

1956
50
2006

The Skyhawk turns 50

The first Cessna 172 meets the latest from Independence

BY PETER A. BEDELL

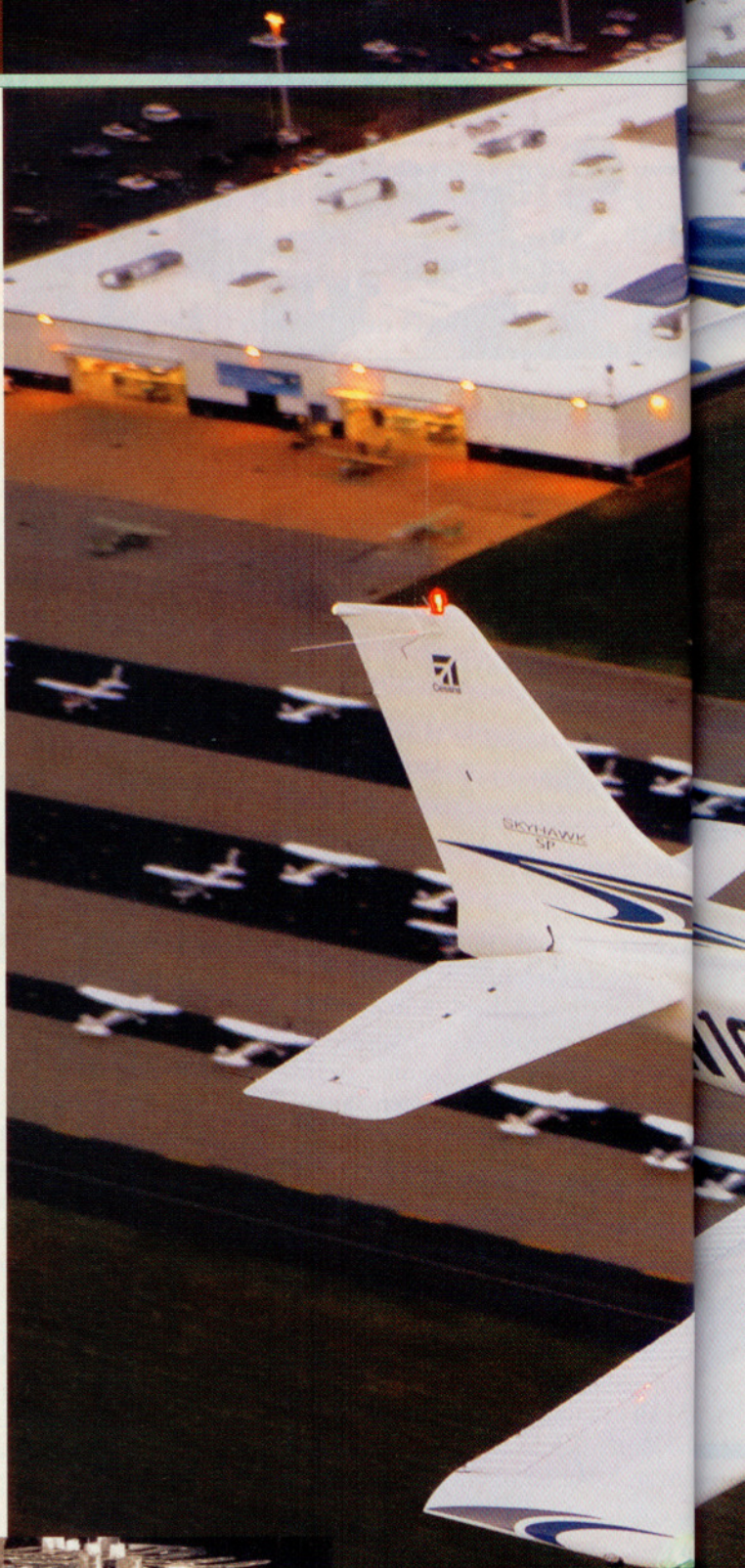
C essna's Model 172 has taught and shaped the careers of thousands of pilots for 50 years. The list of superlatives affixed to the 172 refers to manufacturing numbers and hours amassed rather than sexier terms like "fastest" or "prettiest." It is truly an unsung hero of general aviation airplanes. It's hard to believe that the design is 50 years old and, following the darkest days of the industry, has evolved into what is now among the more advanced single-engine airplanes in the sky.

For many of us, the first exposure we had to Cessna's 172 was the first step-up in size and performance from a two-seat trainer, most likely the Cessna 150/152 series. Back then the Skyhawk seemed huge and powerful compared to the 150/152. Many of us spent hours in 172s giving first rides to friends and family, collecting certificates and ratings, and eventually moving on to bigger and higher-performance rides. Some, on the other hand, continued flying 172s, passing on their knowledge as CFIs or landing jobs as traffic or fish spotters. Over time, people started calling them colorful names like "Chicken Hawk," or "Fryhawk" for those in warmer climates.

Despite the name-calling and sometimes love-hate relationship with the

i Video, additional stories, and more on the Cessna 172 can be found on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/c172).

The old and the new fly over Cessna's new Independence, Kansas, factory that sparked a new generation of Skyhawks (right). Hundreds of 172s await delivery in the late 1950s (below).







To best illustrate how far the design has come in 50 years, we flew the first production 172 (serial number 28000) to Independence, Kansas, to meet the latest 172 emerging from Cessna's single-engine-aircraft facility. Anyone who says the new 172s are the "same old airplane" needs to take a closer look at these pages. The airplanes bear few similarities. Notice the original airplane's upright stance, straight tail, and "fastback" rear fuselage. Best we could tell, the only commonality between the first airplane and the new one is the outer wing panel, and that doesn't include the leading edge. (Since 1973, all 172s employ a cuffed leading edge for

172, pilots and owners always regale the 172 for its remarkably unremarkable traits. It's not fast, but at least it's simple and doesn't burn a lot of fuel. It's not sexy, but it's utilitarian, it's easy to fly, and it makes a great airplane for getting into and out of short, rough fields. It's very inexpensive to operate and that, combined with its legendary dispatch reliability, makes it the trainer of choice at many flight schools. Any mechanic in the world can work on one in a farmer's field or at the jet FBO at the international airport. The list of pros far outweighs the cons and is the main reason why it remains the world's most produced airplane.

Among the editors and writers here at *AOPA Pilot*, the 172 has been at the epicenter of many of our operations. Many of us have owned or still own a Skyhawk. Many of us have logged hundreds of hours in them, camped under their wings, raced them, used them in countless photo shoots, and ferried



N1655H is an S model equipped with a 180-horsepower Lycoming IO-360 engine (above). N5000A is the first "true" 172, built in 1955 as a 1956 model (left).

them across oceans to salivating new owners. In all of those hours flown and articles written, we can't think of many negative things to be said about the 172—it simply got the job done in some of the most difficult situations. It's an airplane that rarely achieves superlative status in any particular category. But over the years the 172 has matured gracefully, maintaining its legendary forgiving flying characteristics, and today, combining them with modern displays and avionics.

improved low-speed handling.) Beneath the skin, the spar carry-through structures are largely the same from 1956. Otherwise, that's about it.

On the inside, the difference is jaw dropping. The recent integration of the Garmin G1000 system into the new Skyhawks has greatly quieted the same-old-airplane crowd. Likewise, people's tastes in interiors over the past few decades have demanded a more inviting living space. Cessna has done that concurrently with several safety enhance-

Cessna 172 timeline

September 7, 1927 Cessna Aircraft Co. formed



1927

1948

1948 Cessna 170, the company's first four-place aircraft, enters the market

1956 Cessna 172 introduced with N5000A

1956

1960 Cessna 172A, the swept-tail model, introduced; IFR versions called "Skyhawks"—the name stuck

1960



1961 The 172 gets a Narco autopilot

1961



ments—among them are beefy seat rails, a reinforced floor, crashworthy seats sporting three-point harnesses in all four seats, and air bags embedded in the front seat belts. After some head scratching with Cessna's general manager of the Independence factory, Terry Clark, we concluded that the rudder pedal tubes in the floor of the airplane were the same as those used in the first airplane. Otherwise, there's no apparent commonality between the two interiors, except for having four seats.

N5000A is the first true 172, built in 1955 as a 1956 model. It was a "proof of production" airplane that was preceded only by a prototype—a tailwheel Cessna 170 converted to tricycle gear. N5000A first flew on October 6, 1955, and amassed 642 hours by the end of 1956. According to Cessna, since N5000A emerged from Cessna's Pawnee plant in Wichita, there have been nearly 40,000 172s built, which is more than any other airplane.

In 1956, nosewheels were a new item to general aviation. Piper's Tri-Pacer and Beech's Bonanza both employed the new technology with success. Cessna's

Queen of the fleet

History's first production 172 started life in a flight school

By Alton K. Marsh

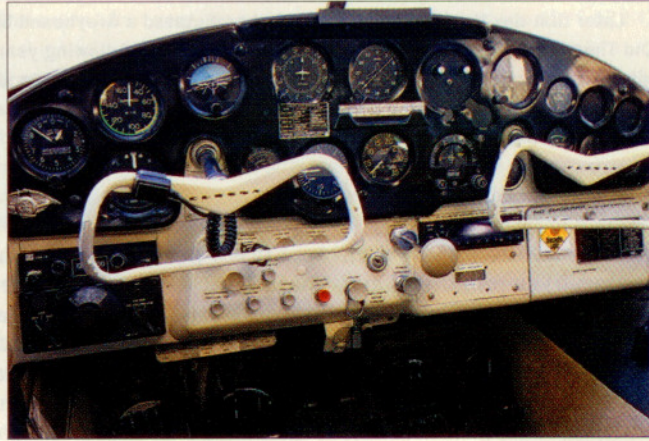
A title search shows that N5000A started life in a role very familiar to 172s, that of a trainer. The aircraft was delivered to Skyways School of Aviation in Troutdale, Oregon, where it was the queen of that fleet that included the Cessna 140s and Aeronca Champs.

It was purchased from the Cessna Aircraft Co. on February 16, 1956, but stayed at the school only until January 20, 1957, when it was sold to a Portland, Oregon, doctor. It may have been in leaseback, but two people who were at the school, including one who learned to fly there at the time, have no recollection of N5000A. It is probable that the aircraft went into private ownership. The doctor kept it almost exactly one year and sold it to a Portland-area car repair shop, Griffith Bearing Service.

The aircraft remained in Oregon until May 1961, when it went to a private owner in Wickenburg, Arizona. It passed through an owner in Greeley, Colorado, the following year before ending up back in service for an aviation company, Exec Air at Grand Island, Nebraska. The airplane continued in service at the same location the following year for Land Air.

After staying briefly with a private owner, in January 1964 it was sold to Joe Tunnicliff, owner of Opitz Motor Co. in Clarinda, Iowa. A year later it went to its present home state, Texas, spending a year or two with private owners in Houston and Midland. It was registered in Friendswood, Texas, 20 years before reaching today's owner, Joe Nelsen, of Gunter, Texas.

Contrast the packed panel on the latest model (left) with the 1950s-era panel (right). The SP has the Garmin G1000, the main ingredient in Cessna's current Nav III option package. In the older version, seemingly random instrument placement with no room for avionics did offer one benefit—excellent visibility over the low panel.



1963 Cessna produces its 50,000th airplane, a Skyhawk; the "Omnivision" Model D introduced

June 1963



November 1966

1968 The R172 "Reims Rocket," built in Reims, France, begins production. The 172 switches from the six-cylinder 145-hp Continental O-300A to the four-cylinder, 150-hp Lycoming O-320-E2D

1963



1967

1967 The first Civil Air Patrol Cessnas delivered—a fleet of Skyhawks

1968

1970

1970 A fold-down child seat debuts

An overnight to remember in Pendleton

By Steven W. Ells, AOPA Pilot Associate Editor

My first long cross-country was on June 13, 1975, in N20186, a 1972 Cessna 172M. I had 54 hours and was given the OK to fly one of Aerodyne's flight school airplanes from Renton, Washington, to Weiser, Idaho, for the Old Time Fiddler's Contest.

A woman friend named Marsha—who liked to be called "Vera Detour"—joined me. The departure date arrived but 3,500-foot ceilings on the western side of the Cascades had me stymied. John Van Winkle, my flight instructor, checked the weather and advised me to fly south to Portland, Oregon, before turning east and flying through the Columbia River gorge to Eastern Oregon.

That trick worked and after three hours in the air we landed for fuel at Pendleton, Oregon. Our plans to make Weiser that day were dashed because of weather along our routing over the Blue Mountains.

The FBO manager heard me saying, "What are we going to do now?" and answered, "Take the courtesy car and go to town." What a revelation: A complete stranger was loaning me a car simply because I had flown a Cessna 172 to his airport and bought some gas. This cross-country flying was fun!

We spent the night searching for a band that could play *Hot Rod Lincoln*. After a tiring search we threw our sleeping bags down on a wide expanse of lawn and fell asleep. The next morning we were awakened by the

sound of a lawn mower. Pushing sleep out of our eyes we asked

where we were. "You're on the grounds of the Eastern Oregon State Mental Hospital," came the reply. We joked about the story we would tell if the guys with the wrap-around jackets captured us—"Yes, I am a pilot—I've been certified by the U.S. government and she is my copilot. Yes, I do call her 'Vera' but that's not her real name." The staff must have been busy with the nonflying patients because nothing came of our short visit.

Later that day the continuing bad weather dictated a Greyhound bus ride to Weiser. The Old Time Fiddler's Contest was great—I went back the following year—and I eventually hitchhiked back to Pendleton and picked up the airplane. The flight home was a nonevent, but I'll always remember the adventures and discoveries of that first night away from home in an airplane—during my first cross-country flight in a 172.

E-mail the author at steve.ells@aopa.org.

sales brochure for the then-new 172 touted, "The patented Land-O-Matic gear takes the skill out of landing and taking off." Many pilots out there are probably offended by that statement, but compared to the taildraggers of the time, the 172 was—and still is—a real

pussycat on the runway. The 172 "Businessliner" was intended to be an easier airplane to fly than the taildraggers, since busy execs didn't always fly enough to maintain sharp tailwheel skills.

Like many general aviation airplanes with 50 years behind them, N5000A has

had a checkered past. It's been on its back twice during its days as a trainer, leading to replacement of the landing gear, firewall, and empennage. Later in life, it sat in an open T-hangar for 10 years (see "Queen of the Fleet," page 73).

Today, N5000A is owned by Joe Nelsen, of Gunter, Texas. Nelsen is an 850-hour private pilot who flies the airplane about 50 to 100 hours a year. When he acquired the airplane in 1988 after the above-mentioned idle years, he spent about eight months getting it up to speed, including top overhauling the engine with all-new cylinders. Interestingly enough, the bottom end of the engine is the same one the airplane was born with, albeit overhauled a few times. Nelsen has strived to keep the airplane as original as possible, but some safety-of-flight items were added, such as the much-improved Cleveland wheels and brakes, a set of strobe lights, and a 35-amp generator.

On the inside there are areas that still have the original upholstery. The instrument panel is typical of 1950s-era airplanes, with seemingly random instrument placement and little room for avionics. It is a VFR-only airplane. On the outside, the paint nods slightly toward the original scheme, but back in 1956, the airplane was mostly polished aluminum with maroon and cream stripes. It was featured in some of the advertising literature for Cessna. In quiet honor of its trailblazing past, N5000A bears a subtle "1st 172" on its vertical fin.

Starting the six-cylinder Continental O-300 employs a pull starter that mechanically engages the starter gear before spinning the starter motor. Taxiing and ground handling are a little stiffer because of the narrow-track spring-steel gear that was used in all 172s until



1973 A redesigned leading edge, the "camber-lift cuff," highlights the Model M

1977 Another engine change brings the 172N a 160-hp Lycoming O-320-H2AD

November 1983



1971

1971 The original spring-steel-leaf landing gear is upgraded to the tubular steel gear, with shock-absorbing struts, still in use on the model.

1972

1972 An extended dorsal fin updates the empennage

1973



1975

1975 Cessna produces its 100,000th single-engine airplane

1977



December 1978



Drastic differences in the interiors give a nod to safety—crashworthy leather seats with three-point harnesses contrast with the basic bench seat and lap belts (above).

1971. In flight, however, N5000A handles just like all other 172s, not giving a hint to its status as a classic. The 145-horsepower engine runs smoothly and pulls the 1,328-pound airframe with gusto when lightly loaded.

One thing that struck me while flying in N5000A is the excellent view over the nose. Instrument panels in the 1950s didn't need to hold as much gear, and the result is a low panel with excellent visibility, allowing the pilot to soak up the view out the windshield. And that suits Nelsen perfectly. He is a VFR pilot who prefers to navigate using pilotage and dead reckoning, and the extra visibility over the nose is much appreciated.

In contrast, the packed panel of the new Skyhawk houses the Garmin G1000, which is the main ingredient of Cessna's current Nav III option package. Today's 172s are a great example of how far a design can go without a clean-sheet makeover. Many were critical of Cessna's decision to resurrect the 172 after a decade-long production hiatus from 1986 to 1996. But reintroducing the 1997 Skyhawk allowed Cessna to get

Coast to coast in a Skyhawk

By Thomas B. Haines, AOPA Pilot Editor in Chief

As the one-time owner of a Cessna 172—the first airplane I ever owned and the one that my wife soloed in—I could write a book about what the Skyhawk means to my family and me (see "Waypoints: Remembering the Skyhawk," page 36). But, surprisingly, my most memorable 172 experience was in a different airplane. As the project manager for the first four of AOPA's most recent generation of airplane sweepstakes, I gained a lot of experience with fixing up 172s, especially with the Good as New 172 and the Better Than New 172 projects. To me the 1994 project airplane, the Better Than New 172, was most memorable because of a flight I made from AOPA Expo in Palm Springs, California, back to AOPA's headquarters at Frederick, Maryland.

By the time Expo rolled around that year, we had completely refurbished the 1978 172N. It sported an all-new panel including the first IFR-approach-certificated GPS receiver in a 172, an upgraded 180-horsepower engine, long-range fuel tanks with extended wings, and a resulting higher maximum gross weight. We needed the extra weight for this trip. My brother-in-law Roger and I lifted off from Palm Springs just before noon on that October day. We deviated northwest toward the Grand Canyon. The fully loaded little airplane struggled up to 11,500 feet for the canyon crossing, providing us with a spectacular view. Next up, a pass over Lake Powell, and finally fuel in Farmington, New Mexico. The next day took us through the pass between Santa Fe and Albuquerque and across lonely west Texas to Dalhart for fuel and lunch. It was steak that night in Kansas City, Missouri, and then an easy trip home the next day. Just more than 2,000 nautical miles over three days and we never once saw a cloud. Hour after hour, the Skyhawk soldiered on, providing us a spectacular view of the nation and providing me with a memory I won't forget.



E-mail the author at thomas.haines@aopa.org.



1986

1986 Cessna suspends production of all piston aircraft; the last Skyhawk is a Model P, the fastest of all the Skyhawks produced thus far



1992



May 1992

1994 Independence, Kansas, selected for new single-engine production facility

1994

1994 The General Aviation Revitalization Act signed into law



January 1994

January 1995



1995

April 1995 First flight of the new Skyhawk

A fledgling heads north

By Thomas A. Horne, AOPA Pilot Editor at Large

I learned to fly in Cessna 150s and 152s. By the time I earned my private pilot certificate, I was ready for the big iron: a Skyhawk! So I joined a flying club, checked out in a brand-new Skyhawk, and built up my 'Hawk time. Moving up from the 150/152 was quite an adjustment for me, at least in the beginning.

First of all, I was caught off guard by the adjustable seats. My instructor kept asking me why I was always so high on final approach. It took a while, but thanks to my ocean of flying wisdom (I had all of 60 hours' total time), I discovered the answer. My seat was set w-a-a-y back on its rails. This ruined my sight picture because I had to stay high in order to see the runway. The Cessna 150/152 has no seat adjustments to speak of, so I simply assumed that the Skyhawk was the same.

Then there was the panel. All those new instruments! My old 150 had a six-pack and not much more. The 'Hawk had dual nav/coms, an EGT gauge, and more! To me it looked like the front office of an airliner.

Once I'd climbed these learning curves, I was ready for bear. It was time to fly the coop and go cross-country. But it wouldn't be a wimpy 100-miler of the kind I'd been flying. Oh no. I set a course for Muskoka, Canada—a 5.5-hour, three-leg jaunt from my home base at the Washington-Dulles International Airport. Did I mention that my then-wife and 4-year-old son were aboard? It was their first flight in a small airplane. He loved it; she hated it.

There were stops at University Airpark in State College, Pennsylvania; Buffalo Airpark in New York; and Toronto Island Airport. Magical, freewheeling adventures for this neophyte cross-country flier. So much new terrain, such exotic locales. The final destination was the Gravenhurst airport near Lake Muskoka, Ontario. A friend rented a farm nearby, and we stayed there for a couple of days. I recall my first seeing the northern lights, tending the house's wood-burning central heating system, and riding horses over miles and miles of empty terrain.

My friend wanted a ride in the Skyhawk, so of course I obliged him. We took off from Gravenhurst and toured the glaciated, lake-strewn scenery. Heady stuff. But during that flight the ammeter started heading south, and the low voltage annunciator came on. The alternator was in its last throes.

The landing was a no-flap, no-radio affair, and I was glad to have the airplane on the ground. But now what? I was stuck in the middle of nowhere, and the nearest repair shop was in Orillia, Ontario—a half-hour south, hard by Lake Simcoe. And it had a grass strip. This trip was turning into a character-builder: No flaps, no radio, soft-field landing in the offing, and a cantankerous passenger.

A call to the flying club at Dulles International Airport assuaged at least some of my fears. The club rules stated that if maintenance was needed while away on a trip, the club would pay for lodging and meals while the airplane was being fixed.

The next day, I loaded my passengers for the trip to Orillia, got the engine hand-propped by some savvy locals, and launched. The landing went very, very well in spite of the soggy runway, and we spent another day or so at a lodge near Orillia—courtesy of Century Aviation. An employee at the lodge even lent me his pickup truck so we could see the local scenery.

After a new alternator was installed, it was time to make my way back to Dulles. By now, I was feeling pretty salty, having packed a lot of excitement into my now-75 hours of experience. The Skyhawk and I had been through a lot together.

The return trip went via Erie and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. On the way to Dulles the first weather of the voyage entered the picture. It was a 4,000-foot broken layer beneath my cruising altitude, and a lingering ground fog at Dulles. But the clouds parted and the fog lifted by the time I arrived.

That trip whetted my appetite for long, international cross-country flights, and was the first of many, many such trips.

There it is, in my first logbook: September 19-25, 1976, in N61648. My last long cross-country in a Skyhawk was in D-EHTW, from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, to Cologne-Bonn, Germany. That trip lasted 39 hours, and took place from March 30 to April 5, 1998. I remember both flights like they were yesterday.

E-mail the author at tom.horne@aopa.org.

a big head start on new four-seaters from other manufacturers that were just being designed. In the late 1990s, several flight schools were itching to replace their fleets of Cessnas that were getting

long in the tooth. Backing the decision to go Cessna were decades of familiarity, all the way from the logistics of mechanical support to the familiarity of training materials. As a result, Cessna

sold a few thousand Skyhawks before other competitors got ramped up for production. By the end of 2005, Cessna had delivered 3,400 Skyhawks since the restart of production.

June 1996 Skyhawk granted FAA certification, and production begins in July

November 1996 First Independence-built Skyhawk rolls out, delivered to AOPA sweepstakes winner in January 1997

March 1998 172S Skyhawk SP announced, first delivered in July

October 1999 The 1,000th Independence Skyhawk delivered



Sweepstakes winner Sharon Hauser

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1996



1998

1999

2003



2005

July 2005 Cessna delivers its 150,000th single-engine piston aircraft, a 172S, and unveils a Garmin G1000-equipped Skyhawk

Two miles high in a 172

By Julie K. Boatman, AOPA Pilot Technical Editor

Although I first flew a 172 shortly after acquiring my private certificate in Iowa in the late 1980s, my most memorable times in the airplane have all taken place in the mountains. One trip in particular stands out.

My friend Ni was working on her instrument rating with a fellow instructor of mine, and she needed to build cross-country time. She had completed a mountain checkout in the school's 180-horsepower 172M, N80893, but wanted more experience in the high country, so we plotted an ambitious day trip that would take us in 893 down the Front Range of the Rockies to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and then back up through Aspen, Colorado, on our return to Boulder.

After brunch at a funky artsy place in Santa Fe (there are a few), we launched north toward Taos. Farther north through the valley, we noted the afternoon heating beginning to take effect. Although it had been forecast as a fairly dry day with no convection on the plate, no one forwarded the plan to Mother Nature. Upon reaching Alamosa, Colorado, thunderstorms topped every peak on every point of the compass, except those we'd just vacated.

We put down at San Luis Valley Regional, and bartered for the crew car—an AMC Eagle that remains by far the worst functioning crew car

I have ever commanded—so that we could see the Great Sand Dunes National Monument. We topped the dunes, which rise more than 750 feet above the valley floor and lie in the shadows of 14,000-foot-plus heights of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, just in time for a thunderstorm to crescendo right on top of us.

Drenched and pelted with sand, we made for the local Wal-Mart—there was no way we could get back into the airplane (or even reasonably request service at a local restaurant) wearing our destroyed clothing. Yes, we bought matching T-shirt dresses.

Now, Ni is a petite Chinese, and I, well, I was a blonde at the time. And I can say without false modesty that, in our purple and red cotton finery, we were the hit of the Aspen ramp (G-Vs and all) the next day as we made our leisurely way home. In all my Skyhawk hours since, I have never received so much attention while checking the fuel caps for security.

E-mail the author at julie.boatman@aopa.org.



Julie K. Boatman (right) and her friend Ni

Cessna also has kept up with the technology and embraced the capabilities of the G1000 system as well as a capable Honeywell Bendix/King autopilot complete with altitude preselect and roll steering. Terrain alerting, traf-

fic information, engine monitoring, and XM WX satellite weather round out an impressive package that makes the once-diminutive 172 a real IFR power player. The G1000 system also is employed in the larger Cessna singles as

well as Cessna's new Citation Mustang personal jet, making advancement easier for pilots who want to step up the product line.

The new Skyhawk that we tested was an SP model equipped with the 180-

Coming full circle

By Machteld A. Smith, AOPA Pilot Senior Editor

The Cessna 172 was to be my reward after I had conquered a 152 in pursuit of a private pilot certificate—an excellent plan. Except, I collected a recreational certificate on the way and stuck with the 152, giving airplane rides to family and friends. I ogled 172 pilots with awe; maybe one day I, too, would command an airplane with four seats and a luggage compartment with a door! Wow.

Two weeks after my private checkride I abandoned the 152 for a 172. Although at first a bit intimidated by the airplane's scale and roominess, I soon felt like a pro—manipulating numerous flight instruments and electrical switches, and, to boot, selecting a fuel tank position other than On or Off.

Sprinkled throughout my logbook are memorable 172 flights, from taking my young son and daughter and my husband on our first flight together, to sightseeing with my dad and sister over the island of Bonaire in the Netherlands Antilles, to checking out with a glass cockpit in the latest 172 model. And one notable flight for me, a flatlander, was an AOPA Air Safety Foundation mountain-flying checkout.

I met my flight instructor and his 172 at the City of Colorado Springs Municipal Airport one early morning in May 1993. "Lean the mixture and abort the takeoff if the aircraft has not reached rotation speed halfway down the runway," sounded his reminder as we rolled onto the long runway.

Confident that my instructor would guide us safely through this unforgiving terrain, I relaxed as I identified the first mountain pass on our way to Salida. "Are you sure?" my instructor queried. "Yep!" I replied. "You're dead," was his response. I had mistaken the checkpoint and, had we continued into the canyon, we would not have been able to

turn around. Sobered by that observation, I painstakingly selected the mountain saddle that would allow our small 172 to cross between the looming peaks into Aspen.

Departing Aspen I circled numerous times to gain altitude for our flight to Lake County Airport in Leadville, which at 9,927 feet msl, is considered the highest public airport location in the United States. Takeoff at Leadville was an eye opener. It was still early in the day and the 172 had only half-full tanks, yet it took a good 3,000 feet to become airborne. "Make a shallow left-hand turn now, or we will hit those peaks yonder," uttered my instructor. I complied swiftly. Good thing, too, as a quick glance at the vertical speed indicator confirmed a meager 150-fpm climb.

Returning over the vast plateaus that led us back to Colorado Springs, we experienced a seemingly never-ending mountain wave. I felt like a small butterfly on a large roller coaster.

That 172 flight was especially memorable since it unexpectedly reunited me with the instructor who had introduced me to my very first flight lesson during an ASF Pinch-Hitter® course seven years earlier in Frederick, Maryland.

E-mail the author at machteld.smith@aopa.org.



Machteld Smith (right) with her father, Felix van Raalte Sr. and sister, Yolanda Boyriven

I'm flying to Disney World

By Alton K. Marsh, AOPA Pilot Senior Editor

The late-1960s 172 I first flew may have been no larger than those of other years, but to me it was the big iron. I had just finished my private certificate at Melbourne, Florida, in a Cessna 152. There had been earlier attempts to get the certificate in college (no money), and the U.S. Army (I got reassigned). There had been four years of flying lessons in 152s off and on, and when I passed the checkride and appeared the next day for a 172 checkout I marveled at how high the step was, and how far above the ground I sat. Way up there. I flew it solo to circle Disney World, the one now with its very own temporary flight restriction, and marveled at the experiences I could provide not only to myself, but also to others.

Other flights stand out as well, like the flight from Superior, Wisconsin, to Frederick, Maryland, in the airplane destined to be the Better Than New 172, AOPA's 1994 sweepstakes airplane. The leaky vents had to be taped over to keep 0-degree air from freeze-drying the cockpit on the way home. Later I took it to Wellington, Kansas, for a new engine, or rather, tried to take it there. Arriving at night, I could see from 30 miles out that Wellington was lashed by thunderstorms, and so I diverted to Wichita where the airplane

could be picked up the next day. After arriving back in Frederick I received a call from someone in the shop in Wellington, asking, "How did you get it here?" The tape was still on the vents and looked to the caller like that was the only thing holding the aircraft together, but I'm still proud of the comment.

Finally there was the day of perfect weather with three adventurous friends on a trip to Tangier Island, Virginia, in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay. The trip from Northern Virginia is little more than an hour by 172 but more than three hours by car and boat. Longer if you have to wait for the boat. The friends discovered a fishing village they never knew existed, with crabs that had come from the water hours before they were made into cakes. For the return flight I took them up the Potomac River as far as possible before diverting away from Washington, D.C.'s busy airspace. The newlyweds in the back thanked me politely after the flight, but then called the next day to say they had talked of nothing else since landing, and thanked me again. That made it memorable for me as well.

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

172R or -S built with steam gauges. Instead of removing a seat and spending lots of quality time on your back working blindly behind the panel, you simply sit in a front seat, remove a few screws on the portion of the panel with the faulty instrument, and tilt out the panel segment to swap the instrument. A more recent change to the Skyhawk is the addition of high-intensity discharge landing lights that provide a brighter and much longer-lasting illumination.

Flying the new 172S shown on these pages was this pilot's first opportunity to fly the G1000 system. As a co-owner of a 1975 172M with mostly original gauges and avionics, I found that my experience flying the new airplane was surreal. Here was an airplane that possessed all of the same flying characteristics as mine, yet provided a whole new world of information on the inside, most important, weather and traffic.

Upon seeing trend vectors—the little lines on the tapes that visually depict where your airspeed, altitude, heading, and vertical speed will be in six seconds—I had a hard time believing I was flying a 172 and not a mod-

ern jet. An autopilot—and especially one with altitude preselect, roll steering, and the capability to fly a coupled approach right down to 200 feet—is another thing completely new to this 172 pilot. Equally pleasing, however, was the full-screen horizon depiction that seems to provide an unquestionable awareness of attitude.

These features, and the fact that all of the instruments and avionics are integrated into one system, will undoubtedly make learning to fly easier and safer. The next time I flew my airplane it was a little depressing, I have to admit.

Despite all of the gee-whiz in the panel, you could fixate your eyeballs out the windshield and simply fly the new 172 like you would the first one—by the seat of your pants, the feel of the yoke, and the sound of the engine. Some things, thankfully, never change.

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i See much more about the Cessna 172 on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/c172).

Pete Bedell is a first officer for a major airline and is co-owner of a 1975 Cessna 172M and a Beechcraft D55 Baron.