

Member Spot light Allen Berry

Allen Berry's fascination with flying began when he was young. This fascination started when he saw his first u-line control models being flown. He built model planes, the first one I remember was a foam glider we had purchased. He put a model plane engine on it and we, me the four boys and Allen, all went outside at the house on 159th street in Brush Prairie. We watched excited as he started the engine and hand launched it. It lifted into the air over the field. Then went higher and higher and just kept going. With no controls there was nothing to do but watch it fly away.

He graduated to building and learning to fly full remote control model aircraft after that. That way the kids didn't get upset as the planes flew away, out of control. I don't know how many time I watched him, often on a coffee table or the floor, building a model from sticks and monocoat, trimming pieces and fitting them to the fuselage, ironing them on. Explaining to me how if he makes this change or softens that curve it will fly better. He was almost always right. By talking with other RC pilots and experimenting he taught himself to fly them. He has spent many hours teaching other young men how to fly RC.



Morris Kivett was a CRNA, Allen worked with owned and flew his own plane. Morris had been telling Allen for years that he knew someone wanting to sell two 1946 Aeroncas, that needed to be restored. Allen hadn't taken Morris very seriously until two significant events occurred.

Allen and Morris went to Arlington and watched a fabric covering demonstration for the tail of an airplane. They were using an iron and shrinking the fabric to the frame in the same manner that he used for building the remote control models had been making for years. The other event was a gift from me, a flight, from Wally Olson at Evergreen Aviation, off Mill Plain in Vancouver, in a Taylorcraft. One look at what kind of shape the T-craft was in and he knew he could build an airplane better than that.

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Allen decided he would like to try his hand at building/restoring an airplane. One that hadn't been in the air for over 50 years. He and Morris both purchased the two planes. They came with stacks of additional parts in new boxes that the previous owner had purchased at a CAP closeout. The day Allen brought home the frame of the Aeronca Chief, he had it attached to the back of the pickup and pulled it up the long driveway. It looked like nothing more than a frame for a Rose Parade float. I'll never forget looking at it and thinking no way is that thing an airplane.

Our sons were in High school and doing high school things, not too interested in rebuilding a dusty old airplane. Putting our daughter, AzLynn, in the plane and making engine noises while imagining what it's like to fly got her attention. At 8 years-old she spent time helping her dad cover, stitch and dope the wings, she was hooked. To this day she loves the smell of dope. (seriously.) I could make a really bad joke here but I'll pass ;-)

He tore the Chief down to metal and rebuilt from the ribs out. He loves the process of the whole project but putting on the wings for the first time was really exciting. He couldn't fly it out of the garage so we had to take it over to Evergreen Aviation, off Mill Plain, to do the final construct. We rolled as much of the fuselage onto a small trailer as would fit, leaving the tail wheel dragging behind and towed it through town to the airport. It's one of those rides I'll never forget!! People would point and smile, some of them even waved.

Allen and I began ground school while he was doing the rebuild. When the time came for the first flight Allen didn't have his pilot's license yet, so couldn't take it up, sooo, He had to find someone else to do it. He went into the airport office where the flight instructors were. There were about 5 instructors hanging out in there when he approached and asked who was willing to do this first flight. I remember standing out on the field as Allen negotiated with the brave pilot that had offered to look at the plane, and listening to Allen assure the pilot that Allen would go with him. Basically assuring the man that Allen was sure the plane was in good enough condition to put his own life on the line. Allen produced his CFI and AI certification. The instructor agreed, said if there was a little more wind "I'd take ya." Just then the wind sock turned and stood out. The pilot instructor smiled and said "Get in." Allen was able to take the first flight after this Aeronca Chief had not been in the air for almost 50 years!

From there Allen took the rest of his flight instruction from the same man in that very plane.

After a while Mark Pierson told Allen of another Chief that had been in the process of being restored but when the wing tips got damaged the project was shelved and was for sale. Allen decided to take on a second one. It wasn't the in-depth project that the first one was and was soon flying.



Member Spotlight – Allen Berry -continued



He took a short break while he looked for his next project. After extensive research, a test flight for both of us, my first barrel roll experience!!!, he settled on a Europa. It's a composite, mono-wheel, that's fast, efficient and will get in and out of short airstrips. He was interested in the composite construction, similar to the smaller RC models he'd done. He also liked the cleaner design lines. The airplane had been well tested and seemed to be a safe design.



The kit was delivered to the house while Allen was at work. When the truck arrived the driver wanted to know where the forklift was to off load. It was way to large for me to lift so I called my brother to come help. It's amazing what you can do with hammers, crowbars and determination. Allen showed up about half way through. I'm still not sure how Garry, I, Allen and the driver were able to get those crates off that truck!

In the two years it took to build, he found that the final finish in composite construction is where the work is, at the painting stage composite is still very labor intensive, with fabric construction the paint is easier.



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Attaching the wings for the first time was different. The wings of the Europa were designed to go on and off in glider fashion and is much easier to do with two people. He has done it by himself but it is not easy

After the finish of the Europa he began looking around for his next project. By this time he had friends that were interested in building with him. Ethan Berry, Tom Martin and Allen went to OshKosh and did a building workshop for the Sonex. They were all very excited about the plane, in 2007, with blue prints in hand, they got together with Lance Harmon and ordered the first sheets of 4'x12' aluminum. The four of them began building four Sonex in Allen's hanger/barn. Four years later they are ready to begin the first flight of the final Sonex.

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