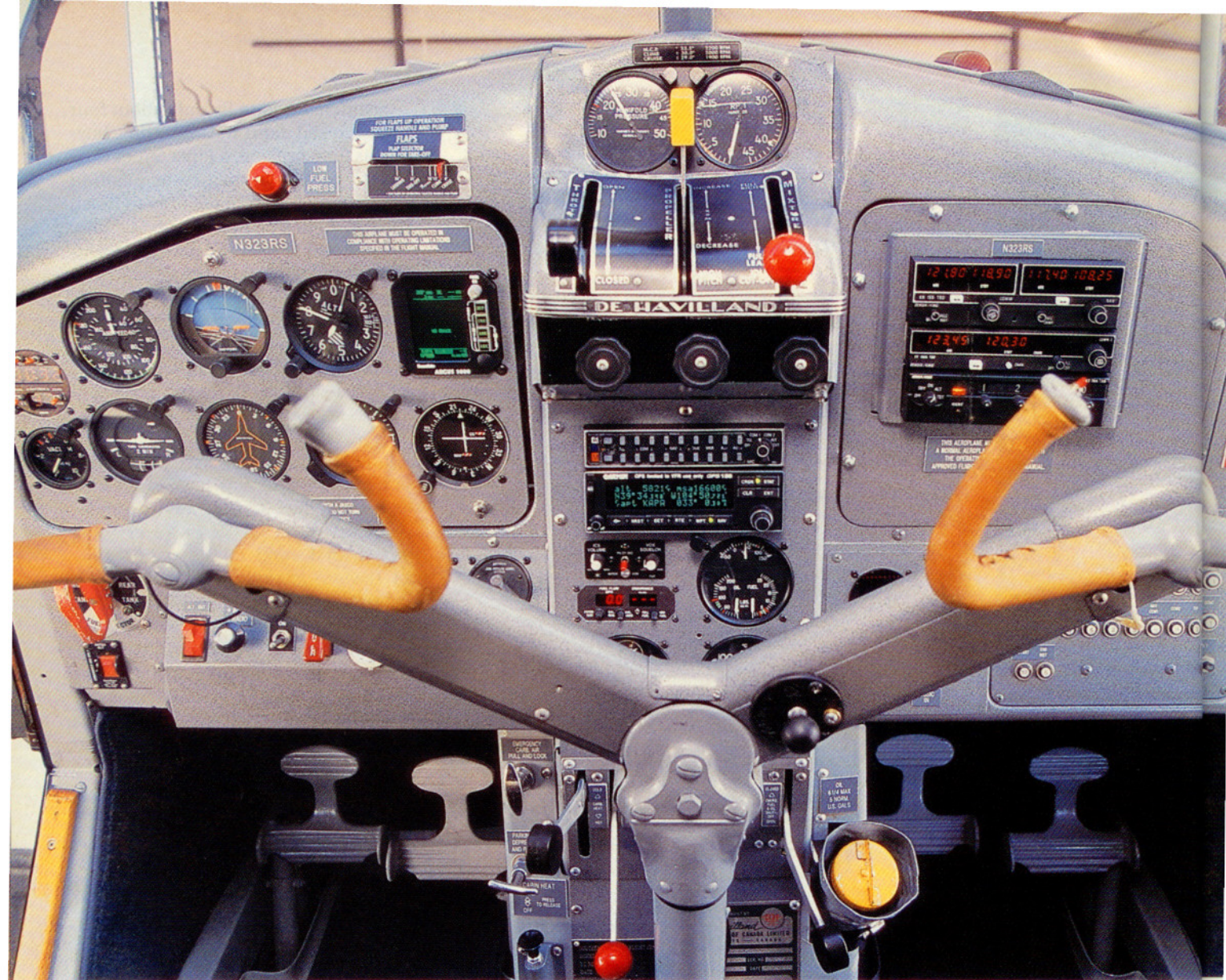
Strom finally located his Beaver after some serious hunting. It's a DHC-2 Mk I, serial number 274, built in 1952. It was restored in the early 1990s after a major crash into a glassy-smooth lake one morning while cameras rolled for a movie in which the Beaver starred. You'd never know the rebuilt airplane is half a century old, with its slick paint, leather interior, and many mods, including the Baron STOL wing, enlarged baggage compartment, bubble cabin windows, preoiler, removable bench seat, and lots of modern avionics, including an Argus moving map.

The first flight of the de Havilland Beaver was at the de Havilland factory in Downsview, Ontario, Canada, on August 16, 1947. An air charter company in Ontario got the first production airplane in 1948 and the Beaver's reputation for getting the job done spread quickly, resulting in sales to other back-country charter operators and an initial order of 100 L-20A Beavers to the U.S. Army in 1952. About half of these went to Korea. The Beaver's production run was a long one, with the last of 1,657 piston versions coming off the assembly line in 1966 and more than a hundred turbine-powered versions after that. The Beaver assembly line was finally shut down in 1968, a full 20 years after it began.

These imminently practical airplanes, once bought as surplus from the Canadian or American military for a song, will now run you between \$200,000

**Modern updates such as a slick paint job, leather interior, bubble cabin windows, and new avionics belie the fact that the aircraft is half a century old.**





and \$600,000, depending on condition and major component times. A recent *Trade-A-Plane* search showed several Beavers for sale, including one in Australia with a "Timex engine and prop" for \$285,000 and another one in Canada with "all the Kenmore mods" including 12-gallon tip tanks for \$415,000. Yet another airplane in Canada, with an amazing 21,000 hours on it, listed for \$375,000. With "rebuilders" bringing \$150,000, Strom figures his beauty queen is worth around \$450,000.

"For the amount of money I spent for the Beaver I could have bought a pressurized, go-fast, sexy airplane. Easily—for a heck of a lot less money! But my lifestyle is away from people, in the backcountry, fishing and camping. And that's what the Beaver is all about," said Strom.

Before he bought the Beaver, Strom was nervous about maintenance issues, but his airplane has proven to be bulletproof—especially the nine-cylinder

radial engine. He's flown the big bird 250 hours in the past 12 months, all virtually trouble free.

The Beaver is no go-fast cruiser. Strom flight plans 105 to 110 knots, burning 22 gallons per hour. Fuel is carried in three belly tanks totaling 95 gallons. He figures he has about three hours' range in the Beaver with comfortable reserves; after that, he wants to be on the ground.

### The flight

Your first impression of the Beaver is that it's one brawny beast. With a 48-foot wingspan, standing a full nine feet high, the Beaver's utilitarian purpose quickly becomes obvious. This is a big airplane for big jobs.

You don't really "get in" a Beaver as much as you "mount up"; you first step on the left main tire, then take a small step halfway up the gear leg. Then slide through the narrow pilot door and swing

into the seat. Once aboard, the seat is comfortable and visibility is surprisingly good, though you notice the thick wing root at about temple height. The broad, rounded nose, housing the 450-horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-985 Wasp Junior radial, is right there in front of you. At the base of the center console, jutting from the floor, is an oddly placed tube capped with yellow. That's the sole filler neck for the five-gallon oil tank. The location of the filler only seems odd until you remember that this airplane is often left outside in minus-something temperatures overnight and pilots drain the oil after each evening's flying to warm it in the cabin.

The mixture-throttle-prop levers are on a high center console, near the top of the panel, trimmed with stylish de Havilland art deco lettering. The location of the levers seems unfriendly at first, but you quickly adapt to it. Start-up is radial-engine simple: wobble,





The mixture, throttle, and prop levers are located on the center console near the top of the panel, which seems awkward at first. The roar of the radial engine at start-up shows the power of the beast.

prime, and crank it up. The sound of an R-985 coming to life is truly one of aviation's sweetest songs. There's that "Harley sound" Strom loves so much.

You sit high in the Beaver and this affords you a commanding view of the ramp. Taxiing is easy with a very positive, steerable tailwheel and powerful brakes. The Beaver moves like a big airplane; nothing happens quickly.

Add takeoff flaps by squeezing a trigger and pulling the lever on the floor to the desired setting, and verify it using a simple mechanical indicator on the pilot's panel or just by looking under the wing. After performing the before-takeoff runup, check the controls, trim, and push the slender throttle to the stop. The Beaver quite happily tracks straight, though noisily, down the runway. Slight forward pressure and it is ready to fly before you think it should.

Stalls in the Beaver are inspiring. Slow flying is what this wing is designed to do; our subject airplane has an optional Baron STOL wing with recontoured leading edges, stall fences, and drooped tips. With full 35 degrees of flaps the airspeed fell well below the 40-mph mark before the wing slowly let go. The airplane is stable in stall but the ailerons become quite soft at slower speeds, leaving the steering to the still-positive rudder.

In steep turns, the airplane is solid without being ponderous. Visibility is surprisingly good for a high-wing airplane, though you need to lean ahead of the leading edge to look for traffic.

Cruise is very stable. Level at 6,500 feet (6,375 pressure altitude) with an outside air temperature of 23 degrees Celsius, we set the power at 29 inches manifold pressure and 1,850 rpm. The indicated airspeed settled on 126 mph for a true airspeed of 130 mph. We estimated the fuel burn at 23 gph. The airplane is quite noisy and Strom's noise-canceling headsets were welcome.

Trim is on the overhead; the pitch trim uses a small fore-aft wheel mounted vertically. It's not much bigger than an inline skate wheel, and it takes a few tries to figure just how to get the desired trim pressure because of its sensitivity. The rudder trim is an overhead crank that seems more intuitive, less sensitive.

We flew several landings on sod and hard-surface runways. The Beaver, like most taildraggers, likes the forgiveness of grass better. With full flaps on final, the tail obviously is flying in disturbed air and has a definite low frequency pitch pulse. The airplane feels solid on landing and rollout; it doesn't dart or invite you on a tour of the airport. It's a tailwheel airplane in which you will quickly feel comfortable.

The Beaver has a well-deserved reputation in the backcountry for being a simple, reliable workhorse. It is often found on the shores of Lake Hood in Alaska or in the Canadian bush—on floats when the water is fluid and on skis when the water is solid.

The Beaver's cabin is cavernous with big doors on either side of the





fuselage, making loading large cargo quite easy. Strom's Beaver has optional large bubble windows, extended baggage, and a bench seat, making the cabin perfect for his camping excursions. There's no need to leave the kitchen sink behind with *this* airplane.

Strom admits that he could never replace his Beaver and says with eyes sparkling that he's "so excited about the next adventure." With his new private certificate, the Beaver of his boyhood dreams, and a family that

loves to fly and camp, life is good at the Strom hangar.

How many of us get to relive our most cherished childhood dreams in our adult years?

ACPA

*Michael Maya Charles is a DC-10 captain for a major airline and owns a Cessna 185 and a Piper J-3 Cub. Visit his Web site ([www.airsafetyexperts.com](http://www.airsafetyexperts.com)).*

## SPECSHEET

### 1952 de Havilland DHC-2 Beaver

Price as tested: \$450,000+

#### Specifications

Powerplant .....	Pratt & Whitney R-985-14B
Recommended TBO .....	1,600 hr
Propeller .....	Hamilton Standard
Length.....	30 ft 4 in
Height .....	12 ft 6 in
Wingspan .....	48 ft
Wing area.....	250 sq ft
Wing loading .....	20.4 lb/sq ft
Power loading .....	11.3 lb/hp
Seats .....	6
Empty weight, as tested .....	3,226 lb
Max gross weight .....	5,100 lb
Useful load, as tested .....	1,874 lb
Payload w/full fuel, as tested .....	1,304 lb
Max takeoff weight.....	5,100 lb
Fuel capacity, std gal.....	95 gal usable (570 lb usable)
Fuel capacity, w/opt tip tanks .....	138 gal usable (828 lb usable)
Oil capacity.....	6.3 gal
Baggage capacity .....	75 lb

#### Performance

Takeoff distance, ground roll.....	562 ft
Takeoff distance over 50-ft obstacle .....	1,250 ft
Max demonstrated crosswind component.....	10 kt
Rate of climb, sea level.....	840 fpm
Max level speed, sea level.....	126 kt
Cruise speed/endurance w/45-min rsv, std fuel (fuel consumption) .....	28.5 gph

@ 53% power, best economy ....105kt/3.54 hr  
(132.5 pph/22.0 gph)

Service ceiling .....	18,000 ft
Landing distance over 50-ft obstacle .....	1,250 ft
Landing distance, ground roll .....	625 ft

#### Limiting and Recommended Airspeeds

V <sub>X</sub> (best angle of climb).....	69 KIAS
V <sub>Y</sub> (best rate of climb) .....	82 KIAS
V <sub>FE</sub> (max flap extended) .....	91 KIAS
V <sub>NO</sub> (max structural cruising).....	126 KIAS
V <sub>NE</sub> (never exceed) .....	156 KIAS
V <sub>S1</sub> (stall, clean) .....	52 KIAS
V <sub>SO</sub> (stall, in landing configuration) .....	39 KIAS

For more information, contact Kenmore Air Harbor, Post Office Box 82064, Kenmore, WA 98028; telephone 425/486-1257; Web site ([www.kenmoreair.com](http://www.kenmoreair.com)).

A.O.G. Air Support, Inc., Post Office Box 2340, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada V1X 6A5; telephone 800/506-9488; Web site ([www.aogair.com](http://www.aogair.com)).

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.