

# Light AIN STAFF REPORT business aircraft

**MAKING DO WITH LESS IS STILL A WHOLE LOT BETTER THAN THE ALTERNATIVES**

Looking to expand its franchise and better serve some of its members, the National Business Aviation Association announced plans last April to hold an event aimed specifically at the owners and operators of light business aircraft, a category the association loosely defines as those weighing less than 20,000 pounds. In the intervening months the world economy has been racked by convulsions, and NBAA's LBA exhibition & conference, scheduled for this month in San Diego, was one of the victims, along with the association's ABACE event in Asia slated for last month.

The LBA event will be absorbed into the big annual convention and meeting, to be held in October in Orlando, and while the event for the owner-flown crowd might have failed to stand on its own two feet this year, this segment of business aviation still provides unrivaled

transportation to its practitioners, and will likely attract more interest as people and companies consider scaling back their transportation costs in lean times.

The eight people we profile in these pages operate a broad variety of aircraft in the LBA segment, from a piston twin to turboprops and small business jets. These people all share two common attributes: they enjoy flying (most up front, a couple in the cabin), and they recognize the huge advantage they hold over business travelers who drive or cling to the failing airline model and all its frustrations, inefficiencies and wasted time. We encourage you to pass this feature on to anyone considering taking the plunge into business aviation, just as these eight people took the step that launched their journeys of a thousand miles (NBAA IFR reserves, 100-nm alternate). —N.M.

## ANDY REARDON: BARON 58 OWNER-PILOT



Like many owner-pilots, Andy Reardon had the passion for flying before he got the idea to fly himself to business appointments. Reardon started flying while head of the law department for the Illinois Central Railroad, got his license in 1986 and retired as CEO of railroad equipment leasing company TTX at the end of last year after 33 years in the railroad industry.

"Given that Illinois Central had facilities all the way from Chicago to New Orleans, there was always business to

attend to in those areas, so I had the need, and the desire, to get in and out of a lot of small towns." It worked out "quite well" and Reardon started by renting Cessnas, but it wasn't long before he developed an enduring allegiance to piston-powered Beech airplanes.

In 1988, Chicago-based Reardon bought an 11-year-old Bonanza A36 listed for sale in Van Nuys and kept it for a year before switching in 1989 to a 12-year-old Baron 58. "I had the 58 for five years until Illinois Central was bought out, then went back to an A36 and put in a new engine and prop. After that came a 1980 Baron B55 bought in 1995. Someone from North Carolina saw it, liked it and offered a modest premium over the price I'd paid. I took the offer and right away bought a 1977 Bonanza V35 in 1996." He had that for seven years, but two things drove Reardon to hunt for another Baron: he and his wife had bought a home in Cape Cod in 2003 and decided they needed more power and more capacity; and one of TTX's prime facilities then was in Pontiac, Mich. "I needed a good solid twin with de-icing boots, hot props and a hot windshield to keep jumping back and forth over Lake Michigan year-round," reasoned Reardon.

They went looking for one with a great airframe and found a 1981 model. "I'd had enough experience with other people's avionics and other people's

engines, so I wanted a good, sound airframe and I'd take it from there," recalled Reardon. It was a project. He stripped the airplane and put on two new IO-520s, new fuel cells, Garmin GNS 530/430 coupled to the autopilot, and EGT monitors. "I had had wonderful luck with IO-520s and stayed with those rather than switch to the IO-550s. If you take good care of the IO-520, it'll go forever. I had flown other people's turbos and had listened to their maintenance stories. Turbos are great, but at annual time you have to be prepared to pay for all that heat. The 58 is a great machine, and maintenance is modest in the overall scheme of things."

Reardon has always maintained his airplane to the highest standards: "I was acutely conscious of canceling a trip and then having somebody say that maybe if I'd flown the airlines I wouldn't have canceled out. If there's a sniff of something wrong, I get it repaired. I depend on that airplane, and out of at least a thousand trips and about 2,800 hours as PIC, I've had to cancel only one due to a maintenance issue."

Some companies frown on the notion of a pilot-employee flying a small airplane on business travel, and Reardon encountered this resistance initially at Union Pacific. However, he had two saviors in the company: one was Jerome Given, "a great trial lawyer for Union Pacific with a wonderful reputation out in Omaha," and the other was Curt Smith, head of Union Pacific's

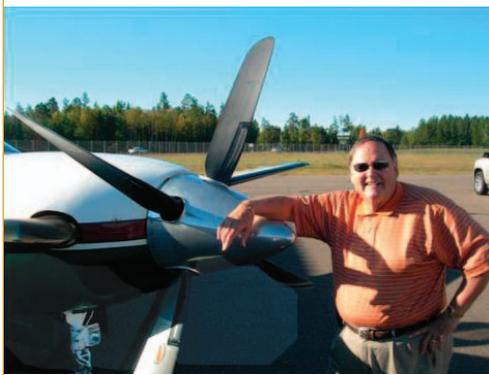
flight department and a member of the FlightSafety board. "Both these guys went to bat for me and vouched for me as a pilot with the company's risk management department, and that helped me cut through some of the red tape," Reardon recounted. "In a lot of companies that's a barrier. At TTX [the company from which Reardon just retired as CEO] a couple of the directors raised their eyebrows at my flying, but I said, 'Look, I'll buy \$2 million in insurance coverage and have the company pick up the portion of the premium that I fly for business.' Above \$2 million it was covered expressly by the corporate travel and liability policy, so it dovetailed nicely with our company insurance."

Illinois Central's main line was from

### RAYTHEON BEECHCRAFT BARON G58

Type	1+4/5-seat piston twin
Engines	Two Teledyne Continental IO-550s, 300 hp each
Max cruise speed	202 kts
Max altitude	20,688 ft
Max range (NBAA IFR, 100-nm alternate)	990 nm
Max takeoff weight	5,500 lbs
Single-pilot capable?	Yes
Takeoff field length*	2,300 ft
Typical equipped price new	\$1.1 million
*Sea-level standard conditions, max takeoff weight	

**JACK COOPER:  
MERIDIAN OWNER-PILOT**



Jack Cooper, a Piper Meridian owner-pilot and president of Olathe, Kan.-based HiSonic, describes the benefits of his aircraft in one word: tremendous.

Cooper flies his Meridian “at least a couple of times a month,” mostly for business. “It just makes life a little easier, especially for me since I do most of the sales calls,” he said. “Fortunately my business takes me to a lot of nice places.” Most of his sales calls are in Florida and California.

HiSonic has been developing and manufacturing electronic components, including transformers, inductors, filters and magnetic assemblies, since 1959. A majority of the components are used in aerospace and airborne equipment, including avionics, power supplies, satel-

lites, missile guidance systems, radar microwave and data processing systems.

“I’ve got stuff on Mars, stuff in satellites, the space shuttle, all the Boeing equipment; pretty much anything that flies, we have a part in someplace,” Cooper said. In addition to the major OEMs, Rockwell Collins and Lockheed Martin are among HiSonic’s largest customers. The company has been supplying Rockwell Collins since 1962, and Lockheed Martin since 1980.

Cooper has been with HiSonic since 1984, when he purchased the company from the original owner, Wayne Bonebright. Before the sale, he owned a share of Jack Cooper Transport, an auto transport carrier that his grandfather founded in 1928. In the early 1980s Cooper sold his share to an uncle. He continued working for the company for about a year, then began searching for a new business opportunity. Over the course of 14 months, he considered more than 50 companies before purchasing HiSonic.

The decision to purchase HiSonic might very well have been a result of his interest in aviation. Cooper got his pilot’s license in 1968, right around the time he started working for the family business. Before getting his license, however, he had spent a number of years flying in the right seat of various aircraft. A friend of the family had been a corporate pilot and often let Cooper fly

with him. “I had flown before I got my license, but of course I didn’t get to log that,” he said.

Although he loved flying, Cooper was forced to take a hiatus when his children were young. “We had children, and my wife decided that perhaps it was a good time for me to stop flying and get rid of my motorcycle,” he said. “Then about 12 years ago I started flying again.”

His return to flying coincided with some changes he decided to make in the business structure of his company. “I had just gotten rid of my representatives around the country, so I decided I was going to do all the sales myself,” Cooper said. At the time, HiSonic employed five sales reps. “I went out and bought a Cessna 182. I moved up to a 182 retractable, a 210, and then I moved up to a Piper Mirage. About a year-and-a-half ago, I bought the Meridian.”

The Meridian “goes higher and faster” than his previous aircraft, Cooper said, and he intends to “hang onto this one for a while. It certainly has a much better reputation, and I feel a lot safer in it.”

Although Cooper acknowledges that driving or taking the airlines to the various sales calls would probably be less expensive, the benefits of having his own airplane far outweigh the costs. “It saves time and it’s a lot more convenient,” he said. “And it’s certainly more pleasurable than waiting in lines and

getting to the airport two hours early. I use it as much as I can.”

Cooper’s employees also enjoy the benefits, he said. When he and his engineers schedule meetings with the Rockwell Collins engineering group in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, they often use the Meridian to travel. “We leave in the morning, we’re there in an hour and 15 minutes, and we can meet with them all day and come back, instead of spending five hours on the road and having to spend the night,” he said. “We also go to Dallas. That’s a pretty easy turn for us.”

Cooper said he might consider getting an airplane with longer range and more power sometime in the future, but for now he’s content to keep his Meridian. “Time-wise and convenience-wise, the benefits are tremendous.” —J.H.

**PIPER MERIDIAN**

Type	1+4/5-seat turboprop single
Engine	One P&WC PT6A-42A
Max cruise speed	260 kts
Max altitude	30,000 ft
Max range	1,000 nm
(NBAA IFR, 100-nm alternate)	
Max takeoff weight	5,092 lbs
Single-pilot capable?	Yes
Max baggage capacity	20 cu ft/100 lbs
Takeoff field length*	1,650 ft
Typical equipped price new	\$1.9 million
*Sea-level standard conditions, max takeoff weight	

Chicago to New Orleans, with east-west branch lines that didn’t make much money. “We made our money north-south, hauling UPS traffic, and we wanted to sell the east-west lines,” Reardon said. “Selling a railroad line is not easy—you have to file in every county the railroad traverses. As with selling a house, you have to go to the courthouse and refile the papers transferring from one owner to another. It’s a process that has to be done efficiently and as close to instantaneously as you can.

“The airplanes really helped, particularly in the sale of the line from Chicago to Iowa—we must have stopped in 25 different counties through Iowa and Missouri in a day-and-a-half.”

Wrecks on a railroad are not uncommon, and it’s important that railroad people show up on scene promptly. “I would jump in the airplane and head out to wherever we had to go. One time we had a terrible injury down in Madisonville, Kentucky, and I was there within three hours of the accident. Another time we had a tornado hit a moving train in an old town called Horn Lake, Mississippi, south of Memphis, and I was on site down there within three hours. It was our best customer, UPS, and the tornado knocked the train off the tracks, a one-in-a-million shot back in 1988. If I didn’t have an airplane, I couldn’t have been there as quickly. A chartered airplane probably wouldn’t have gotten me there until the next day. The

transportation industry presents these unique opportunities for an airplane to shine: something happens in your network, and you have to be there yesterday, more often than not in the middle of nowhere.”

While Reardon was running TTX, he had to attend staff meetings at a plant just across the river from Augusta, Ga., in North Augusta, S.C., and another plant in Jacksonville, Fla. “To do that commercially is really cumbersome: fly to Atlanta, change planes, fly to Augusta for staff meetings, stay overnight, back to Atlanta, fly to Jacksonville, back to Atlanta, back to Chicago. TTX is something of an industry cooperative, owned by nine North American railroad companies, and every one of them has airplanes. It’s a terrible waste of time not to.”

Did Reardon ever think of moving up to a turboprop, maybe a TBM 700/850 or King Air? “Yes, I thought about it, but if I was going to buy a new airplane today, I’d get a Baron 58 again. It’s a wonderful machine.”

Reardon is also doing something about his favorite airplane’s taste for avgas at a time when its continued availability is in question. Early this year he joined the board of advisors of Swift Enterprises, in Lafayette, Ind., a company spawned by Purdue University. “We have found a biofuel to replace avgas, and there’s just one more FAA test ahead of us for approval.” —N.M.

**KEN WOLF:  
MU-2 OWNER-PILOT**



While the Mitsubishi MU-2 has had a reputation as a difficult airplane to fly, it is not without its passionate partisans, perhaps none more fervent than Ken Wolf of Lewiston, Maine, who founded the MU-2 Owners Association by hosting its first meeting at his home in 1994. An ophthalmologist and FAA medical examiner and former Air Force flight surgeon, Wolf has been a pilot for more than 45 years and his MU-2 Solitaire is “probably the last airplane I’ll own.” He has operated MU-2s since 1994, starting with a -K that he owned for five years before trading it in for a Solitaire for “more fuel, more range, more speed, more of everything,” he said. “Some of my missions are 1,000 nautical miles, and I could do them in greater comfort [as regards time and

fuel reserves] with the Solitaire. It’s got 403 gallons as opposed to the -K’s 365 gallons, so that adds another 45 minutes [of flight time]. It just made me a little more comfortable knowing that if I was coming in at night after flying 1,000 miles, I’d still have plenty of fuel.”

As an eye surgeon, Wolf makes frequent use of the aircraft for business, taking advantage of the time savings aviation offers, even occasionally to commute to work. “There’s an ophthalmologist in New Hampshire, about two-and-a-half to three hours drive away depending on the weather, and he doesn’t like to do surgery; he does medical ophthalmology. I fly over the White Mountains in about 15 to 20 minutes once a month to do surgery over there, and I’ll operate all day and hop in the airplane and come back home. That saves me five or six hours of traveling and makes the whole thing feasible. It would be impossible to spend that much time traveling and do seven or eight hours of surgery. I’ve been doing that since the early 1980s.”

Wolf often uses the MU-2 as a de facto corporate transport for his practice, which employs 29 people. “At professional meetings and when people in the office have to be trained, we hop in the airplane. We’ve gone to Atlanta for the American Academy of Ophthalmology meetings, and I took the technicians with me when

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## GEORGE HERSH: KING AIR E90 OWNER-PASSENGER



An aircraft may not be the perfect travel solution for the businessman, but it certainly beats the alternatives. That's the position taken by entrepreneur George

Hersh, who puts about 100 hours a year riding in the back of his King Air E90, based at New Century AirCenter in Olathe, Kan., in support of the nationwide trucking business he runs. His company offers customized semi-trailers for the transport of sport vehicles, motorcycles and watercraft. Major subsidiaries also transport household goods and provide business relocation, as well as professional records management and real-estate interests. The company has many locations in cities and towns no longer served by the airlines.

Now 48, Hersh has had a fascination with airplanes that began when he was 22. That was in 1987, the year he began taking lessons, and the same year his father had a talk with him regarding his responsibilities as a new father. The flying lessons were canceled, but as time passed and Hersh's various GMJ Company ground transport services expanded well beyond the Kansas City headquarters, his recollection of the

relative ease and speed of private aircraft transport took on a more serious aspect. He might be shipping everything from motor sport vehicles and crews and household goods all over the country by ground, but managing all those assets required personal travel by air.

The first airplane was a Piper Malibu bought in 2004, and it quickly proved inadequate. According to pilot Robert Abrams, who joined Hersh that same year, the dispatch rate left something to be desired. "Even with all-weather capability there were situations with which I wasn't comfortable," said Abrams. "Flying over the Rockies at night in a single-engine airplane wasn't beyond the Malibu's advertised capabilities, but it was beyond what I felt was safe."

"All airplanes are a compromise," he explained. "But we were crossing the Rockies a half-dozen times a year, and as compromises go, that was too much. We needed something more, not just in terms of the number of engines, but in terms of performance."

There was also the matter of space, according to Hersh. "I'm six-foot-six, and there aren't a lot of airplanes I can fit into."

The answer, a year later, was a used King Air E90 with about 8,000 hours logged. Abrams manages the airplane from his Advanced Aviation FBO. He also sees to operation of an Internet availability program for three or four companies that use the seven-passenger twin turboprop under a dry-lease agreement when it isn't in use by Hersh. The program adds 250 hours a year to the logbook.

Abrams is Hersh's regular pilot but occasionally flies for one of the dry-lease users. "I always provide them a list of pilots I've qualified in the airplane, but I end up doing a lot of the flying," he said. The airplane is operated under Part 91 and is not offered for charter.

Dry lease helps defray the cost of ownership, but at \$600 an hour it doesn't exactly pay for the airplane, said Abrams. Including current fuel costs and ramp fees, the cost to the customer comes closer to \$1,000 an hour. That's based on a formula that requires 300 to 400 hours a year, "and we're not quite making that."

Hersh agrees. "The dry-lease program has helped, but not as much as we'd like." The problem, he added, is that many of the dry-lease partners find a private aircraft so convenient that they end up buying one of their own or a fractional share, "so we're always looking for someone new."

Abrams said the boss has made only a few additions to the airplane since it was purchased, among them a handheld Garmin 496 with moving map, terrain avoidance link and XM weather, as well as power outlets at the seats to accommodate passengers with laptops. "Otherwise," Hersh added, "it's pretty much the way it was when I bought it."

Hersh and Abrams discussed an RVSM (reduced vertical separation minimums) upgrade for the King Air but concluded that the advantages for them were minimal. "I couldn't get the thing up to 28,000

feet anyhow," said Abrams, "and the best fuel economy is between 18,000 and 22,000 feet."

With the airplane based at Olathe, Abrams will typically pick up Hersh at Philip Billard Municipal Airport near his home in Topeka, Kan. He and Hersh travel "to both coasts and pretty much anywhere there's air," but most trips are not more than two hours. "The typical requirement is to get out and back in a day," said Abrams.

Abrams added, "The fact is that most people really don't want to be in an airplane, any airplane, more than about three hours. The airplane really shines on trips that require two or three stops a day," the pilot explained.

Said Hersh, "If I have a trip to Dallas, we'll leave Topeka in time to get there by eight a.m. for a nine a.m. meeting and I'm home by five p.m. I also make an occasional trip to the East Coast that includes three, four, maybe five stops," said Hersh. "Commercially, I can't do that in less than a week, but with the King Air, it's two days, three at the most."

The entrepreneur admits that he has—on occasion—talked with Abrams about learning to fly, but he adds, "I've always been comfortable letting Robert fly the airplane. I sit up front once in a while, but I can get a lot of work done in the back, and most of the time I have a group with me and we're occupied with work."

Hersh has been tempted to buy a jet, but agrees with Abrams that it doesn't make economic sense for the kind of flying they're doing—multiple stops, and often at airports that can't accommodate a jet. "I've got nothing against jets," he said. "I like the speed. But not the cost."

Abrams figures there are certain things that qualify a company for ownership of a business aircraft the size of a King Air E90 and flying the kind of missions he flies, and annual revenues of about \$20 million are among them.

He also points out that too many individuals acquire a company airplane with the expectation of some kind of direct payback. "But there is no direct payback, not in the way that a charter airplane generates direct revenue."

On the other hand, he re-iterated what everyone business aircraft owner knows: time is money. "If time is the potential deal-breaker, that airplane becomes a deal-maker, and that's where a company airplane earns its keep." —K.J.H.

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we went there. If I'm flying the airplane, I might as well take some other people."

Wolf's Solitaire is configured with a three-place bench in the back, a two-place bench on the entry side, a rear-facing seat, plus the pilot and another passenger in the copilot seat. "You can get eight in there and still carry enough fuel to go 400 to 500 miles easy."

Wolf cited another example of how using the airplane actually allowed him to save money. When he purchased some new medical equipment, "It turned out to be cheaper to take four techs in the MU-2 to free training at the factory. If the factory had had to send somebody out [to us] for a week it would have charged an arm and a leg."

In addition to his practice, Wolf uses the MU-2 in conjunction with a real-estate investment he has in another part of the state. "Maine is all back roads. It's a couple of hours to drive there, so I just get in the airplane and fly over to Rockland in 10 or 15 minutes."

Not content to restrict the turboprop twin to short regional hops, Wolf flies it down to Florida too. "I've got a couple of trusted [business] consultants, one in Jacksonville and the other in Miami. These are people who used to be closer but they have moved south. Every once in a while I need to sit down with them,

so I'll chug on down," he said. "Non-stop it's three hours 35 minutes from here to Jacksonville with no wind."

Home base for Wolf is Auburn-Lewiston Municipal Airport, where he was the chairman of the airport's board of directors for 18 years. Since 1970, with the exception of a span of three years, Wolf has owned at least one aircraft, starting with a Piper Tri-Pacer. Wolf had planned to trade in his latest MU-2 for an Eclipse and was an early position holder for the VLJ, even appearing in some of the company's promotional materials. "One of those Eclipse ads said, 'Vision has played an important role in my life, especially when it came to investing in an Eclipse 500 jet,' and it showed an eye surgeon sitting in front of an operating microscope. That was me," said Wolf, who soon had a change of heart. "I realized that although my MU-2 goes 50 to 60 knots slower it's got the range I need to get to places, whereas in the Eclipse I'd have to stop on many of my flights. Fortunately, I wound up selling my Eclipse position a year-and-a-half ago."

Like all U.S. MU-2 pilots, Wolf is now subject to the special federal aviation regulation (SFAR) that requires annual recurrent training for the type, but he sees only positives in the edict, which he believes will help erase the airplane's tarnished image.

"The airplane is superb, but the record for a while was pretty atrocious. People would buy this airplane, take four or five hours of training and off they'd go. And they'd kill themselves because it's a different sort of airplane. You fly it differently. It's not harder, it's not easier; it's just different," he said. "For the money you spend on the airplane, it's crazy what a bargain it is, and like everything in life, if it's a bargain, there has to be a catch. The catch is you have to train. You've got to be good at this thing, but if you're well trained you can have your cake and eat it too." —C.E.

### MITSUBISHI MU-2 SOLITAIRE

Type	1+6/7-seat turboprop twin
Engines	Two Honeywell TPE331-10s
Max cruise speed	320 kts
Max altitude	31,000 ft
Max range (NBAA IFR, 100-nm alternate)	1,405 nm
Max takeoff weight	10,470 lbs
Single-pilot capable?	Yes
Max baggage capacity	43 cu ft/574 lbs
Takeoff field length*	3,420 ft
Typical used price	\$600,000

\*Sea-level standard conditions, max takeoff weight

### KING AIR E90

Type	1+6-seat turboprop twin
Engines	Two P&WC PT6A-28s
Max cruise speed:	240 knots
Max range (NBAA IFR, 100-nm alternate)	1,300 nm
Max altitude	27,500 feet
Max takeoff weight	10,100 lbs
Single-pilot capable?	Yes
Max baggage capacity	48 cu ft/350 lbs
Takeoff field length*	4,400 feet
Typical used price :	\$500,000

\*Sea-level standard conditions, max takeoff weight

RON LABEL:  
ECLIPSE 500 OWNER-PILOT



If any owner of an Eclipse 500 could be said to be lucky, it's Ron Lebel, who bought S/N 40 of the iconic very light jet. Lebel's Eclipse is not only one of the earliest models to be built to the latest aerodynamic standard, but also has the most modern cockpit of any non-factory-owned Eclipse 500, the Avio NG system with the Innovative Solutions & Support glass panel. Just two additional upgrades separate Lebel's Eclipse from what should be the latest configuration standard, the flight-into-known-icing package and the Garmin 400W navigators.

While Lebel is lucky that his Eclipse is relatively up-to-date, like all other Eclipse owners he is facing the prospect of owning an airplane with no factory to provide support, depending on the outcome of the sale of bankrupt Eclipse Aviation's assets to newly formed EclipseJet International, a process that remains ensnared in the courts.

According to Lebel, what made the Eclipse 500 attractive in 2000 when he placed his order was that, "It was so affordable." He liked the speed and range characteristics as well as the promised "whiz-bang, high-tech cockpit" and the highly integrated electronics that tied the aircraft systems together. Many of the promised features, Lebel conceded, fall in the category of "all the things we haven't gotten."

Lebel was an executive in the high-tech industry and a single-engine piston pilot with 1,200 hours in a Grumman Tiger. "I was attracted to the overall concept of applying technology to make an efficient airplane," he recalled. After placing his order for Eclipse 500 number 22, Lebel's serial number was pushed back to number 40 because orders for the DayJet air-taxi fleet needed to be inserted into the production line. The delay turned out to be fortuitous because Eclipse had to redesign the tip tanks and make other aerodynamic modifications and an engine performance change to meet the promised performance specifications. The Eclipse 500 assembly line in Albuquerque, N.M., switched over to the modified version with serial number 39, just in time for Lebel's jet.

To prepare to fly his new jet, which wasn't delivered until August 2007, Lebel bought a Piper Seneca II in 2002 and earned his commercial certificate and multiengine rating, logging another 400 hours in the twin. Lebel enjoyed the utility of a high-performance airplane so much that he and a partner bought a Westwind jet. Flying as second-in-command in the Westwind, Lebel learned about jet operations in preparation for flying his Eclipse.

When that time finally came, Lebel ran into a few problems familiar to Eclipse owners such as training delays due to scheduling problems, airplane discrepancies and weather. Before training in Albuquerque, Lebel spent some time in focused instruction in his Seneca, under the tutelage of Eclipse expert Ben Marcus, who is cofounder of management firm jetAviva, in Van Nuys, Calif. Marcus and Cyrus Sigari are former Eclipse employees who launched jetAviva to help new Eclipse and other VLJ owners operate their aircraft and also to assist with deliveries.

Lebel admitted that as a pilot his strong suit is procedures. "I'm not strong in stick-and-rudder skills," he said. "I'm a technology guy." One of the problems in early Eclipses with the original Avidyne avionics was the lack of an autopilot. Lebel found that he was using most of his energy focusing on hand-flying the glideslope and localizer on an ILS approach, for example, and there wasn't much brainpower left to apply to the necessary procedures involved in flying a jet. At the time, the Eclipse 500 simulators were not ready, so Lebel had to do all his training in the airplane.

Lebel had another constraint; he had taken the ATP written test in anticipation of obtaining his type rating and ATP shortly after taking delivery of his jet, but time was running out on the two-year window for the written test. Finally, after running into problems on his first type-rating attempt and switching to another instructor, Lebel earned his Eclipse 500 type rating and ATP in January 2008, just in time for the written-test deadline. After that, he spent another 12 to 15 hours flying with a mentor pilot to meet insurance requirements.

Flying to ATP standards was a new challenge for Lebel, and adding a variety of instructors with different backgrounds, while a "great experience," also made the process more difficult. Some of the instructors and mentors had airline backgrounds and thus much different expectations, he said.

For his first solo flight in his new jet, Lebel flew from Van Nuys to Paso Robles, Calif. "It was great," he said, "especially after the struggle I had with the type rating." Like every pilot's first solo flight, Lebel found that his first Eclipse flight "was awfully quiet."

Since taking delivery, Lebel's Eclipse has logged about 370 hours, and he has flown about 250 hours in Eclipse 500s. Not all his flights were in his own jet, including a trip to Alaska last August which Lebel had to fly in a leased Eclipse 500 because his was at the Albuquerque factory getting the Avio NG upgrade.

At the time, Eclipse S/N 39 was scheduled to go to Albuquerque for the upgrade, but the owner of that jet decided he didn't need the work done right away, so he agreed to swap the slot with Lebel. When it appeared that his upgrade would not be completed in time for the Alaska trip, Lebel leased another jet.

Not long after his Eclipse was upgraded, company president Vern Raburn was fired, and amid continuing financial problems, Eclipse stopped all customer upgrades and eventually filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. "I made the right decision," Lebel said. He still is out about half the money he prepaid for the JetComplete maintenance cost-per-hour program, and like other Eclipse 500 owners he is still owed the known-icing and Garmin 400W upgrade.

Lebel has flown his Eclipse 500 throughout the Americas, including Alaska and Baja California. The jet has been "pretty reliable," he said, and he's never been stuck due to a maintenance problem. His Eclipse has had windshields replaced, and pitot/angle of attack probes were replaced twice.

In general, Lebel prefers runways at least 5,000 feet long, although he would consider 3,500 feet (with a decent headwind) as a minimum. The Eclipse 500 can't be flown with a full load of five people and full tanks, he said. "But I've been flying general aviation airplanes for 25 to 30 years, and I'm used to tradeoffs." Typically he flies the Eclipse with two people, and with full tanks he normally plans 800-nm legs or 900 to 1,000 nm in good weather. Although southern California controllers rarely offer a climb straight to the Eclipse 500's 41,000-foot maximum altitude, it happens occasionally, and the jet can make it directly to FL410 unless the temperature is much hotter than standard.

While Lebel is happy that he was able to get his Eclipse upgraded with the new avionics and performance modifications, he isn't holding out any hope that Eclipse's new owners will be able to offer free known-icing and Garmin 400w upgrades. Lebel is participating in an ad hoc owners committee that is trying to carve out some reasonable settlement as part of the Eclipse asset sale, but he understands that the new owners "have to make a business of this," something that the original company was not able to do. Meanwhile, "I haven't been flying a lot since the bankruptcy," he said. "If there is no support six months from now, we'll be worse off, except we had the experience of owning a VLJ." —M.T.

## ECLIPSE 500

Type	Five-seat twinjet
Engines	Two P&WC PW610Fs
Max cruise speed	370 kts
Max altitude	41,000 ft
Max range (NBAA IFR, 100-nm alternate)	1,125 nm
Max takeoff weight	6,000 lbs
Single-pilot capable?	Yes
Max baggage capacity	16 cu ft
Takeoff field length*	2,345 ft
Typical equipped price new	\$2.15 million
*Sea-level standard conditions, max takeoff weight	

JIM AND BETSY FROST:  
PHENOM 100 OWNER-PILOTS



Being the launch customer for any new aircraft is not for the faint of heart. These customers often take delivery of an aircraft that for the first few months might spend more time in the shop than in the air, at least until the major bugs can be worked out of the new design.

But there are some benefits, as well. Launch customers have considerable user input into the new airplane, including such things as cabin and cockpit layouts, through their involvement with customer design committees. Not least, they also get to be the first to have the hottest new airplane that is sure to turn heads at every airport visited.

Jim and Betsy Frost of Houston have taken on this job with great gusto and enthusiasm. The husband and wife owner-pilots are the proud owners of N82DU, the first customer Embraer Phenom 100. They took delivery of S/N 008 on December 23 and by the end of January they had already made more than a dozen flights, despite some technical glitches, an AOG situation and a one-week downtime while paint stripes were added at Duncan Aviation in Lincoln, Neb.

The N-number of their new airplane tells a little history about the couple. They met while attending Duke University, and they both graduated in 1982. Jim has been flying since the age of 23; Betsy caught the flying bug from husband Jim and has been flying since she was 24. He has 2,700 hours total time and about 40 hours in the Phenom; she has 2,400 hours total time, with nearly 50 hours in type.

Both of the Frosts have an ATP certificate with instrument and multi-engine ratings, as well as a single-pilot type rating in the Phenom 100. Betsy is also a certified flight instructor in single- and multi-engine airplanes, as well as instruments. They swap seats every other leg when flying together.

The couple describe their business as a "partnership" with real estate, oil and other investments, though they declined to provide more specifics. Like many owner-pilots, they use their airplane for both business and pleasure.

"We started with a brand-new turbocharged Beechcraft Bonanza in 1995," Betsy said. While it was a good starter

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## FRANK PERRYMAN: PREMIER IA OWNER-PILOT

The Perryman family shares a devotion to the Beechcraft brand that spans not only aircraft models but also generations. Frank and James Jr., brothers from Western Pennsylvania who grew up riding in their father's Beech Bonanza, Duke and Baron, have continued the tradition, first by purchasing their own Beech piston singles and twins and later by moving up the line into Kings Airs and, more recently, the Beech Premier I light jet.

"We bleed Beech," said Frank Perryman, describing the family's fondness for the

brand dating back to the 1970s. It was then that the elder Perryman, James Sr., bought his first airplane, a Beech Bonanza. Frank and James Jr. are both ATP-rated pilots with around 3,000 hours to their credit and, along with a company chief pilot, constitute the flight department at Perryman Co., a manufacturer of specialty titanium products for the aerospace, medical and automotive industries.

Frank Perryman is president and CEO of the family business. The Perrymans founded the company in 1988 in Houston, Pa., a suburb of Pittsburgh. James Sr. serves as company chairman and James Jr. is COO. As the company has grown and expanded its operations to other locations,



the brothers have gone from recreational pilots flying Bonanzas and Barons for fun to full-time pros who train at FlightSafety International and take their secondary jobs as corporate pilots as seriously as their first as entrepreneurs.

Even though the Premier I is certified for single-pilot operations, all company flying by the Perryman brothers is done with the chief pilot present in the cockpit. The company puts roughly 350 to 390 hours a year on its Premier IA, based at Allegheny County Airport (AGC) near Pittsburgh and maintained by Landmark Aviation in Leesburg, Va.

Most of the flying centers around customer visits, either to bring Perryman Co. personnel to customer sites or in some cases to bring the customer to Perryman's factories in Pennsylvania. In the past three years Perryman Co. has built two new factories in Western Pennsylvania, spending \$40 million on each and using the Premier I during construction to transport its engineers to the site of its biggest equipment supplier in Northern California.

Headquartered in Ukiah, Calif., a tiny enclave in the mountains about 100 miles north of San Francisco, the supplier is difficult to reach relying on the airlines because of the long trek required after leaving the terminal at SFO. "It's about a three-and-a-half-hour drive by car from San Francisco," said Frank Perryman. "From Pittsburgh it's not an easy place to get to. Flying the airlines you lose one full day getting there and a day-and-a-half getting home. With that kind of travel and loss of time, we could send only one or two people if we had to rely on the airlines. With the Premier, we can send a whole engineering team, have them out there for two days and then send them straight back."

Perryman said his company saved a significant amount of money and time on each of the factories because no unforeseen modifications needed to be made to the plans after construction began. "That was a case of where the airplane paid for itself," he said. "We sent four or five engineers to California on a number of occasions to make sure everything for these new factories was exactly right. We wouldn't have done that if our people had to fly commercially."

The current Premier IA (RB-173) was purchased new from Hawker Beechcraft in January 2007. It is the company's second jet after the Perrymans bought their first Premier I (RB-75) in 2003. The majority of trips are to equipment vendors and customer sites with mid-level employees on board, Perryman said, emphasizing that the jet isn't an executive perk, but rather a transportation workhorse. "The airplane allows us to get

our people in position to help our company grow," he said. "It is a tool for improved productivity if ever there was one."

Perryman said he and his brother looked closely at the Cessna CJ series when contemplating the move from the King Air to the Premier I, but in the end chose the Beech product because of its better payload and range capabilities. "Nothing in its category can touch its speed. With the modifications Beech has made from the Premier I to the IA, the airplane has only gotten better."

One of the big changes has been to the lift-dump system, which the manufacturer changed from an automatic system activated by the landing gear squat switch to a manual lever the pilot must reach down and pull after touchdown. The change was made after a number of high-profile runway overruns that hurt the Premier I's image. The automatic lift-dump system worked fine during certification testing, but posed problems for some pilots after the model's introduction to real-world flying.

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airplane, they found the cabin wasn't quite big enough nor was the range long enough for their missions. The couple also wanted two engines for additional safety.

In 1998 they traded in their Bonanza for a new King Air C90. "We went with the King Air because the model line had a long history," Betsy explained. "We figured there wouldn't be any major problems with the airplane because of this."

That thinking was somewhat flawed. The airplane spent so much time in the factory service center at Houston Hobby Airport that the Frosts were on a first-name basis with the staff. According to Betsy, one tech flight six months after delivery—intended to find the source of an oxygen leak—ended with the on-board factory mechanic nearly kissing the ground after the door was opened. At altitude, a grommet in the aft pressure bulkhead blew, causing rapid decompression and a resulting emergency descent. The decompression also caused the lavatory bowl—which had a closed valve—to fill with blue liquid. On approach back to Houston, the airplane encountered severe turbulence, causing the fluid to splash all over the aft cabin, requiring installation of a new interior.

Despite the teething problems with the King Air, the Frosts held onto it and flew the airplane to the Caribbean and Alaska, and everywhere else in between.

The insurance company that had had no problems with the husband-wife crew flying together in the Bonanza wasn't thrilled about them doing the same in the King Air. "We eventually convinced the insurance company that we were professionals while in the cockpit, not a feuding couple," they said.

Eventually the Frosts found that the King Air also no longer had the range they needed and they realized their next step should be to a small twinjet. While the couple knew what kind of jet they wanted, they didn't see anything on the market that matched their needs. "The Eclipse 500 was too small, and the Cessna Citation Mustang was too slow," Jim said. "So we waited until the market presented a solution." That solution arrived in the June 2005 issue of *AIN*,

which had a front-page story on Embraer's new Phenom 100 and 300. "We immediately called Embraer to order a Phenom 100 after reading that article," he noted.

The transition from the Bonanza to the King Air eased the transition to the Phenom, said the couple, who admitted that the King Air had been "a big step up."

Jim and Betsy take their training seriously. To prepare for the Phenom's Garmin G1000-based Prodigy cockpit on the Phenom, they bought the Cessna Citation Mustang G1000 training software and King Schools G1000 video and started using them almost daily in the six months leading up to training at CAE SimuLite. When they showed up to take their Phenom 100 type course in November, "We were more than just familiar with the avionics system," Jim said. They passed the type course with flying colors.

While the couple liked being part of the man-machine interface committee for the Phenom 100, they're now enjoying their new jet, despite its relatively minor teething problems. "So far, we had a fuel pump fail and a minor hydraulic leak, along with a few CAS (crew alert system) messages," Betsy said. Another problem area is the flaps and what Betsy calls "the nasty flap handle." Software fixes to remedy a slight out-of-alignment flap issue and the sensor limitations on the flap actuator were pending at press time, Embraer said.

Even with these minor problems with their Phenom, Betsy told *AIN*, "I love this airplane. It was made for me." Husband Jim nodded his head in agreement. —C.T.

### EMBRAER PHENOM 100

Type	1+4/6-seat twinjet
Engines	Two P&WC PW617Fs
Max cruise speed	390 kts
Max altitude	41,000 ft
Max range (NBAA IFR, 100-nm alternate)	1,178 nm
Max takeoff weight	10,472 lbs
Single-pilot capable?	Yes
Max baggage capacity	55 cu ft
Takeoff field length*	3,125 ft
Typical equipped price new	\$3.6 million

\*Sea-level standard conditions, max takeoff weight

### HAWKER BEECHCRAFT PREMIER IA

Type	1+6/7-seat twinjet
Engines	Two Williams FJ44-2As
Max cruise speed	451 kts
Max altitude	41,000 ft
Max range (NBAA IFR, 100-nm alternate)	1,360 nm
Max takeoff weight	12,500 lbs
Single-pilot capable?	Yes
Max baggage capacity	76.9 cu ft/750 lbs
Takeoff field length*	3,792 ft
Typical equipped price new	\$6.2 million

\*Sea-level standard conditions, max takeoff weight

According to its operating logic, the system would deploy as soon as the main gear touched down, planting the wheels firmly on the ground and aiding with braking. But if the pilots bounced the landing the system would automatically stow itself. Or if the nosewheel did not touch down within 13 seconds the system would assume a go-around was imminent and automatically stow. Pilots who landed too fast and then tried to hold the nose off for too long got an unwelcome surprise when those big spoiler panels suddenly lowered as the end of the runway rapidly approached.

"You know what, I never had a problem with the lift-dump system to begin with," Perryman said of the change from automatic to manual spoiler control. "My analysis of it was that the system wasn't idiot-proofed enough. When you follow procedures, everything is OK. It's when people don't follow procedures that they

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either get hurt or they screw something up.”

The Premier I, with its sharply swept wing, also demands strict adherence to airspeed control on approach. While airspeed management is not quite as critical in straight-wing airplanes such as the King Air or Baron, Premier I pilots are cautioned to nail their approach speed every time. “High performance demands a strict adherence to

rules and procedures,” Perryman said. “You have to pay attention. It’s not a Cessna 182.”

The Perryman flight department spends a week at FlightSafety each year, alternating between learning centers in Wilmington, Del., and Wichita to gain different viewpoints from a variety of instructors.

Like many Premier I pilots, Perryman says he has a special affinity for the airplane’s Rockwell Collins Pro Line 21 glass cockpit, especially in the Premier IA where

XM satellite weather and electronic Jepp charts are available. “I absolutely love it,” he said of Pro Line 21. “I will not switch to another airplane without it. It’s great stuff.”

As far as a potential move up into the Hawker line, Perryman said he dreams about making the jump to the heavier iron but says that gains in cabin size and range aren’t justified by the steep rise in price between the Premier and Hawker 750. “We’d really need to jump into something

that’s in the \$13 million range, and I could get two Premiers for that,” he said. Instead, Perryman Co. will likely opt for the Premier II when it’s time to trade in RB-173. Due for certification next year, the Premier II will combine more powerful engines, increased max weight and winglets, a 20-percent boost in range and a 15-knot increase in maximum cruise speed to 465 knots. “That’ll be a good fit for us when the time comes,” he said. —S.P.

## AN URGENT MESSAGE FOR YOUR AIRPLANE OWNER FROM AIN’s MANAGING DIRECTOR



**Wilson S. Leach**

The cover story in the February/March edition of AIN’s sister publication, *Business Jet Traveler*, addresses one of the most serious events ever to hit our industry: the negative publicity that private aviation continues to receive because of the public relations fiasco that resulted when Detroit’s Big Three auto CEOs traveled to Washington by business jet to plead for bailout money. That negative publicity has debased and now dogs private aviation.

Business aviation has suddenly become the whipping boy for many populist causes. The general media and many members of Congress are having a field day with this issue. They have succeeded in completely misrepresenting the value of business aircraft.

These aircraft, which are legitimate and often indispensable business tools, have become synonymous with fat cats and excessive luxury. Never mind that congressmen and other government personnel use private lift every day. Never mind that the presidential candidates could not have conducted their campaigns without private aircraft. Never mind that members of the general press corps—which has played a huge role in distorting the industry’s image—regularly fly on business jets themselves.

What to do. I realize that you have your own companies to run and are facing critical decisions on a daily basis. These are perilous times and it would be easy to say that concerns about the image of corporate airplanes are low priority. But they shouldn’t be—not if you want to avoid becoming former business jet travelers.

### A Call to Arms

To keep that from happening you must defend your use of corporate aircraft. Many of you run complex businesses and you must be able to travel to cities and countries without the time constraints of airline schedules. You need safety, security and privacy to efficiently conduct your affairs while traveling.

If you run a publicly held company, bring up your use of business aviation

directly with your stockholders. Don’t shy away from the subject—meet it head on. Defend the utility of your aircraft. Explain why it is mandatory that you have private air transportation at your disposal.

This is a serious matter that should be addressed directly or indirectly by every single person reading this publication. The business aviation community is currently fighting issues in Washington that could adversely impact your ability to use aircraft effectively. In addition to user fees, there is a proposal from the Transportation Security Administration that will encumber your ability to operate any aircraft larger than a light jet by imposing manifest and cargo restrictions on every flight. Congress—a component of which has been blatantly taking advantage of the negative image of corporate airplanes—will decide the outcome of most of these issues in the year ahead.

In addition, we need your help to deliver the message that the business aviation industry contributes significantly to our country’s economic health. America invented the business aircraft in the aftermath of World War II. Today, corporate aviation is a vibrant, thriving business sector. Annual new-jet sales have been in the \$20 billion range during the past few years; adding in fuel, maintenance, charter and other related activities puts the entire corporate aviation industry well over \$100 billion per year.

What’s more, American companies dominate the business, both in the U.S. and internationally. Yes, there are worthy competitors from Brazil (Embraer), Canada (Bombardier) and Europe (Airbus and Dassault), but U.S.-based Boeing Business Jets, Cessna, Gulfstream and Hawker Beechcraft are household names with huge market shares. All of these companies had record sales in 2008; what’s more, even the “international” business jet manufacturers have massive service and maintenance facilities in the U.S. employing tens of thousands of American workers.

This industry is the envy of the world and an invaluable tool for American companies. Let’s make sure our employees, shareholders, representatives and fellow citizens understand why. Let’s not allow misguided groups to cripple it.

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I welcome your thoughts via e-mail  
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