

Member Spotlight – Mark Pearson

I grew up in a family of pilots and knew at an early age I wanted to be one also. I obtained my private license in 1973 and flew for pleasure for many years, adding ratings along the way. I had been doing auto body repair to support my flying addiction until 1983 when I saw an ad in the paper for a flight instructor job. I enjoyed flight instructing for over a year when a local radio station offered me a chance to fly two traffic reporters in a Cessna 182 over Houston during the morning and afternoon rush hour. Since I was off during the middle of the day, I would hang out at the airport which gave me the opportunity to get to know everyone on the field. This led to a job starting out as copilot on a Beech 99 flying night freight for a Federal Express contractor. I was based in Abilene, Texas and was very excited to be building multi engine turbo-prop time. There was a commuter airline flying out of Abilene called Chaparral Airlines. I got hired on there as copilot in a Gulfstream G1 and a Casa 212. Both of these were very interesting planes to fly. The G1 had been a premier corporate aircraft during the late fifties and sixties. Chaparral Airlines flew a version that had been "stretched" to carry 37 passengers. The Casa 212 was a very boxy, high wing, turbo-prop, with a ramp like opening in the rear. It looked like a shrunk down, boxier version of a C130. Except it only had two engines. Chaparral was the very first American Eagle commuter for American Airlines. While there I befriended a fellow who had previously flown Learjets.



Beech 99



Casa 212

Member Spotlight – Mark Pearson Continued..

Later he quit to take another job flying Learjets. A few weeks later he called to say he was the chief pilot and if I wanted to go fly Learjets he would hire me. So I packed up and moved to Newport News, Virginia to go to work for Flight International. I had never flown a jet before, and certainly had never been in a dog fight. At Flight International I got to do both! Flying the Lear made my face hurt. I didn't realize it until I got home but my face was literally hurting from grinning so hard. The acceleration and power of a Lear is like a narcotic. It feels GOOD, and you want MORE!



Learjet painted for "aerial maneuvering"

At Flight International I learned the tactics of aerial combat. They had a contract with the Dept of Defense to provide target services for the military. The great thing about this company was that advancement was based on merit instead of the seniority system used by airlines. Within six months I was ready to upgrade to captain. They needed me to move to Klamath Falls, Oregon as part of a group of three planes and several pilots. I had to go find Klamath Falls on a map because I had never heard of it. All I knew was that I was going to get paid to fly a Learjet and go up to dog fight with fighter pilots, yipeeee! But before I went to Klamath Falls, I had to stop in Fresno to open up a new base. I opened up the base and trained a guy to be the captain. Then I moved onto Klamath Falls. I discovered that there was Salmon fishing all around, and skiing too. I thought I had died and gone to heaven, flying, skiing, and fishing. It just couldn't get any better than that. But the company was being mismanaged and several paychecks bounced. I had a radio problem in the Lear one day while working with the Portland Air National Guard, so I taxied the plane to Flightcraft to have it fixed. While there the chief pilot approached me asking if I was interested in a job. Seems he needed a Lear pilot and I was in the right place at the right time. I flew on demand charter for them, for not quite a year when a family illness required me to return to Texas. My wife and I moved to Texas City for about three years, during which time I mostly went to college. I flew an Aerostar parttime until it started interfering with my class schedule. Then in 1993 a friend I had flown with at Flight International called to ask if I wanted to fly Learjets again. I returned to the Pacific Northwest to fly Learjets for the Federal Reserve Bank system. After two years, I was getting bored with it, so I applied at Horizon Air and was accepted. I flew the Fokker F28 for exactly one year for them. Then I was picked up by a startup airline out of Colorado Springs called Western Pacific. They flew Boeing 737s all over the U.S. That was the best job I ever had. I loved the airplane. I loved the people I worked with. And I loved the company. They were just great to work for! But like most startups, they didn't make it. I sent out 175 resumes in one day looking for a job. I went with a company called Kittyhawk Aircargo. They flew Boeing 727s all over the U.S., Mexico, and the Caribbean. I was with them for almost 10 years, upgrading and downgrading through all of the seats. (It is a 3 pilot cockpit) When they shut the doors, I found a job with another startup airline. This time it was flying an Airbus A320, like the one that landed in the Hudson River. But when the economy went downhill they too shut down. So now my flying is limited to a tube and rag tail dragger, and I love it. Flying as a career isn't what it was when I first started pursuing it. But it is still very gratifying. I hope to return to flying the big stuff when the economy turns around.

"I wouldn't take a million dollars for the memories. But I wouldn't give two cents to do it all over again." Mark Pearson