



The accidental showpiece

How an annual inspection led to a prize-winning restoration

BY PETER A. BEDELL

At some point in the restoration of an airplane, owners reach a point of no return of sorts. That's the point where passion for the project overruns economic practicality. The dilemma comes when the cost of the project begins to exceed the value of the airplane. Go beyond this point and there's no chance of recouping any sizable portion of the money—to say nothing of the man-hours—invested in the project if the airplane were sold. If an owner continues the restoration to create a showpiece, he or she must come to terms with the fact that the cost may easily exceed the value of the aircraft—several times. But for most airplane nuts, the passion and satisfaction involved in making a prize winner out of a basket case are worth more than any amount of money.

Steve Oxman knows this feeling well. His hangar could shelter a late-model Beechcraft A36 Bonanza for the amount of money he has spent restoring his prize-winning 1959 V-tail Bonanza, but he wouldn't have traded his rewarding experience for the comparatively uneventful turn-key experience of buying a new or nearly new airplane. Over the past several years, he has learned volumes about the con-

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL P. COLLINS



The panel retains some classic touches such as the "piano key" switch layout (right) yet it has modern avionics to allow practical flight in the IFR system. Some modifications, most noticeably in the form of height extension to the panel, were needed in order to accommodate the added gadgetry.



From head on, this 1959 K35 looks a lot like a more modern V-tail thanks to the new nosebowl that was installed to prepare the airplane for an eventual turbocharger. A 285-horsepower IO-520 replaced the original 250-horsepower IO-470 using a Beryl D'Shannon STC and baffle kit.



With a raised eyebrow, Oxman's mechanic quickly uncovered some major items that the other mechanics had missed.

struction, history, and systems of his Bonanza—things he never would have learned if he had bought a new one and thrown the keys to a mechanic every month or two to fix a squawk list. For a pilot who knew little or nothing about airplane ownership seven years ago, Oxman has become a well-seasoned owner whose mechanic occasionally calls him when it comes to questions about Bonanzas.

It all happened accidentally, sort of. Oxman occasionally rented Piper Cherokees and Arrows to use for business trips after he launched his own software development company in 1985. The Cherokees weren't fast enough or big enough for his typical missions, which would take him as many as 500 nautical miles in a day. A friend let him use an A36 on occasion, which met his needs very nicely, but because of scheduling conflicts, Oxman was riding on the airlines a lot. After a couple of nightmarish airline experiences, he was ready to buy.

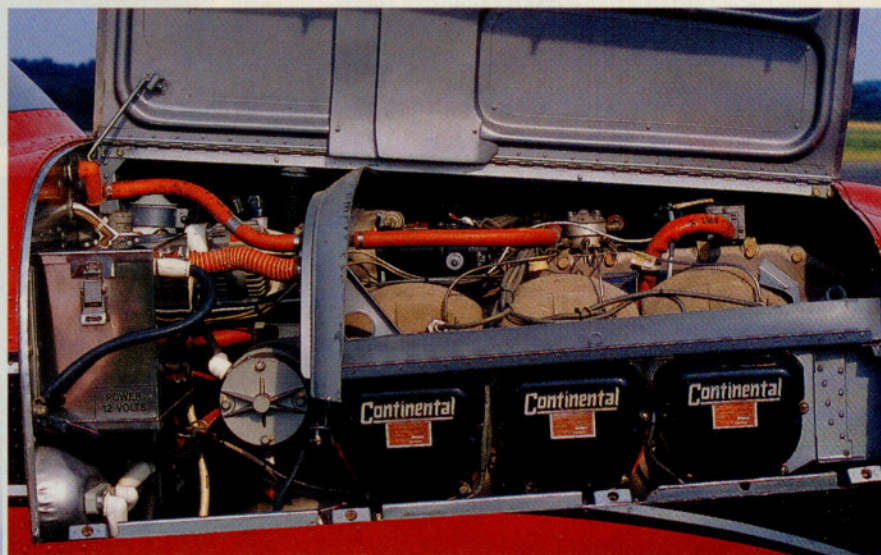
With his business doing well in the early and mid-1990s, Oxman realized

The entire engine compartment was detailed and Oxman installed a standby alternator and other safety and convenience items. The custom paint job is modeled after the original Beechcraft scheme for the 1959 model year. The only variation is the "Speed Bird" design on the tip tanks, a style favored by Oxman's son.

the time was right to purchase his own airplane. The A36 had suited him well and a Bonanza was the model he lusted after. At the time, an A36 was out of his price range so he set his sights on older V-tail Model 35s. Being new to airplane ownership, Oxman admittedly made several mistakes in the eventual purchase of a certain 1959 K35 located in Tulsa. Because of his lack of Beechcraft experience, Oxman wisely chose to have a third-party shop perform a pre-purchase inspection and an annual inspection on the airplane. Oxman and the seller worked out an agreement to fix those items found during the annual

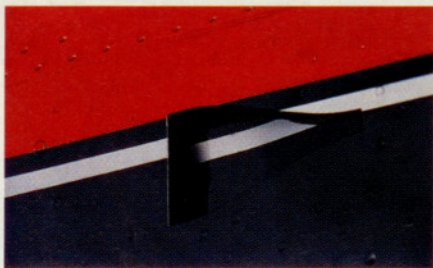
and the deal was sealed. On the long flight home to Maryland, Oxman and a friend with Bonanza experience compiled a list of 30 additional items that needed attention.

When Oxman got the Bonanza home to Lee Airport in Annapolis, Maryland, he took it to Chesapeake Aviation Services to have the squawk list addressed. It would be an understatement to say that it was a rude awakening. With a raised eyebrow, Oxman's mechanic quickly uncovered some major items that the other mechanics had missed. The airplane had been on its belly at some point in its past despite being sold





Steve Oxman (far left) spent countless hours turning this 1959 K35 into a prize winner. Oxman had a NACA-style airvent installed (far left below) to keep his passengers cool. The landing gear wells (left) are spotless and are painted in the original silver color. Eight-inch wheels and brakes greatly aid stopping power (left). New aluminum gear doors from Dodson are of a one-piece design.



with "no damage history." And after doing an airworthiness directives search through AOPA, Oxman and his mechanic found that there were a total of 62 airworthiness directives and service bulletins that had not been complied with. It became painfully clear that the annual inspection in Oklahoma was minimal at best and performed by an A&P with limited knowledge of Bonanzas.

Oxman's mechanic also discovered other safety-of-flight items: There were nonstructural stainless-steel screws holding the ailerons on. The ruddervators

were out of balance and 100 percent overweight. The latter is a big no-no with V-tail Bonanzas, which have experienced in-flight breakups partly because of improperly balanced ruddervators.

Although depressed about the many findings on his new purchase, Oxman forged ahead, vowing to turn his airplane into a safe, mechanically sound machine. When it came to the cosmetic parts of that first annual, Oxman's mechanic was not very motivated to do the work. With a hangar full of broken air-

planes, replacing carpets and fixing a torn seat in Oxman's airplane was not priority one. The two agreed that Oxman could do the cosmetic work under his mechanic's direct supervision. Oxman had experience with auto restorations but was frankly a little nervous about touching the airplane. His mechanic pointed him toward the FARs that state what maintenance items owners can legally perform on their airplanes. Under the guidance of his mechanic, Oxman plunged into work on his airplane, gaining confidence in his



Soon the simple replacement of some carpet turned into a massive restoration of the airplane's cabin and understructure.

Oxman tore out the entire interior and cleaned up the cabin understructure down to the outer skin. Rotten insulation, dirt, miscellaneous hardware, and even a pair of sunglasses were uncovered. A new leather interior was installed including three-point harnesses for the front seats.

abilities and storing up knowledge of airplane construction.

"At that point it became not *an* airplane but *my* airplane," said Oxman. "At first I thought I would get the airplane to look decent and be safe. But as I started to work on it myself, with the help and support of my family, my idea and course changed," he said. For example, when he peeled up the old carpets he found that the wooden floorboards were in terrible shape and needed replacement. When the floorboards were taken up, he found rotten insulation, dirt, miscellaneous hardware, a screwdriver, and even some old sunglasses in the understructure. In Oxman's meticulous eyes, those items couldn't just be glazed over. Soon the simple replacement of some carpet turned into a massive restoration of the airplane's cabin and understructure.

He took to other projects in a similar fashion. The headliner and canopy structure were cleaned up and reworked, as was the empennage from the aft interior bulkhead to the tail cone. Along the way, Oxman found more surprises such as missing fasteners, wiring that led to nothing, and decades of dirt buildup. Soon, Oxman found himself attending Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) fly-ins and looking over other restoration jobs with renewed interest. He attended two Alexander SportAir



workshops—one on metalworking and the other on avionics and electronics. He detailed much of his work on the Bonanza in articles for Bonanza type clubs. With his new skills, Oxman made the decision to plunge headfirst into a total restoration of N12711 with the goal of winning prizes at major airshows.

Between stages of the restoration, Oxman did manage to fly the airplane a surprising amount. "For every week or two that I flew it, it spent a week or two in the hangar," recalled Oxman. His fervor and attention to detail in the restoration continued throughout the entire airframe in stages. In true Oxman form, not a fastener was missed or a nut plate overlooked. But at some point in a restoration such as this, owners must decide if they are going to re-create the airplane as it came from the factory, archaic avionics and all, or if there is

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some room to update and modify the airplane to allow it to better fit in the twenty-first century.

Oxman definitely chose the latter. N12711 has many modern amenities to enhance speed, safety, comfort, and the airplane's capabilities; yet, he has retained many of the classic features of the K35, such as the instrument panel's "piano key" layout. After a few dates with Lancaster Avionics in Lititz, Pennsylvania, the panel is now equipped with new avionics and instrumentation for practical IFR flight. Of course, there was some modification needed to gain panel space. For example, the separate manifold pressure and fuel flow gauges were combined into one gauge, opening up a hole to insert an engine monitor. Amazingly, there's an awful lot of capability packed into a panel that was never designed to hold it. An IFR-approved Garmin GNS 430 provides a display for a Goodrich Stormscope WX-500, negating the need for a separate display. There's also a Ryan 9900 TCAD and PS Engineering audio panel/intercom with integrated marker beacon receiver. Combining these boxes allowed room for some luxury items such as an S-Tec 60-2 autopilot with yaw damper and GPSS roll steering.

A short 10 months into the project, Oxman had a partial power loss in the

airplane's original 250-horsepower Continental IO-470-C. Three of the six fuel injectors had become clogged with remnants of deteriorating rubber fuel cells. Naturally, the fuel cells needed replacement, but Oxman also decided the old engine had to go. He decided on a factory remanufactured 285-hp Continental IO-520-BA utilizing the Beryl D'Shannon supplemental type certificate. A new prop was needed to absorb the jump in power and Hartzell's Top Prop STC fit the bill nicely.

While the engine was out, Oxman took the opportunity to update and replace all of the engine instruments, some of which were wildly inaccurate. He also took the opportunity to add some engine-related safety enhancements to the airplane like a Beryl D'Shannon alternate-air valve, Shadin fuel computer, and B&C standby alter-

nator. Typical of Oxman, the entire engine compartment was cleaned up and restored to like-new condition.

Perhaps the biggest project Oxman undertook was the replacement of the entire nose bowl of the airplane to eventually accept a Tornado Alley Turbo turbonormalizing system. The K35's original snout can't accommodate the turbo STC's requirement for a slightly canted engine mount like those of newer Bonanzas.

Rather than sell his beloved K model for a newer Bonanza, Oxman decided to give N12711 a major nose job. For this ambitious project Oxman chose Hagerstown Aircraft Services in nearby Hagerstown, Maryland, to do the job. As in all of the farmed-out projects performed on this airplane, Oxman chose a nearby shop so that he could keep close tabs on the progress and get involved hands-on for a few days a week. Although the new nose substantially changed the looks of the airplane from the head-on viewpoint, Oxman has taken other strides to make sure the airplane retains its classic appearance.

Oxman exhaustively investigated paint schemes and color options that were available from the factory in 1959. He also is a big fan of Beech Model 17 Staggerwings and Model 18 Twin Beeches with their classy looks and round en-

gines. After compiling all of the information from the Beech factory about the K35 and picking up some pointers from owners of the Beech classics, Oxman settled on a paint job that satisfied both fancies. The red and black coloring is reminiscent of the early Beech 17s and 18s, but it is laid on the airplane in the model-year-specific paint scheme of a 1959 K35. The only deviation from the original scheme is the "Speed Bird" design on the tip tanks, which was used on earlier Bonanzas but won the admiration of Oxman's son, Philip.

While the individual elements of Oxman's Bonanza restoration are too numerous to mention in a magazine article, he was finally recognized for his time, money, and effort when he was awarded Outstanding Custom Aircraft in the Contemporary Class at the 2002 Sun 'n Fun EAA Fly-In. At last year's EAA AirVenture fly-in, N12711 was awarded a Bronze Lindy in the Contemporary Class. In April, the airplane was awarded Grand Champion in the Custom Contemporary Class at Sun 'n Fun. And at Oshkosh this year, N12711 took the Bronze in the Contemporary category.

Oxman's Bonanza is worth only a fraction of what he's invested in it, but that doesn't bother him at all. He now has a mountain of knowledge and experience with aircraft ownership that he'd never have learned if he went to Beechcraft to buy a new Bonanza. He credits much of his newfound knowledge to the experts at the American Bonanza Society as well as an Internet chat room of fellow Beech owners. He's very active in the more social Bonanza groups such as the World Beechcraft Society and the Northeast Bonanza Group.

So what's Oxman to do after his Bonanza is finished? It may never be completely finished in his eyes, but he has vowed to keep his Bonanza and continue to fly it for the foreseeable future. However, both Oxman and his wife lust for a Beech 18 or Model 50 Twin Bonanza. And if he puts the same fortitude, effort—and money—into a classic Beech twin as he did this Bonanza, he may be winning more prizes at future airshows. AOPA

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i Links to additional information about Beechcraft Bonanza restorations may be found on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml).