Falco Builders Letter

My Name is Malcolm and I'm a Falcoholic

Homebuilding's Ultimate Prize

by Malcolm McLeod
This article was originally published in the September/October 2010 Canadian Aviator *magazine.*

Through fate, luck and circumstance I have recently become the owner of a Falco; a venerable and fabled aircraft that is relatively rare in Canada. On May 14th at the Stoney Creek airport, just east of Hamilton, I took the keys for the Falco and climbed aboard, but the path I took to this moment began 17 years earlier.

Fade back to the 1980s. I had decided to move on from the flying club Cessnas to an aircraft of my own—one that would have better performance than a 172 yet be economical.

In terms of performance per dollar, homebuilders enjoy the best of aircraft design and the building spark had been kindled in me by John Veale, a colleague at CBC radio, who had just completed a Mustang II. So thinking that "I can build one of those," I began to look at all sorts of different birds.

Of course, part of the process has to include a serious reality check. Let's see... very small garage already full of motorcycles, young children, very demanding job, don't want to wait for years to fly... so maybe building is not in the cards just now.

The alternative was to buy a completed homebuilt. Some people were incredulous; "You're going up in some plane that some amateur built in his garage?" Well, yes, but not just any plane is going to do... I have a strong sense of self-preservation.

So began a long search. Sure enough, I found a few that I wouldn't dare fly in, but eventually, a Cavalier SA102.5 turned up

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in the COPA classifieds. The Cavalier is a wood and fabric two-seater that gets an honest 110 knots out of 125 horsepower. You'll recognize a Cavalier by the large elliptical tip tanks.

My investigation of the Cavalier turned up a sad story but also cause for optimism. The aircraft was owned by an AME who bought the plane from the builder, then, before he ever got to fly it, had the misfortune to lose his medical. He had waited for a year to see whether he might get reinstated but when that possibility disappeared he had decided to sell.

Next, I tracked down Jamie Alexandre, one of the key people responsible for the homebuilt inspection program. Jamie knew the aircraft and the builder. His simple comment was "you'll be fine with the Cavalier."

The builder, I was to learn, was a man with a passion. Jack Wiebe of Stoney Creek, Ontario was a man I quickly came to respect and admire. He had traveled the same road I was on—twenty years earlier. The essential difference was that Jack had decided to build, and build, and build again.

Jack started his first airplane in 1968. Small airplane construction options in Canada were few at the time, but Jack bought into the clean lines of Claude Piel's Emeraude. The Emeraude is a low wing, two place, side-by-side, wood and fabric craft, and is the pre-cursor to the Cap 10-flown by the French Connection aerobatic team. The construction "highlight" is that the Emeraude wing is elliptical in shape, requiring the individual jigging and construction of every rib. The plans were drawn in metric and written in French, neither of which Jack had a clue how to interpret. Whether or not he knew it then, the perseverance required to complete that Emeraude was the first checkmark on the 'insane masochist' checklist required to scratch-build a Falco.

It didn't take long for Jack to dream of more

Jack and Mike Wiebe

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speed—just about the time that Ken Rand was making a splash with his KR-2. This was the perfect homebuilder's airplane. It was cheap to build and operate, but fast and good-looking. Unfortunately he developed an allergy to the early epoxies used in such craft, so to finish the plane he enlisted his young son, Mike.

When Mike went off to university, Jack went back to wood. This was the time that the Cavalier was built. Construction of the Cavalier went very much like the Emeraude. There were no kits—you bought the wood and made parts. It's a scratch-built aeroplane and this explains why there are so many Cavaliers in barns and sheds across Canada—legacies of great ambitions unfulfilled.

Fast forward two years. Mike and his new wife Lee Anne are settling in to married life. As Mike tells it, "The phone rings… it's Dad. He says, hey son, I got a line on a partially built Emeraude project. Ya want half? Don't worry, the ribs are already built."

Team Wiebe was back in business and work progressed quickly on the second Emeraude.

It was then that the Falco insinuated itself into the lives of Jack and Mike. They saw the Falco as "probably the only wooden aircraft tougher to build than an Emeraude… maybe someday, but not likely." However, one day in 1990 an acquaintance showed up at Jack's shop with a partially completed Falco fuselage on a trailer. It was an orphan, and the guy said "Well, do ya' want the damned thing or do I hafta' set fire to it in your driveway!"

That was the genesis of the Falco, but before it was completed, two more Wiebe Aero projects would fly. First was Emeraude number two and then something completely different—a Murphy Rebel on amphibious floats. The Rebel is aluminum construction and a kit, but it was a natural choice for two guys who love to fish.

Construction of the Falco began in earnest in 1995. Kits and plans are sold by Sequoia Aircraft Company, but the Wiebes, true to form, bought plans but built much of the aircraft from scratch. Jack, the master woodworker, was the airframe specialist and Mike, a graduate engineer, focused on systems. After seven years and a staggering total of some 8,000 hours of work, the Falco took to the air.

Jack and Mike have numerous "shoulda-dones" but when they took the Falco to EAA's 2003 Sun ´n Fun gathering it won the Best All-Wood award, soon to be followed by an Outstanding Workmanship award at EAA Airventure in Oshkosh.

Meanwhile I had been enjoying low-cost trouble-free flying with the Cavalier. I flew it to Oshkosh five times and I was always able to get together with Jack and Mike.

At last year's Airventure, I got a big surprise—the Falco was for sale. It didn't take long to realize I was in a unique position; knowing better than just about anyone else what to expect in a Wiebe-built aircraft.

I had seen Falcos and knew a little about them but I soon found out that the praise for this design is in no way overstated. Astonishingly, it was designed ´way back in 1955 by Stelio Frati, a man who became known as a genius in light aircraft design. The Falco was a production aircraft in Italy and the precursor of the SIAI Marchetti SF.260, which was built for the civil market and a dozen different air forces.

I can shamelessly and unequivocally quote the pamphlets. "A timeless beauty and a masterpiece of design… compared to ordinary aircraft, the Falco is an Arabian stallion among plow horses." It's known as "the Ferrari of the air." Gross weight is just under 1900 pounds and with a 180-horse fuel-injected Lycoming 360, the Falco has an initial climb rate around 1800 fpm, and will high-speed cruise at 185 knots with a fuel burn of 11 GPH. If you want economy, a 158-knot cruise at 10,000 feet will burn 7.5 GPH or 24 miles per gallon. If you fancy aerobatics, the Falco is strong and nimble. Operational load limits are plus-six and minus-three Gs at aerobatic weight and the controls are light, precise and beautifully harmonized.

The Falco is an absolute joy to fly and I feel very lucky to have been able to get one that is a work of art in construction as well as design.

Ironically, on the day I picked up my Falco, its creator died at the age of 91 in Milan.

Stelio Frati leaves a tremendous legacy in aircraft design and the profound appreciation of everyone who has flown the Falco. I will think of him often as I learn to dance through the sky with this hot Italian beauty.

Precision GPS Instrument Approaches

by Alfred Scott

During World War II, Alex Henshaw led a team of pilots charged with the production flight testing of the Supermarine Spitfire. Before they were accepted into the RAF, they would take a new airplane up and run it through a series of tests to confirm that the airplane met the specifications for the plane.

At that time, Henshaw was the most famous pilot in England, roughly equivalent to Lindberg in the U.S. In February 1939, he flew a modified Mew Gull to Cape Town and back, and set a speed record that stands to this day. He was also capable of doing things with an airplane that few others would attempt.

There was tremendous pressure on them to get all of the airplanes that came off the production line into service as quickly as possible, and that wasn't always easy because the weather in England was often terrible. Henshaw routinely flew in weather that nobody else would.

Among Henshaw's team was Venda Jicha, who had been in the Czechoslovakian Air Force and was then their top aerobatic pilot. He was Henshaw's best Spitfire pilot at Castle Bromwich, but he also became very difficult and bridled at being told when he could fly. He thought the group was made up of a bunch of softies.

Henshaw decided to teach the man a lesson, and waited until the weather was right down on the deck, with a very low overcast ceiling and driving rain. Jicha took one look at the weather and his face turned white. "No one's going to fly in this," he said.

Roaul Schild now has a three-bladed MT propeller and is testing the EG-NOS system of precision GPS ILS approaches for the Austrian Civil Aviation authority.

Their job was to fly to 17,000 feet, put the planes through their paces and then find their way back to the base with visual flight references only. Henshaw took a machine up, ran through the tests and returned to the base. Jicha watched it all in disbelief, and then Henshaw suggested they go up together. So off they went to 17,000 feet flying up through the clouds in close formation.

With their tests finished, Henshaw signaled to Jicha to get into formation with him, and then they descended through the rain and clouds—essentially flying blind—and at the last minute they broke out of the clouds right over the base and they landed within seconds of each other. "Nothing was said as we struggled against the wind and rain to the office, but the change could be sensed by everyone. From then on, Jicha was a different person."

Henshaw had a secret which he revealed later in *Sigh for a Merlin*. Near the base was the Hams Hill power station with cooling towers that sent plumes of steam up through the layers of clouds. Henshaw had learned to fly back to the base guided by these. He had his own personal precision IFR approach method.

We now have GPS navigation, and GPS-based approaches are termed RNAV(GNSS), and they are by definition 'non-precision' approaches, however the addition of the Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS) in the U.S. and the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) now enable "ILS like" approach capabilities with accuracy that is often better than ILS, but without the need to install and maintain expensive ILS equipment on the ground.

The significance is that with GPS and WAAS/EGNOS, you can technically run an ILS-like approach into any grass strip if you wish. So this is a big step forward, especially for general aviation aircraft to use in lousy weather.

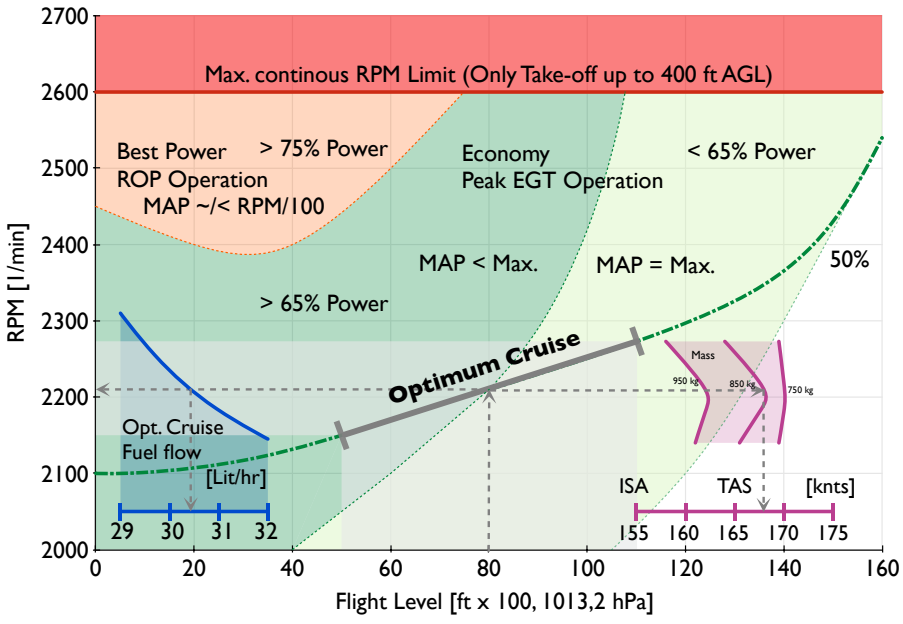
A system like this still requires testing. Raoul Schild now has his Falco, I-DIET, upgraded to use the EGNOS system. He has a Garmin 430W GPS which drives an Aspen Avionics EFD1000 glass panel, and he has been testing the system with the Austrian Civil Aviation authority.

The Falco with the new "high tech" avionics is one of the test aircraft (the other likely a Citation Jet with a Collins Pro Line cockpit), and a Cessna 182. The Falco fits well into the jet/turboprop traffic because of its high speed capabilities during approach.

Raoul recently reported "Today I did the first fully satellite-based approach with lateral and vertical guidance (LNAV+V). One approach hand flying, the other fully automatic on autopilot down to minimums. The accuracy (10 feet laterally and 13 feet vertically) is better then what you would need for an ILS approach. The guidance indication on the primary flight display is the same as ILS."

Raoul began testing the system at the big airports Graz and Innsbruck in March, and Vienna and other smaller airports will follow.

Raoul has also installed a three blade MT propeller in his Falco. This is the same type of prop that Rob Phillis has and Raoul has also been using our Benchmark program for his flight testing for the Italian authority ENAC. These old wooden airplanes are really getting high tech and now almost anyone can shoot an approach like Alex Henshaw.



Raoul's engine operation diagram

Hung Nguyen

by Alfred Scott

In 1966, fresh out of college and right before going into the Marine Corps, I had a final dash of freedom in Europe, picking up a bright red Porsche 912 at the plant in Stuttgart, and then driving through Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Spain and finally to Paris, where I stayed with my father's cousin Frederick E. "Fritz" Nolting.

Cousin Fritz had been the U.S. ambassador to Vietnam, right before Henry Cabot Lodge, and he was working as a banker in Paris. He was an elegant Virginia gentleman who got caught up in the machinations, politics and power struggles that attend great moments in history. He knew I was probably headed to Vietnam with the war raging on, and one evening we had dinner at his spacious Avenue Foch apartment. It was just the two of us. I listened as he told me the story of what had happened in Vietnam during the Kennedy administration.

He talked about how the Kennedy administration was unhappy with President Diem, and how three men in the administration, Averell Harriman, George Ball and Dean Rusk wanted Diem out. They argued that he was a Catholic running a Bhuddist country, that there was nepotism with him bringing his brother Ngu into the government—an exact parallel of the Catholic U.S. President and his brother the Attorney General, but never mind that. In all the discussions, Lyndon Johnson was adamantly opposed to undermining Diem—in Texas, a contract is a contract. But he was overruled and the word quietly passed to the Vietnamese generals that it would be okay to remove Diem from power, but please don't hurt him. The generals promptly shot Diem and his brother in a tank. Two weeks later, JFK was assassinated. Cousin Fritz went to see Johnson, and said "Why don't you just say that President Kennedy was a great man but he made a great mistake." "I can't

Hung Nguyen in Saigon office, 1970

do that," Johnson replied, "the man is now a martyr."

And so began the downward spiral of Vietnam and all of this story later came out in the Pentagon Papers.

Eleven years later and after going to Morocco, not Vietnam, in my military service, I owned an old Victorian apartment building in Richmond, and Susan Arruda was our manager. Our maintenance man was illiterate and temperamental, and his form of job security was to always keep everything not quite working so we were dependent on him whenever things started going wrong—which was a constant state of affairs. Susan and I decided to fire the man, so she ran blind advertisements in the local paper and interviewed the men in my partner's office, some distance away.

I remember it like it was yesterday. Susan walked into my office and said "You will not believe who walked through the door." She said the man wore a blue suit and brought a three-page typed resumé—for an apartment maintenance job. He had an AAS Civil & Architectural Engineering degree, previous employment in a maintenance job at a local charity the Little Sisters of the Poor, and then I turned the page where his previous job was with a construction company in Hue, Vietnam. "This was my company" where Hung Nguyen—the man applying for our maintenance job—had employed 5000 people.

It was a family business that was started in 1760 and had been run by many generations of his family. Mr. Nguyen was the head of the company and all of the family worked there and shared in the profit. Between 1960 and 1972, he was a subcontractor for two large U.S. companies which had contracts with the U.S. government. He built the Bien Hoa Highway, Cam Ranh, Chu Lai, Danang and Phu Bai air bases. He also constructed the combat base for the 101st Airborne division, and all the secondary roads from the DMZ to the Mekong Delta. His company designed and built various large projects for the Vietnamese government such as a cancer hospital and a soccer stadium in Saigon, the governor's complex, a medical college, a university, and the renovation and rehabilitation of the King's Palace in Hue, and also several large factories in Saigon, Danang and Hue. His head office was in Hue, where Diem had been a neighbor, and there were offices in five major cities.

And this man became our maintenance man in a 77-unit apartment building. He

says he had never worked with his hands before, but he had a holster of tools on his hip and roamed the halls, tightening every loose screw and soon had the building in great shape. He said he had to forget all about the past, and that eight out of ten friends who were used to a life of luxury and servants had killed themselves.

He is a quiet, shy man, and I can only tell you all this after much prodding over time to get it out of him. One day he was in my basement office where I had a world map on the wall—to help me think great thoughts—and he looked at the map of Vietnam, saying that he had a boat that he used to go back and forth between Hue and Vung Tau, a seaside port in South Vietnam. I was curious about the boat, and asked him how big it was.

His hands stretched out, one in front and one behind him as if to measure the size of the boat, and then his hands dropped and he said "big boat."

I pressed him further and he went through the same thing, arms out, and then "big boat." He knew of course, with precision how big his boat was, and after a couple more sessions like this, I finally asked him, "Mr. Nguyen, how big was your boat?"

"A hundred feet."

And then he opened up. It was twelve feet wide, had twin Chrysler diesels, and had been designed for him by engineers in Taiwan and built of wood in the Mekong Delta for $33,000. And he went on to explain that he had the boat as insur-

Hung Nguyen with his mother and family in 1987.

ance in case the communists took over, and when they did in 1975, he piled his children and family (a total of 42 people) on the boat and headed for Australia. He spent a couple of days offshore and confirmed that indeed the country had fallen. But when they had reached international waters, he was picked up by the U.S. Seventh Fleet, hauled to the deck in cargo nets and then taken to Subic Bay in the Philipines, later to Guam, and finally flown to an Army refugee camp at Indian Town Gap in Pennsylvania.

All 42 members of his family came to Richmond, sponsored by the Paul Nott family. He immediately went to work at their scrap metal company and then to the Little Sisters of the Poor where he worked as a maintenance man and dishwasher. Then he came to work for us for three years, working sixteen-hour days, from 7:30 to 3:30 at our building and then 3:30 to 11:00 at the Medical College of Virginia.

There were many times when he would ask me to sign sponsorship papers to help get relatives out of Vietnam. He said I didn't need to worry about this. I signed them all and there never were any problems. I think back now with embarrassment at the way some of my fellow Marines referred to the Vietnamese at the time, but when they arrived in our country, there never was an unemployment problem with the Vietnamese. Hung Nguyen became the leader of the Vietnamese community here in Richmond.

After three years with us, Mr. Nguyen got a job with Philip Morris, where one nine-to-five job paid him what the two jobs had brought in. He began work in an Associate Field Engineer, but it didn't take Philip Morris long to recognize what they had. He was moved into the factory construction division, and then for the next 25 years, he was a project manager at Philip Morris, building factories all over the U.S. and Asia, in Kuala Lumpur, Manila and China. A typical plant was 200,000 square feet, cost a hundred million to build and took 12-18 months. Everything had to happen right on schedule, and it cost $3000 for each hour the plant was delayed. They paid well for the work but everything had to come in on time and on budget. A plant in Cabarus County, NC was a million square feet and cost $500 million.

Mr. Nguyen retired in 2005, and I reconnected with him then. He now lives in Florida near two of his sons. He was 75 and looked 55 when he retired and Philip Morris tried to get him to stay on for another five years. He has five sons and two daughters, all college educated.

When Susan came back to work with me, we called him and asked him to stop by next time he was in Richmond. He's now on the board of the Little Sisters of the Poor, where he once worked in maintenance and as a dishwasher. He stopped by the other day, and I want you to know, he now has a Falco hat.

Morriën Glass Panel

If Raoul Schild's panel is not enough to intimidate you, check out the instrument panel currently being assembled by Aerotronics for Marcel Morriën.

Aerotronic's Jason Smith explains, "The heart of the panel is the Garmin G3X EFIS system. This is a synthetic vision, map, and engine monitor.

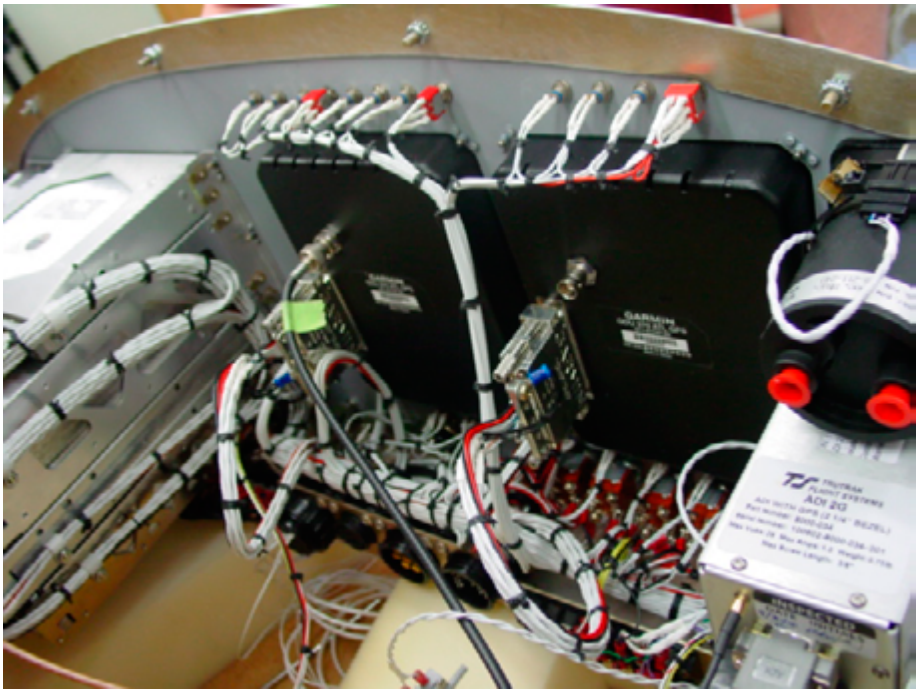
"It is connected to the Garmin GNS 430 (WAAS GPS, comm, and nav) for HSI indication and map positioning. This system is capable of XM weather although Marcel's doesn't have this. You can get XM in Europe!

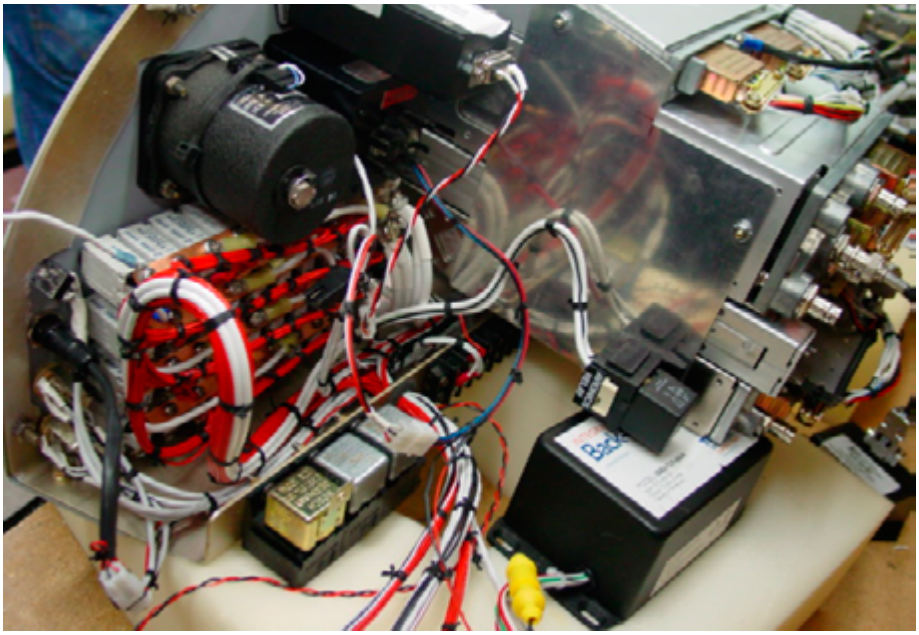
"There is an audio panel, a second com and a transponder. We build a plug-and-play panel for each customer and using the Falco original drawing we followed all of the standard pin-outs we could for the systems.

"Attached are some pictures of the rear of the panel. We had to, of course, integrate this different avionics into the factory Falco drawing and make it all play together.

"Marcel also had a Tru Trak two-axis autopilot completely coupled to the EFIS so he has heading, course, VOR, ILS/GS coupling as well as GPS WASS approach capability. He also has a AOA, backup 'steam' instruments, G-Meter, clock, ELT, and battery back-ups. We created a new panel face so it could be attached to the original frame and therefore easily removed to access behind the panel."

Aerotronics is located at the Billings International Airport, Billings, MT. www.Aerotronics.com





Marcel Morriën








Marcel Morriën

Coast to Coast with Susan

Have some good news for you. I have been working on a new contract with UPS. If all goes as planned, we will be able to get orders overseas using UPS. I normally mail small overseas orders or use a commercial shipper for large cartons. It is economical but not very timely. With this new plan, they are going to quote competively and of course you would receive an order much faster. I am excited about this because the more we use them, the bigger the discounts to you. You may have to pay a little more to expedite your order, but at least you will have the choice. However, please remember that we are still bound by all of the US Customs and Duties declarations. There are now very strict procedures for exporting from the USA. You will still be responsible for the taxes/duties at your end.

Hope you have enjoyed our article about our friend Hung Nguyen. Alfred asked me to comment on those early days when Hung and I worked together at the Chesterfield Apartments. Well, it is best put by saying that we were strangers together in a strange land. I had just arrived from Florida and knew nothing about Richmond, Virginia, and he had come from another country and way of life. My adjustment was nothing compared to his, but when you come from a very tropical, casual and cosmopolitan environment as I did to a conservative and traditional environment, I too had a transition to make.

He and I would often talk about the difficulties we were having in getting used to our new home and all the things we did not understand. If you have traveled around our country, you know that regions and states can be different in more than climate. Richmond is rich in American Civil War history which I knew little of and Hung understood even less.

I remember one of our very elderly tenants inviting me to tea one afternoon. I had never been asked to tea! She was quite lovely and kind and wanted to share her family history with me. Proudly, she presented a very old photograph of five pretty young girls dressed in long white summer dresses sitting on a porch surrounding a dapperly dressed gentleman in a white suit. She pointed out that one of the girls was her great grandmother and that was "Bobby Lee." I had no idea who that was, only later to realize she was speaking of the great Confederate general Robert E. Lee! I have since become a little bit more interested in my family tree, but I have yet to discover anyone of greatness.

Top: Shirley & Neville Langrick at Gibraltar. Above: Susan Arruda & Hung Nguyen

Just a little up-date on my previous article about "Speed Limit Enforced by Aircraft." Last fall the state raised the speed limit to 70 miles per hour on the interstate I travel daily. I believe the theory behind the change was the concession that everyone was travelling at 70 mph anyway. Okay, so most people are now speeding along at 75 mph or 80 mph. Makes for a really fun drive to work and back home! They never succeeded in mending all of the pot holes from last winter's weather, and now it is a really fast obstacle course! Oh yes, just have to mention all the drivers that pass me busy talking on their cell phones and even texting—at those speeds no less. Latest survey states that 25% of all auto accidents in the USA are cell-phone related. Just not a comforting thought when on the interstate. But, Alfred knows that I will take all risks to get to my Falco office.—*Susan Arruda*

Mailbox

[To Steve Wilkinson] I am loving flying your Falco over here. Since buying it from Bob it has done around another 260 hrs and all the compressions have returned up to 78/80. When I bought it they were between 72-76/80 and after the first year they were up to 74-76/80. When my LAME that works on Drew's, Ian's, Stephen's and mine did my compression checks he couldn't believe that they were all 78 even and thought his test equipment was faulty until he did a check on a Continental and it showed a couple in the 60's.

Another problem that I have fixed was the strobe noise. It was back-feeding through the audio panel. I used the power to the strobes to control a relay that I placed down near the starter relay and *voila* it was gone. I still have a reduced noise from the alternator after replacing it with a lightweight one as it was very noisy and it had voltage fluctuations. I have ordered an inline filter that I hope will reduce it but I think I may have to take the alternator cable back to the battery to stop it.

I have installed a JPI830 engine management instrument for better control of the EGT/CHT and after analysing them and sending the data to GAMI they said it was very good and their injectors may make only a very slight advantage. My main question is, did you or Mattituck put airflow balanced or GAMI injectors in as I purchased a set of GAMI's when I ordered the JPI and from what we saw that it could be run LOP fairly successfully? I have been getting very good fuel economy that Drew couldn't believe. He plans on 40 lts/hr, and I am getting consistently around 32-34 lts/hr. If you have had them installed then Drew is interested in buying them from me or GAMI give a money back guarantee.

On another note my partner has just realised where we can go for a weekend/day trip after taking her to some places that required many hrs of driving. She is now planning all my big flights to places that the airlines can't get to and as she is used to boating doesn't get airsick. I am planning a night rating fairly soon as I nearly got caught out after an airshow over here with only 10 mins of last light when I got back and not long after that in instrument rating.

I got caught in cloud unintentionally a while ago after turning back due to weather but after trying to fly it manually I realised it had the wing leveller which took a load of pressure off and came out of it OK.

Top & Center: Nose down in Down Under, Stephen Friend's close encounter with sheep tracks and Ian Ferguson's mishap. Above: Not our kind of Falco.

After seeing my Falco a friend of mine has decided he wants one, and he is currently in the US and has looked at three of them. He went for a flight with Arthur Dominguez and is now hooked. He is looking at also bringing another back down under.

Ian Newman
Merimbula, NSW
Australia

Ian, that's interesting about the injectors. No, whatever is in that engine is stock. All Mattituck did was magnaflux my original crank, to find that it was indeed cracked (after the gear-up landing by my friend, whcih really wasn't his fault at all but a fault of the original gear-extension installation). I built the engine back up myself, with the new crank. First aircraft engine I'd ever built, so I'm delighted it continues to work well. Built a heavily modified, twin-plug, carbureted, bored Porsche 911SC engine awhile ago, and that made prodigious power as well, so I guess it's a matter of slow and steady wins the race...

Funny, I still see the old Falco crank every week. Long story, but I'm a mentor teaching writing for the local chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen's youth program (a national legacy organization in honor of the black WWII fighter pilots), and the crank is in our classroom, along with somebody else's cylinder barrel and piston, plus a rare titanium Ford racecar engine connecting rod that I gave them, and we use the assemblage in our how-an-engine-works chalk talk.

I put a fair amount of night time on the Falco, and I look back in some horror at so casually flying over millions of square acres of Southeastern forest. Ignorance is bliss.

Stephan Wilkinson
Cornwall-On-Hudson, NY

Last Saturday I had an unfortunate event in YBN. We were travelling to NSW for a friend's birthday party and had been given directions to a private bush strip. The strip was around 750 m. in length, but was of the one-way variety because of the slope of the ground. The approach was over trees and up hill and there was little wind.

I descended over the trees but must have got slower than is normal when I tried to round out found, to my cost, a lack of elevator authority and I was unable to raise the nose and consequently landed nose first. The subsequent bounce terminated in a second, more severe nose impact which removed the nose wheel. There was little damage to the airframe itself, but considerable to that structure forward of the firewall.

Top: Andrea Tremolada. Above: Rick Pellicottia's two favorite airplanes.

The damage is covered by insurance I'm pleased to say. I felt that as the cost is covered and there is little damage to the wood, just some distortion where the aft brace pivots on the firewall, I would leave the repairs to the insurer. The engine will require a strip and the prop may need to be replaced.

The damage that is not covered is to my ego. We will go away to Tasmania fishing for a few days to encourage that repair.

Ian Ferguson
Dookie, Australia

After more than 15 years of using the Falco from our farm airstrip, last week it decided to get its own back.

We share the strip with whatever mob of sheep that need to be in that paddock. Now sheep are known as gregarious animals and like nothing better than to follow their mates to the best grass or water and so create sheep tracks—not very deep but obviously bad enough!

I needed to get into a short strip so had only filled the front tank (dictated by a peculiarity of my Falco's W & B) which didn't help. The gear must have been locked as it had been reversed into its hangar on a towbar and pulled out just before this happened. It was at idle, taxiing at a walking pace, there was a bang as the nose gear bottomed as it hit the sheep track then another, then silence.

Four Falcos in the Netherlands

Ian Ferguson put a delightful positive spin on things by pointing out that it was a good opportunity to find out why my engine never seemed to have the power of other Falcos when we flew formation!

Stephen Friend
Breadalbane, NSW
Australia

Rita and I flew the Falco down to Charleston, SC last month for a couple of days. We landed at the Summerville airport just northwest of the city and the facilities and support were top notch. The guys at the FBO even gave us a lift into town to get our rental car. We stayed at a charming old hotel in downtown Charleston and had a wonderful time.

When we got back, I discovered two cracks in the right aft baffle where the magneto blast tube is attached. The first crack was about one inch long and centered on the blast tube extending toward the centerline of the engine. The second crack was about two inches long below the blast tube running along the crease in the baffle and the blast tube was getting pretty loose. I'm sure it wouldn't have taken much longer for the blast tube to break completely out of the baffle. I tried to get the cracks welded, but wasn't happy with the result, so I fabricated a new baffle out of slightly thicker aluminum. The blast tube is relatively heavy compared to the thin aluminum and is un-supported, it seems much more rigid now. Not sure if anyone else has had this problem, but thought I'd point it out.

On another note, I took my new iPad with me. If you get the WiFi 3G version, it has a built-in GPS with geo-referenced maps. I used ForeFlight and had all my IFR Low Enroute, VFR sectionals, approach plates, A/FD's, etc. on it. It worked great in flight and saves a ton of money (not to mention weight) in carrying all those paper charts around. I also have the FAR/AIM, Falco Flight Manual, AOPA airports plus a bunch of other stuff. Of course, you can also plug it into your audio panel and play your favorite iTunes and Rita even used it in her attempt to master Angry Birds when she got tired of monitoring my progress on the magenta line.

Speaking of the iPad, I was wondering if there has been any attempt to make Benchmark work on it? If I recall correctly, you mentioned at OSH that you were thinking of making it available to work at some point on the iPhone. I believe an iPad app would be very well received!

Bill Nutt
Magnolia, Delaware

A maybe silly question: Is there experience opening/closing the canopy in flight? My friend Thomas and I were discussing this the other day.

Raoul Schild
Vienna, Austria

I think this would be extremely dangerous and would result in the canopy leaving the airplane. This happened in Ireland once when a seagull broke a windshield, the canopy slide back, came off, hit the vertical tail breaking the tail section off. The airplane then tumbled into the sea, killing the pilot and his young son.

However, I have always been intrigued at the idea of taking the canopy completely off and flying the plane. I expect it would be stable and extremely noisy. And also one of those things that you do just once and never again.

If you ever try this, the logical approach is to use the same controls effectiveness tests from the Flight Test Guide. You want to confirm that the airplane is controllable in high speed taxi tests and not just launch into the air with the hope that things will be fine.—Alfred Scott

We are still totally in love with DJD over here in Aus. We now have just on 700 hours on her and apart from some early teething problems it has been trouble free. There has been a little trouble with the paint on the trailing edges of the wings, so I am in the middle of doing some repair work/spraying. As usual these jobs show up other spots that need work so a one-day job turns into a major effort.

Drew Done
Merimbula, NSW
Australia