

Member Spotlight – Ethan Berry

My aviation adventures started a long time ago and a little backwards from how most people start. You see, I built an airplane before I ever learned to fly powered airplanes. I managed to satisfy some of my aviation cravings with an old hang-glider and lessons that put the wind in my hair and bugs in my teeth. What the hang-glider really did was fan the flame of aviation in my heart. It helped me realize if I ever really wanted to fly I needed go back to school and increase my earning power. That way I could afford to spend a little money and have a little time to fly.



After I finished college and started working, it was time to start pursuing my flying dreams, well actually, they really began with building a Sonex. You see, my Dad, Allen Berry, Tom Martin, friend, Lance Harmon, friend, and I, Ethan Berry all decided to scratch build our own Sonex. Not one plane but four Sonex' s at one time. We figured building one part was hard enough, building three more of the same part wouldn't be that much more complicated.

In 2006 that's exactly what we decided to do. We ordered a set of plans for everyone, attended a Sonex building workshop, and ordered enough 4' X 12' aluminum sheets for all of us to make a few mistakes. The building adventure had begun!!! Our plan was to build four exact airframes and before starting to individualize them, draw lots to see who gets what airframe. By 2008 we had 4 rolling aircraft frames minus engines and panels. In my "naïve-ness" I thought we would be finished within a year after drawing lots but in actuality it took two years before the planes were all completed. The work completely slowed down when we started individualizing our own planes. Also our great workshop was a little hard to heat in the very cold winters.

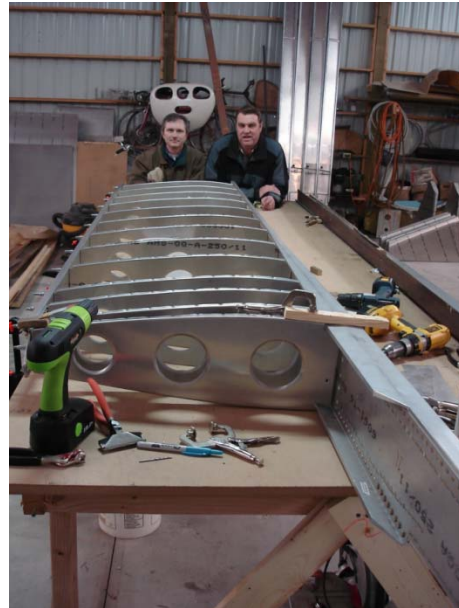


Ethan Berry in 2002 above Springville UT

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Before I get to the finished planes let me back track and talk a little about qualifications and building rules. My Dad, by far, had the most building experience having restored two Aeronca Chiefs and constructed and flying a Europa. Having built, rag, tube and composite he was excited about his first metal airplane project. Lance also had building experience with a wood plane project. Tom was the flyer of the group, which included several flying adventures across the U.S. I know what you're thinking, "what did I have to offer this group?" Well, as it turns out they were not too picky. My rugged good looks, youth, and relationship with the workshop owner seemed to be enough.

The building adventure had to be fun so our rules were not all that strict. First rule: pick one day a week that we all meet and work together. If someone didn't make it, that day's mistakes were immediately and without reservation blamed on the missing person. If you didn't want to be responsible for the biggest mistake of the week, you better show up! We all took blame now and then, but all in the name of fun. Second: if something was not going together according to your standards you can change it without hurting any ones feelings. Quality wins over speed. Third: have fun and that's what be did! Allen earned the nickname The Parts Fairy because sometimes when we would all meet up, there were a bunch of magically appearing parts made and ready to go together. Everyone should be lucky enough to have a parts fairy around for a project like this. If we were not exactly sure how to build a part we asked the parts fairy what he thought and the next thing we knew the parts were sitting on the work bench ready for installation.



Tom and Allen working on one of the wings.



Four sets of wings in the rafters.



Rolling frames, time to draw lots.

Member Spotlight – Ethan Berry continued...



The mad scientist AKA (The Parts Fairy) in his barn, I mean Hanger. He hates it when you call it a barn!

Right, Tom during flight testing. Below, all four airplanes pose together for another glamor shot.



Member Spotlight – Ethan Berry continued...

At the end of the build, my plane earned the nickname The Tool Shed. They said, whenever there was a tool missing, it could always be found in or on my plane. I think they were just jealous of how often I worked on mine. I'm also sure some tools were put there to frame me. The ruggedly handsome guy always gets framed.



“whenever there was a tool missing, it could always be found in or on my plane”

In August 2010, Allen’s plane flew first, followed by Tom’s, and then mine. Unfortunately, watching my Dad fly the 40 hours off of The Tool Shed was bitter sweet. Sweet knowing that soon I would get a ride in the plane I built and bitter knowing that I could not fly it, yet. After every flight Dad would say to me, “Your plane needs some more gas.” Have you ever heard of perma-grin? It’s a smile so big your face hurts just looking at the guy smiling. That’s what happened to my Dad when he said, "Your plane needs gas!!!!



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“The tail N number on The Tool Shed is the birth date and initials of my little girl Camilla who was born during the building.”

Getting a ride with my Dad in The Tool Shed was exciting but nothing compared to what happened August 28th 2012. Brett Zefting, my flight instructor, told me to take him back to the airport and let him out. No, I hadn't scared him to death, it was finally time for me to fly the pattern, for the first time ever, all by myself. My heart was pounding so hard I could here it over the sound of the engine. I made my radio call and pulled out onto runway seven at the very windy Dalles Regional airport in Washington state. The throttle went in, the tail came up, the plane jumped toward the sky, just as I had imagined it so many times before. My first landing could have counted for 3 landings if you included all the bounces. The second landing was better and the third, perfect! I wish I could describe how it feels to solo the plane you built. That was almost a year ago and I still wear a perma-grin so big, you can see the dimples in my cheeks, when standing behind me. The more flying I do the worse the perma-grin gets. At this rate, before I ever get my pilot's license, I will be the closest living thing resembling a Pez dispenser. What can I say, ***I have a serious aviation addiction.*** – ***Ethan Berry***

Below - Instructor Brett and I on my first solo. Yes, that is my shirt tail! Notice the perma-grin!

