

BEECHCRAFT OF THE MONTH



N2023W

Mike Caban
Tampa, Florida



SIERRA TO BARON

A Brooklyn boy's dream comes true

I wanted to be a pilot since I was 11, which was fairly challenging for a kid growing up in Brooklyn, New York. Nevertheless, I traveled great distances on buses and trains to reach hobby stores; built model rockets and started building control-line airplanes. I built a 36" wingspan, low-wing model and got an A+ on my mechanical drawing extra-credit project.

I originally pursued aeronautical engineering in college. But the mid-'70s were difficult years for the aerospace industry, so I modified my major and graduated in 1977 with a BS in mechanical engineering.

Fast forward to age 38. I was working in Syracuse, New York, when I received a community college catalog that offered a private pilot ground school course at night. I enrolled and made some very good aviation contacts that ultimately helped me become a pilot.

When I turned 40, I started looking for an airplane to buy. My old ground school instructor put me in touch with a "buyer's broker" friend (for a 6% fee) to help me select one to meet my needs and to check it for proper airworthiness.

The broker prepared a list of viable aircraft, including a few Pipers with fixed gear, a Piper Arrow, a Mooney 20C, a C35 and a Sierra. The Sierra had retractable gear, a lower fuel burn, a lower price and speeds that were kind to a student and adequate to keep me from being bored as my experience grew. The Sierra was selected and I flew her for 1,450 hours over nine years, earning my private and instrument ratings.

Around 1999, I began lusting after a twin-engine bird, something to advance my skills and increase cruise speeds. Typically, my Sierra trips were approaching 500 nm, and most required a fuel stop. I avoided flights of more than four hours on the five-hour fuel supply.

In 2002, I took multiengine training in a 1959 Travel Air, then decided I would want either a Travel Air or a Baron. I vacillated back and forth, running the numbers on cruise speeds, fuel burn, useful load and all manner of comparisons.

I chose the Baron because there were more of them flying and still being built. This meant an airframe with more available parts, suppliers and support.

In 2003, I found Barons were a performance bargain in terms of acquisition costs. Based on my budget and list of wants, a mid-'60s B55 would be per-

fect, and the further into the '60s the better. I also needed an outlet for the Sierra, which was a significant part of my purchase dollars, so a trade was a priority.

In early 2004, all the financial stars were aligned when an ad appeared by a dealer for two B55s—a 1965 and a 1969—that seemed within horse-trading distance of my budget. I chose the 1965 airplane; the 1969 had higher engine times and two-blade props.

I e-mailed the dealer with my trade proposition and agreed to fly to his location to "get a peek at his and show him mine." I was extremely interested because it was late '60s (alternators and higher gross weight); low airframe, engine and prop times; decent IFR digital avionics and I could personalize the paint and interior. It was exciting to be staring at the prospect of essentially refurbishing my Dream Baron.

When I arrived, I saw the plane's exterior already had a base coat of white. The side windows were beginning to cloud. Its interior had been completely removed; the panel had a hodgepodge of dated avionics. A gear-up landing in the '80s had been properly repaired and well-documented. The right engine was a TCM factory-reman with 440TT SFRM; the left engine was a fresh 0TT SMOH overhaul. This was a good platform to refurbish.

Final negotiations included new ¼" side windows from Great Lakes Aero, a Tracker IIIC color moving map bootstrapped to the IFR-certified KLN-89B (later upgraded to a slide-in replacement KLN94), a Garmin 340 audio panel and a wired six-place stereo intercom, a fresh annual inspection, Airwolf oil filter adapters, GAMInjectors, a JPI EDM-760 w/fuel flow, new landing gear bushings



Mike Caban with his "Dream Baron."

(from ABS member Kevin O'Halloran's private stock), copilot AI and DG, vertical card compass and a Cygnet dual yoke, Davtron clocks and flight deck with push-to-talk switches mounted in the thumb plates. (I later added "coolie hat" switches in the opposing thumb plates to switch coms, autopilot disconnect and ident transponder.)

I joined ABS

I signed the contract on February 23, with an expected delivery one month later. I then realized I needed more specific knowledge and input on this refurbishing project, so I joined ABS and also subscribed to the independent Beech chatline. These resources proved to be invaluable in identifying sources for components and "watch-outs."

I had coordinated many multimillion-dollar projects and programs, but coordinating an aircraft refurbishment among the dealer's four independent subcontractors required much more time and energy than the one-month plan the dealer anticipated.

Refurbishment begins

The engine monitor, oil filters and side window installations began first, followed by a return to the paint shop for the "split-scheme" and striping, then on to the avionics shop and lastly to the interior shop for the Berber carpet, leather seats and side panels, priming and painting of all exposed interior metal surfaces and plastic trim and new headliner material.

At the beginning of each subcontractor's efforts, I met with them to review all the particulars. During their work I visited to make sure they did not get "confused" and to see that everything was progressing as agreed. In the ensuing months, I logged 50 hours in my Sierra while checking on things.

In June—nearly four agonizing and trying months later—N2023W, S/N TC971, was reborn to be my Dream Baron for the rest of my flying years.



EQUIPMENT LIST — N2023W — 1965 B55 — S/N:TC971

ENGINE:

Left - Continental IO-470L
Devine Engines overhaul
Right - Continental IO-470L TCM
factory remanufactured
Hartzell "Top-Prop" 3-blade conversion
Beechcraft factory unfeathering
accumulators
Tanis under valve cover
heating elements, block
and sump pad heaters
JPI EDM-760 w/ fuel flow
Airwolf oil filter adapters
GAMIjectors

AIRFRAME:

Dupont Imron "Split Scheme"
(Matterhorn White-Blue Metallic-
Las Vegas Gold-Cumulus Gray
Metallic)
Great Lakes Aero ¼" grey tint
side glass
Cunningham Covers cabin cover
& engine cowl plugs
Cygnet dual yoke w/ dual
Davtron chronometers & flight
desk
Copilot AI and DG flight
instruments
PAI vertical card compass

AVIONICS:

Garmin 340 audio panel &
six-place stereo intercom
KLN-94 IFR-Certified GPS
Mid-Continent MD41-528
annunciator/switching unit
Skyforce Tracker IIIC moving
map slaved to GPS
Dual Narco Mark 12D nav/coms
Narco AT-150 transponder
Otto Controls T5-0055,
five-position toggle/pushbutton
"hat" switch
Century IIIB autopilot w/ altitude
hold coupled to nav #1 & GPS
Bonzer Mark 10X radar altimeter

Requalifying

Since I hadn't flown a twin-engine aircraft in almost two years, I needed to requalify myself. On delivery day, my instructor/CFII-MEI Aaron Flora and another CFII-MEI friend joined me for the cross-country two-hour trip back to the Tampa area. The trip at 10,000' was great—clocking about 185 KTAS on 25 gph. In the following days, Aaron and I mapped out my retraining.

My insurance policy had no stipulations, so what was needed was good common sense. I essentially repeated the multiengine training and didn't undertake a solo flight until it was completed. Eighteen hours later, Aaron and I agreed that I had a good command of the plane's operating parameters and I was "released" for solo flight with self-imposed marginal VFR privileges.

My Dream Baron today

I now reach family destinations in Virginia in about three hours, the Bahamas in 1.5 hours and am looking forward to trips to the Caymans and Belize. A recent trip from Virginia to Seattle, Washington, with my parents was a full day of flying enjoyment. The GAMIjectors and the EDM-760 enable me to cruise lean of peak at 8,000', burning 21 gph at 175-180 KTAS.

Even in the summer heat of south Florida, I can keep CHTs below 400° F in the climb at 120 KIAS with 24 gph fuel flow on each engine.

With more than 350 hours in the B55 and being within weeks of taking the commercial and ATP checkrides, I am looking forward to learning more about operating the Baron through activities with other ABS members.