

Friendly skies

Cottage Grove couple living their dream with matching planes

By Ben Sclair
For The Sentinel

For 23 years now, Donna Svoboda and Dennis Reynolds have traveled the country together, in different airplanes. She in her Citabria, him in his Pacer.

No longer. Sort of.

After nearly four years of building Donna and Dennis will fly the skies in their matching – but different – Bearhawk Patrols.

Delivery of their kits was in February 2013 at their Cottage Grove home. Dennis' first flight was on January 25, 2017 Donna flew a day later on January 26. "The weather went sour on us," said Dennis. "So I flew mine Sunday and Donna flew hers the next day." So after four years of building, what was that first flight like?

"Awesome. That's all can say. It was just awesome," said Donna. "I've been flying behind a 115 horse power Citabria for 23 years. You couldn't slap that smile off my face."

"After the first flights, we both looked at each other and decided that four years was well worth it," continued Dennis.

Prior to building their Patrols, Donna had no aircraft building experience while Dennis recovered and converted his Tri-Pacer to a Pacer back in the 1980s. And "I've been building a Mustang II for too long a time. It's still not finished."

The pair approached their Patrols like a job. "The four years was pretty much every day," noted Donna. "When you approach a project like that, you know it's huge. But I had no idea how huge. I told myself, this is my job. I'm going to get up and I'm going to go to work, and go out there about nine o'clock. We'd come back at five, every day."

It helps that both are retired. Donna from a local power company in Michigan where she flew pipeline patrol in a Cessna 185 "which was an awesome way to earn a paycheck." Dennis retired after 37 years with the Chrysler Corporation.

Aside from visiting a couple of newborn babies and attending a funeral back in Michigan, Donna and Dennis worked the builds nearly every day.

"No vacations," continued Donna. "I wanted this done and flying. I'm not a builder, I'm a flyer."

When Donna and Dennis completed a task on one Patrol, they immediately moved over to the other one to complete the same task. They found that to be the most efficient use of the experience they were gathering.

The only challenge the duo ran in to was painting. "That's a sore subject," noted Donna.

"I think that was the most painful part of the whole process," continued Dennis. "We've discovered that if we had to make a living painting, we'd starve."

Sadly, for them, they hired out the painting after four months of trying to make it work. Donna noted, the paint is anyone's "first impression of the plane," and they wanted it to look sharp.

THE PLANES

Why'd you select the Patrol? "Dennis' investigating found the Patrol," said Donna. "He pretty much talked me into building it, for the purpose of the characteristics of slow flight and the fast speed on the other end. Tandem seating was what we were looking for."

"We ordered the quick build kit with the quick build wings," said Donna. "I would never have done this if we had to do it from scratch."

"Having to build two airplanes, we wanted the best head start we could get," continued Dennis.

In the end, aside from paint color, the two Patrols are nearly identical. Donna doesn't have a skylight, Dennis does. Dennis has an ADS-B In receiver, Donna doesn't. The planes differs in weight by just two pounds.

Each Patrol has an ECI O-360 spinning a Whirlwind constant-speed propeller and "they just perform beautifully".

COMMUNITY

Dennis noted that both Bob Barrows (the original designer of the Patrol) and Mark Goldberg (owner of Bearhawk Aircraft) provided invaluable help to Donna and Dennis. "Any questions we had or any issues, they were quick to give advice or help us out."

"There's also a very active Bearhawk forum that you can get just about any question answered by someone who's been there before you," said Dennis. "That's a great helpful."

No dust will be collecting on the Patrols this year. Donna and Dennis plan to join Patrol designer Bob Barrows and others at

Idaho's Johnson Creek for a gathering in June. They also plan to bounce around other airports in Idaho before ultimately heading back to Oshkosh for AirVenture 2017 in July.

Next summer... "We've been wanting to do an Alaska trip and now we have the time and the planes to do it in," smiled Donna.

The guy who bought Dennis' Pacer is in Alaska and they're "thinking about maybe getting with him – or somebody like him – to take us around to all the places that we might not know about." Regardless, it is easy to hear the excitement in their voices.

So, if you happen to spy N241BP, that'll be Donna's Patrol. Look around I'll bet N240BP isn't far away.

PATROL SPECS AND PERFORMANCE

- > Maximum Speed 165 mph
- > Cruise Speed 150+ mph
- > Landing Speed 35 mph
- > Take-off Roll 250 ft
- > Range (55 gal @35% power) 900 miles
- > Empty Weight 950 lbs
- > Gross Weight 2000 lbs
- > Wing Span 33 ft
- > Wing Area 180 sq ft
- > Length 22 ft 8 in
- > Height 6 ft 4 in
- > Cabin Width 32"
- > Cabin Length 9 ft 5 in



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