



# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

General aviation news in 1992 included delivery of the first all-new Commander 114B, Hurricane Andrew, and advances in the GPS arena.

## Year of hope

BY WILLIAM L. GRUBER

**F**or us in general aviation, 1992 didn't seem like a very good year, at least while we were living through it. Aircraft production figures were dismal, and the economic recession seemed more like a depression in aviation circles; we even had a hurricane come along and smash up a goodly portion of the GA fleet. But there was good news, too—a fair amount of it—and reason to end the year with a sense of hope, even in the face of adversity.

The most crying need in GA these days is for new airplanes. In 1992, the Federal Aviation Administration finally passed new, simpler certification rules for light aircraft that could make it easier for manufacturers to replenish the aging training fleet and provide inexpensive, certified new lightplanes. AOPA and other aviation groups had spent a decade advocating simplified certification requirements for light airplanes. By year's end, several kitplane manufacturers were hard at work trying to adapt their designs to the new certification rules.

In what hopefully was a bellwether of GA's long-awaited upswing, Cessna Aircraft Company even began talking tantalizingly in 1992

about maybe getting back into the piston-powered airplane business. This seemed like a logical move after Cessna was purchased in February by Textron, Incorporated, which already owned engine manufacturer Lycoming. That caused Hal Shevers, proprietor of Sporty's Pilot Shop, to shelve his plans to build a Cessna 172 clone at first dubbed the Hawk, then the Liberty. But liability remained as a pesky stumbling block to Cessna and everyone else in 1992. Proposed product liability reform legislation again withered and died in Congress, although it got further in the Senate than it ever has before. AOPA and other groups made staunch efforts to advance this much-needed legislation. Meanwhile, Cessna made strides on the jet side of its business, with certification of the Citation VII and CitationJet—powered by the newly certified Williams-Rolls FJ44 engine—highlighting a busy year.

That other GA icon, Piper Aircraft Corporation, made news by *not* being sold in 1992. Struggling to spool up production of aircraft and parts under Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, Piper was rumored throughout the year to be on the verge of being sold to any

number of suitors, both foreign and domestic. In fact, about the only one *not* mentioned as a prospective Piper purchaser was Elvis. Little changed when M. Stuart Millar bowed out of the picture, selling his Piper shares to investor Stone Douglass. But by year's end, Piper surprised everybody by announcing that Piper itself would bring Piper out of bankruptcy. With a full booth and static display at AOPA Expo '92 in Las Vegas in October, Piper proclaimed that "the reports of [our] death are greatly exaggerated." Piper delivered more than 100 airplanes last year and, by November, had 310 employees building Warriors, Archers,

contract to provide the service with 77 tanker trainers. Beech also came out with new and improved versions of its Starship and King Air and a quieter version of the A36 Bonanza aimed at the noise-sensitive European market. The venerable company delivered its 50,000th Beechcraft, a King Air C90B, in 1992.

The year's activity was far from limited to the Big Three, however. American General Aircraft continued to crank out Tigers on a regular basis and, after facing financial difficulties early in the year, was rejuvenated by Teleflex of Philadelphia, which bought 50 percent of AGA. The other AGA on the GA

other imports, the aerobatic Swiss Trainer won U.S. certification, and the Russian-built two-seat Sukhoi Su-29 unlimited aerobac made its American debut. Aerospatiale Helicopter Corporation of Grand Prairie, Texas, and MBB Helicopter Corporation of West Chester, Pennsylvania, merged to form American Eurocopter Corporation, a subsidiary of France's Eurocopter S.A. California-based Robinson Helicopter Company, with its popular little R22 and newly developed four-seat R44, continued to lead the parade in helicopter sales.

There was no shortage of news in the business jet arena, either. Besides its CitationJet, Cessna continued work on the Citation X, its largest model yet. Other big jets in development included Canadair's Global Express, the Gulfstream V (Gulfstream also announced the IV-SP in 1992), and Falcon Jet's Falcon 9000. Learjet announced the new mid-size Model 45 and rolled out its Lear 60, the largest and most sophisticated Learjet ever. Swearingen Engineering and Technology, Incorporated,



*Cessna returned to its jet roots with the CitationJet.*

Senecas, a Super Cub, and a Mirage. It also made considerable headway on manufacturing and shipping back-ordered parts. Saratogas are slated to go into production in March, and Mirage production is expected to increase to two per month by June, according to Piper.

Piper had even more good news when the Malibu and Malibu Mirage emerged from an intensive FAA certification review—following a spate of in-flight breakups—with a clean bill of health. After extensive scrutiny of the airplanes, the onus fell mainly on the pilots—the crux of a variety of recommendations being the need for better training for pilots of slick, high-performance airplanes. AOPA had worked with the FAA in 1991 to clarify and revise restrictive limitations placed on the airplanes during the investigation that severely limited their utility. AOPA played a key role in helping see the review through to a fair conclusion.

It was a good year for Beech Aircraft Corporation, too. Beech began deliveries of the T-1A Jayhawk, a modified version of the Beechjet 400A, to the U.S. Air Force under a \$348.3-million

scene, Aerospatiale General Aviation, continued to make significant inroads into the U.S. market with several large sales of its French-built Tampico, Tobago, and Trinidad, mainly to university training fleets. Aerospatiale also announced plans to start assembling some airplanes here in the United States. After several years of development, Commander Aircraft Company delivered its first all-new Commander 114B in 1992; it was one of just a few new aircraft designs introduced in some time. There were new models from Taylorcraft, American Champion, and Maule, and Aviat announced plans to build the Acro Husky, an aerobatic version of its Husky utility airplane. Air Tractor delivered its 1,000th airplane in 1992, an AT-402.

Biggest lightplane news on the import scene was probably the British-built Slingsby Firefly, which won the hotly contested—and much discussed—Enhanced Flight Screener (EFS) contract. Selection of the Firefly by the USAF drew angry, formal protests from several U.S. manufacturers who had vied for the \$54.8-million contract, but the deal stood. Among

work on a new production facility for its SJ30 bizjet in Martinsburg, West Virginia. Swearingen originally held ground-breaking ceremonies for a new plant in Delaware, but that deal fell through. The Jetcruzer, a new turbo-prop pusher built by Advanced Aerodynamics and Structures, Incorporated, also made its first appearance in 1992, with rollout ceremonies in California and subsequent flight tests.

The used aircraft market was surprisingly robust, with sales keeping pace with levels in previous years. "The piston side has really done well," said Fletcher Aldredge, editor of the *Aircraft Bluebook-Price Digest*. "It hasn't been a great market, but it's certainly better than the turbine market." Average price for a piston twin at the end of the year was \$172,080, compared to \$169,420 at the end of 1991. Single-engine reciprocals sold for an average of \$64,210 at year's end, compared to \$63,580 at the close of 1991. It was a good year for both buyers and sellers; sellers were able to move their airplanes, and buyers saw prices increase at a palatable rate.



## 1992

*Hurricane Andrew was probably the most dramatic—and saddest—news in general aviation in 1992. More positive was the clearing of the Malibu's name and the debut of new airplanes like the aerobatic Sukhoi Su-29.*



Not all of the airframe news was good, of course. Production figures were down again from 1991, and in August, a fellow named Andrew did all he could to diminish the GA fleet even further. When the hurricane came ashore in south Florida, nothing in its way stood a chance of emerging unscathed. Hurricane Andrew turned Kendall-Tamiami Executive Airport into a junkyard, smashing about 300 airplanes and devastating the airport facilities. A near-priceless collection of historic airplanes at the Weeks Air Museum was destroyed. Also hard-hit were Homestead General Aviation Air-

port and Homestead Air Force Base, with further damage inflicted across Florida and into Louisiana. But Hurricane Andrew provided yet another opportunity for general aviation to prove its great worth to the community, with GA pilots and their airplanes playing a key role in relief efforts. AOPA assisted in coordinating Hurricane Andrew relief efforts, with AOPA Regional Representative John Reid on the scene to personally offer the association's help. AOPA also assisted in an aircraft auction following the hurricane to help unite airplane sellers and the many ex-airplane owners who had

fresh insurance settlement checks in their pockets.

There were many names in the news in 1992 besides Andrew's. There was a period of musical chairs in the Washington aviation bureaucracy. FAA Administrator James B. Busey left to become a deputy secretary of the Department of Transportation, and DOT Secretary Samuel K. Skinner left DOT to become White House chief of staff. Both later left the federal government entirely. After a lot of rumors about who'd replace whom, a former Army general named Jerry Curry was nominated to replace Busey at the FAA, but then nothing happened. Curry's nomination ran into opposition from AOPA and other groups, and he was left waiting for a Senate confirmation that never came. When all was said and done, we had Andrew Card—a long-time Bush political loyalist—as DOT secretary, and Thomas H. Richards—another ex-general, this time from the Air Force—as FAA administrator. But between Card's subsequent appointment to spearhead Hurricane Andrew relief efforts and the general malaise that afflicts Washington around election time, we never did get much of a chance in 1992 to see what either of these men was about.

Here at AOPA, there were top-level personnel changes, too. Donald D. Engen, a former Navy admiral and ex-administrator of the FAA, stepped down as president and CEO of the AOPA Air Safety Foundation, becoming chairman of the board of visitors for ASF. The ASF helm was taken over by Bruce Landsberg, a former FlightSafety International executive well familiar with GA safety issues. Landsberg now serves as ASF executive director and



The Pulsar was one of a number of new kitplane designs with certification potential.

writes a new column for *AOPA Pilot*, "Safety Pilot." The foundation mourned the loss in 1992 of its executive vice president, Gerald L. (Jerry) Lawhon, who succumbed after a long bout with cancer. But despite the changes, ASF carried on in its mission to make flying safer for all of us. The foundation continued to meet new challenges, like educating pilots about airspace reclassification.

As for AOPA proper, 1992 presented no shortage of issues to keep the association's policy and technical experts busy. From airspace reclassification to new certification rules to airport access to proposed airworthiness directives, AOPA kept close tabs on any proposals that might potentially affect members and worked with the appropriate offices at the FAA to see matters through to a satisfactory resolution.

The association won victories on several longstanding issues. The requirement for an annual flight review for low-time pilots without instrument ratings was dropped as a result of AOPA action, as were a variety of restrictive proposed rules, like the one that would have eliminated instrument departures from uncontrolled airfields without published instrument departure procedures. The Mode S transponder requirement (Mode S was to be mandatory on all new aircraft built after July 1992, followed by eventual replacement of all Mode A transponders with more costly Mode S units) was dropped for Federal Aviation Regulation Part 91 operators.

Also in 1992, AOPA continued to work hard on a variety of initiatives that will be ongoing in 1993 and beyond.

The association continues to push for accelerated widespread use of the Global Positioning System and implementation of nonprecision GPS approaches

for GA use. In fact, beginning in December, AOPA staff pilots, flying the association's A36 Bonanza, were to take part directly in FAA testing of GPS approach procedures for light aircraft.

Another important issue facing general aviation is that of future fuels, and AOPA has been working with the FAA, manufacturers, and refiners on this crucial matter. Association representatives are participating in efforts to develop new specifications for no-lead avgas that could allow aviation to more easily tap into mainstream fuel supplies.

Issues such as special-use airspace, the U.S. Customs Service's treatment of general aviation, and the Na-

tional Weather Service's automation program occupied high-profile positions on AOPA's packed agenda in 1992 and will continue to do so this year.

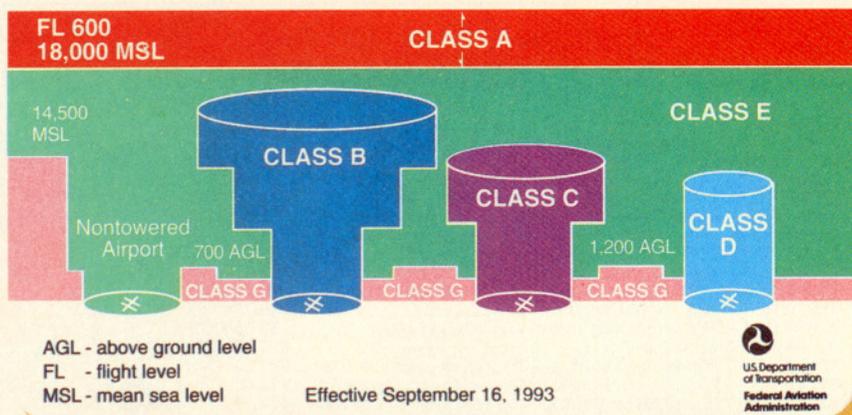
In the legislative arena, AOPA's Washington lobbying team focused on product liability reform, the controversial Civil Penalty Assessment Demonstration Program, and a host of other important issues on Capitol Hill.

Although progress was seen on liability reform when a landmark reform bill in the Senate became the first ever to reach the floor of either house of Congress, the measure failed to pass.

# 1992

The FAA's airspace reclassification plan was a high-profile issue in 1992 and will continue to be this year as it goes into effect.

## Airspace Reclassification at a Glance



The Jetcruzer, a new turboprop pusher, is in development.

AOPA's efforts will continue on product liability reform.

The association won a significant victory on the Civil Penalty Assessment Demonstration Program. As originally structured, the FAA itself acted as policeman, prosecutor, judge, and jury in imposing civil penalties (fines) on airmen for violating FARs. The FAA even ruled on administrative appeals of its own civil penalty decisions. But after a tough fight, AOPA convinced Congress to pass legislation transferring adjudication of civil penalty cases involving airmen to the National Transportation Safety Board. This was an important triumph of justice that will help to protect the rights of all pilots.

AOPA's Washington team has been actively involved in federal budget deliberations, making sure general aviation gets a fair shake under increasingly tight spending constraints. The association also has been working to overturn the aircraft luxury tax (when it was first proposed, AOPA worked hard to ensure that the congressionally mandated luxury tax did not affect aircraft priced under \$250,000) and to see to it that monies in the user-funded Airport and Airway Trust Fund are spent on aviation needs and not diverted to other purposes or kept in the bank to help mask the federal deficit.

Of course, space won't permit us to even mention *all* of the issues in which AOPA has played a pivotal role over the past year, any more than it's possible to touch on every new aircraft design or every bit of industry news. Those are things we do in these pages—hopefully with some detail—every month of the year. But it is appropriate as we tuck 1992 into the hangar and start the pre-flight on 1993 that we take a quick look back. It's been a heck of a year, both good and bad. But we've got too much to do to spend much time in meditative hindsight. We have a lot to look forward to in 1993.

Perhaps most exciting, we can expect to see a variety of new designs nearing certification under the new rules. Fresh blood is needed in general aviation, and that's what we'll be getting. But we won't forget the old stalwarts who brought us this far, and who will play a key role in GA's future. Piper, we'll save a glass of New Year's Eve champagne to toast your health and wish you good fortunes in 1993. We hope, too, that Cessna will decide the time is right to get back into the

light airplane business.

Probably, we'll see the first GPS approaches in 1993—that's something to get jazzed up about. We also will see the new alphabet-soup airspace classifications go into effect in September (okay, that won't be much fun, but it's needed to put us in conformity with the global aviation community). And who knows what new surprises might be cooking up in the meeting rooms at

the FAA or on the drawing boards at the manufacturers? We'll keep tabs, and we'll keep you posted.

The new year will be meaningful for pilots on a more personal scale. Whether you resolve to get an instrument rating or aerobatic training this year or just to finally replace those old played-out radios in your trusty Skyhawk, 1993 promises to be a good year for—what else?—*flying*. □

## AND THE SURVEY SAYS . . .

### *The view from you*

To gain a better understanding of how members feel about policy issues affecting general aviation, AOPA in 1992 began conducting scientific surveys of their views. The results show a high degree of concern over product liability burdens and the increasing cost of flying. They also reveal significant distrust of top-level government officials when it comes to aviation issues, although views of the FAA are about evenly split.

Although the association has polled members in the past, the new AOPA General Aviation Surveys represent an even more formal effort by AOPA's Government and Technical Affairs Division to direct its policy initiatives in ways that directly respond to member concerns.

Here are some of the results:

Given three choices, 46 percent of the responding members felt that "the increasing cost of flying" was the most significant issue facing GA today. Some 36 percent felt that "the decreasing production of new general aviation aircraft in the United States" was the most pressing matter, while 18 percent named "excessive government safety regulations" as the chief GA bugaboo. Still, nearly half—47 percent—described the FAA as a friend of general aviation.

Congress didn't fare so well. Only 19 percent of respondents thought Congress was a friend of GA, and just about a third felt that the current administration (i.e., the President, the Department of Transportation, the Federal Com-

munications Commission, the Office of Management and Budget, Customs, the Environmental Protection Agency, etc.) was a friend of GA. Locally, though, pilots seem to feel better about their public servants. A healthy two thirds called government officials at their state aviation agency friends to GA.

The product liability issue loomed as a major concern dogging general aviation. More than nine out of 10 members—an overwhelming 92 percent—believed that new aircraft manufacturing is dying off primarily because of high liability costs. Some 87 percent cited liability costs as the main reason new aircraft prices are so high.

The survey covered a range of other issues, from pilots' use of personal computers (three out of four use them) to the environment (73 percent would not be willing to pay higher fuel prices to lessen the impact of burning aviation fuel on the environment). The results will help the association's policy experts tailor a wide array of initiatives to conform with members' desires.

The 1992 polls were conducted in March and September on 3,000 randomly selected members. Those selected received a questionnaire in the mail and were asked to complete it and mail it back to AOPA. The response rate was 46 percent, which is quite good for a mail-back poll. The results are considered statistically accurate—representative of the entire AOPA membership—with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.8 percent. —WLG