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Tim and Larry Geldermann



Award-winning 1947 Aeronca Champ

A Champ In The Family

by Pete Schoeninger

At EAA AirVenture 2008, Aeronca Champ N3506E, owned by Larry and Tim Geldermann of Hartland and Sussex, Wisconsin, respectively, was named “Outstanding Custom Classic” in the 0-80 hp division. While the airplane had been in the family for 25 years, the story starts with a \$2 Cub ride as World War II was ending.

Larry's mother, Florence, had read Antoine De. St. Exupery's classic, “Wind, Sand & Stars,” in 1944. She was so curious about flight that she took lessons and soloed in a J-3 Cub at Palwaukee Airport in Chicago. One day mom's lesson ended early, and she gave her flight instructor \$2 to take her 12-year-old son, Larry, for a short hop. Larry's first logbook has several 10 and 15-minute entries, dated from 1944 - 1946. In 1950, Larry soloed in a Champ at Chicagoland Airport. Sadly, Florence passed away in 1948.

In 1970, now a married civil engineer with a P.E. at the end of his name, Larry went to Gran-Aire, Inc. at Milwaukee-Timmerman Airport, Milwaukee, Wis., resumed flying lessons and received his Private Pilot Certificate. With financial help from the G.I. Bill, Larry flew with legendary flight instructor, Jim Batterman, and by 1973, had most of his ratings, and was working part time at Gran-

Aire as a flight instructor. All of Larry's and wife, Kathy's, six children worked at Gran-Aire during the late 1970s and 1980s in line and office positions. Daughter, Mary Jo, has a Private Pilot Certificate, as does son Tim, and son Dan is a commercial pilot. Dad was the CFI for each child.

After graduating from high school, son Tim pursued a degree from Stout University in Menomonee, Wis., and took numerous “hands on” courses in addition to the usual calculus, structures, etc. en route to becoming a manufacturing engineer. He is employed at Harley Davidson in Milwaukee.

In 1983, Larry's wife Kathy asked advertising business acquaintance Wes Schmid, then the Secretary of the Experimental Aircraft Association, if he knew of any Champs for sale, as Larry wanted one for sentimental reasons. Wes knew that Bernie Klees owned a Champ based at Capitol Drive Airport in Brookfield, Wis., and was looking for a partner. Larry bought half of the airplane, and had a pleasant 14 years of co-ownership. Bernie died in 1998 and Larry became sole owner of the airplane, but soon son Tim would buy half of the airplane. Together, Tim and Larry have attended numerous EAA AirVenture workshops on fabric recovering, sheet metal basics, and Aeronca seminars by Bill Pancake.

In 2000, the FAA issued AD 2000-25-02, mandating a thorough inspection of wood spars in various Aeronca

airplanes. Larry and Tim felt it was “about time” to remove the wings and give the whole wing assembly a thorough inspection and recover. In July 2001, off came the wings, and a close inspection in Larry’s basement yielded no spar problems. When done Tim noted, “The wings were too nice to put back on the old fuselage!”

At that time the owners decided to restore the entire airplane. Neither had rebuilt an airplane before, but they had completed many seminars, helped other airplane owners, and were proud enough to do something over, “Sometimes three times,” said Larry, until they got it right. Since neither Tim nor Larry is a licensed mechanic, they had numerous visits by Inspection Authorized mechanics.

Every piece of the airplane was disassembled, inspected, and either rebuilt, or in the case of the hardware, cowling, windows, wood formers, cabin woodwork, firewall, and engine compartment baffles, hoses, etc., replaced with new. The 65 hp Continental engine was determined to be in good condition, and was pickled during the 6-year airframe rebuild. Tim and Larry did virtually all of the work on the airplane, except for sandblasting and priming the bare fuselage, which was done at a local auto shop. Prior to blasting, Tim welded a missing step on the fuselage.

When Larry and Kathy had a new house built in Hartland, Wisconsin, Larry specified a door that would allow the wings and entire fuselage to pass directly from the garage to their basement with a few inches to spare. But with the new step welded to the fuselage, the door was too small, and the fuselage was completed in their garage.

The entire airplane was recovered using the Stits Poly Fiber system with a lot of phone help from Jim and Dondi Miller of Aircraft Technical Support.

In December 2003, heated space was rented from friend Dennis Mohr at Waukesha County Airport, Waukesha, Wis., and the last 3 of 6

years of restoration was accomplished there.

As restored, the airplane is entirely stock except for paint color and cabin interior. It was completed on November 3, 2007, and made its first flight on November 4.

The airplane cruises at 94 mph,

faster than most 65 hp Champs. Larry attributes that to great detail in rigging the airplane exactly to factory specs, and to Tim’s excellent paint job.

How much did it all cost? Larry would only say, “You don’t want to know, but the experience was worth every penny and more.” □

Helicopter Specialties Breaks Ground For New Facility



JANESVILLE, WIS. – Helicopter Specialties, Inc., located at Southern Wisconsin Regional Airport in Janesville, Wis., broke ground for a new \$1.6 million maintenance facility on August 27, 2009.

The total square footage of the existing building is 13,900 sq feet. The total square footage of the new building will be 28,750 sq. feet. The project will be completed by January 2010.

Helicopter Specialties specializes in helicopter maintenance, and outfitting and maintaining medical helicopters. Jim Freeman is president.

(L/R) Tom Helgesen of T&K Helgesen, Inc.; Jim Freeman, President of Helicopter Specialties; and Terry Peed, Chief Inspector.

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