



AOPA

The Debonair
Sweepstakes


Leather and glass

Putting both in action

BY THOMAS A. HORNE

AFTER FLYING THE DEBONAIR with its funky old interior for more than a year, it was a relief to experience the airplane's much-needed overhaul. Ohio's Clermont County Airport-based Air Mod did the work and it's a sight to behold. Air Mod has done several of AOPA's sweepstakes interior renovations—each one a beauty, and this one's no exception. Ergonomically correct leather seats with lumbar support are the first things you notice, and the most important in making even super-long flights the most comfortable they can be. The added touches are nice, too. Things such as storage pockets and a large compartment for holding charts, iPads, flashlights, notes, and other necessities. Air Mod's Dennis Wolter went an extra step and added vintage Beechcraft logo shields (with the big Beechcraft "B") to the side panels.

A lot of Air Mod's best work isn't visible. It's the extensive internal cleanup and anti-corrosion measures. This is documented pretty well in my "Sweepstakes Logbook" blog entries, where the photos show an ugly belly with inch-deep geological layers of dirt transformed into gleaming aluminum, which is then coated with zinc chromate for long life. Luckily for us, there was no corrosion. But if there had been, it would have been eliminated. "Now the airplane is good for another 30 years," Wolter says of his anti-corrosion work.

I was pumped for the 730-nm trip from Clermont County to AOPA Summit in Fort Worth, Texas. The airplane was filled to the gills with 120 gallons of

fuel—more than enough for what would be a five-hour, 11-minute nonstop journey.

It was during the runup that it happened. The Aspen primary flight display (PFD) came up with two red Xs. For some reason the screen had died. A quick scan of the cockpit showed no breakers popped or anything else untoward. I stared in disbelief at the Xs. After the shock wore off, I figured it out. The Aspen Evolution system in the Debonair consists of two multifunction displays (MFDs) and a PFD—three screens in all. And the PFD and rightmost MFD have attitude and heading reference systems (AHRS) of their own. So the solution was to push the red Rev button on the MFD. This puts the right MFD in reversionary mode, and up came the attitude and heading information. I was good to go.

After takeoff, I was even able to link the S-Tec System 50 autopilot to the MFD. You simply move the centrally mounted Autopilot Source toggle switch to the MFD Rev position. Now the autopilot has all it needs for heading, altitude hold, and nav tracking functions. It was as though I never lost any capability. This was another neat feature of the Aspen installation, as well as the panel architecture designed by Santa Fe Aero Services, the avionics shop that made the Deb's new panel. By the end of the day, Aspen responded to the problem by replacing the faulty PFD.

At AOPA Summit, it was time for visiting members to get a look at the new interior for themselves. The most frequently heard comment? "Man, get a load of that new-car smell!"

EMAIL tom.horne@aopa.org



VISIT the sweepstakes blog (http://blog.aopa.org/sweepstakes_logbook/) for updates and related news.

Three ways to win one of 76 prizes in AOPA's Debonair Sweepstakes

Join or renew your AOPA membership and you will be entered to win in AOPA's Debonair Sweepstakes. AOPA is giving away a completely restored 1963 Beechcraft Debonair B33 with an all-new ergonomic interior, the latest avionics, and an up-to-date airframe as the grand prize. Plus, you could also win one of 75 other great aviation prizes. Visit the website (www.aopa.org/Membership/Sweeps.aspx) for ways to enter.

THE DEBONAIR'S brand-new front office, complete with interior by AirMod, panel by Santa Fe Aero Services, and seats covered by Garrett Leather Corporation's finest leather.