





*PICKLES
TO
BIG TAIL*

AERONCAS

BY BUDD DAVISSON

**SUZY KRYZANOWICZ
AND HER 15AC SEDAN**

IT'S A TOSS-UP AS to which have the most complicated life stories: pilots who like vintage airplanes or the vintage airplanes themselves. What is even more complicated is trying to weave the two together. Such is the case with Suzy Kryzanowicz, EAA Lifetime 462813, and her 1948 Aeronca 15AC Sedan. Although Suzy has a life story that has been touched by many interesting people and experiences, N1003H has a number of life stories of its own that, unknown to Suzy, would eventually lead it to her. Or vice versa.



N1003H'S TALE

From the beginning, N1003H was unique. The aircraft was “born” in 1947, but the documentation says 1948. The fifth one built out of 561, it was typical of the Aeronca 15AC Sedan breed. Wide of shoulder, it had the kind of cabin that pilots loved then and still do: 46 inches at the shoulders, in comparison to a C-172 at 40 inches or a C-182 at 42 inches. It’s high enough that, with enough cushions, a pilot can almost see over the nose on the ground.

Structurally, the 15AC is unusual for the period in that its fuselage is tried and true (and easier to repair and restore) rag and tube. The wings, however, are aluminum and totally smooth from front to rear. No inspection panels. More on that later.

Eventually, two individuals had a significant impact on the aircraft’s future. First was Konrad Jockus, EAA 63327, of Kalamazoo, Michigan, who bought it in the mid-1980s. The second was Mike Hoag, EAA 228838 of Three Rivers, Michigan. Mike entered 03H’s life well after Konrad, but the pair came together to breathe life back into the aircraft after an untimely incident.

Konrad was a welder maintenance tech at GM who loved flying and had owned a number of airplanes prior to N1003H. He loved N1003H because of the roomy cabin, its classic looks, and its docile nature. So, he was especially distraught when an engine failure on takeoff put it into a field; the left wing was demolished, the left main gear was pushed several feet into the cabin, and the firewall forward was pretty much destroyed. The right wing, aft fuselage, and tail were intact. Basically, it was totaled. But Konrad wasn’t about to part the aircraft out. Instead, he put it in a dry barn hoping that someday he’d have the time and expertise to bring it back to life. Enter Mike Hoag.

Right out of high school, Mike had gone into the sheet metal trade. Then, a chance meeting at a video rental store with someone who had an Aeronca Chief for sale put him into the airplane ownership game.

“I worked on that airplane far more than I flew it and found I really enjoyed wrenching on airplanes,” Mike said.

That initial brush with the Chief put him on a different path in life.

“I bought a basket case Champ in the U.P. [Upper Peninsula in Michigan] and spent 13 years restoring [it] into a ‘counterfeit’ warbird as I finished it as an L-16,” he said. “At the same time, I was working on my A&P, which took seven years. But I knew where I was going — I wanted to restore old airplanes.”



Suzy Kryzanowicz says she’s the “cat lady” of vintage aviation as she keeps acquiring them. The Aeronca Sedan is her latest “cat.”

Mike met Konrad at a local fly-in. Konrad had a Champ and said he had a damaged Aeronca Sedan in a barn.

“At that point, I had never heard of a Sedan, so I started doing a little research,” Mike said. “And in a matter of a few months, I found myself the proud owner of a 15AC Sedan that truly was a basket case.”

The aircraft had been landed hard on floats and was missing some parts, but the wings looked good and the fuselage was repairable.

“So, I struck a deal with Konrad that he’d bring his Sedan over to my place and we’d restore both airplanes at the same time, side by side,” Mike said.

Konrad’s airplane, which would eventually be Suzy’s, presented some serious problems with the fuselage. He had found



another left wing that only needed some tip repair, but the bottom left corner of the fuselage from the firewall back was severely crunched, and none of the fittings anywhere lined up.

"I found a solution in a badly rusted 15AC fuselage that couldn't possibly be saved," Mike said. "It was perfectly straight and matched the factory drawings I was working from, so I used it to build a fuselage jig that I could use to exactly locate all the fitting bolt holes for Konrad's fuselage."

Mike cut Konrad's bent fuselage in several places, bolted the fittings where they were supposed to be in the jig, and replaced tubing where needed. The carry-through truss at the bottom that mounts the wing struts and the landing gear is "built like a dump truck," Mike said, so that survived intact. That made getting alignment in that part of the fuselage much easier.

"But, it wasn't all easy," he said. "The airplane had sat in the barn for so long that rust forced me to replace 5 or 6 feet of the lower aft longerons along with part of the tail structure. That's typical for rag and tube taildraggers, but his was worse than most."

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— Suzy Kryzanowicz



It's easy to see why the Sedan is thought so highly of in Alaska: Its stout construction and huge cabin are ideal for north country use.



Mike noted that may have been because the airplane was on floats when Konrad originally bought it. His Sedan was an early one, and later airplanes used thicker tubes.

"The wings on Sedans can be a real problem," Mike said. "Essentially, as built, they were closed containers with the only access points being at the tip and the root. When Aeronca designed them that way, they were probably thinking that making a closed cell, moisture would have a harder time getting in there. Plus, the wings were all aluminum so it was probably thought moisture wouldn't have much impact. But they were wrong. Plus, they couldn't imagine that the airplanes would still be flying 50, 60, 70 years later. And they didn't take condensation into account. Basically, moisture always has a way of getting into anything."

If moisture and acid rain get into the wings and the extruded aluminum spar caps are of an alloy, things can easily begin to corrode.


"But, it's a special kind of corrosion," Mike said. "It's exfoliation where the aluminum essentially changes character and begins to come off in flakes. What makes it really dangerous is that, as built, there was no way to get inside the wings to inspect the spars."

Mike said that, after a few cases of really degenerated wings, a service bulletin was issued that requires installing nine inspection panels that allow someone to use mirrors and a flashlight to carefully inspect the spar caps. However, an approved alternative is to drill small holes and snake a borescope in to snoop around.

"It works well," he said. "Fortunately, the spar caps in N1003H were good. The spar caps on my own wings, not so much."

The good news about Sedan spar caps is that they are available new from Burl's Aircraft in Alaska, along with all manner of Sedan parts — see sidebar.

"Another possible wing problem was recognized by the factory almost from the beginning because the airplanes came out of the factory with unpainted, polished wings," Mike said. "They were a maintenance headache, so the factory issued a service bulletin that said 'prime and paint with suitable auto parts.' Suzy's wings were painted with DuPont VariPrime self-etching primer under a silver urethane topcoat."



THE SEDAN SAVIOR:

BURL'S AIRCRAFT LLC

THE TYPE CERTIFICATE for almost every airplane built in the 1940s is owned by someone, somewhere, who has dreams of beginning production. Or at least manufacturing parts for them. However, with low-production aircraft like the 15AC Sedan, most (not all) of the time, those efforts falter and not much happens. Fortunately, this is not the case with Burl's Aircraft LLC, www.Burlac.com, which has owned the 15AC type certificate for decades and has made a name for itself in manufacturing not only critical parts but entire aircraft (marketed as the AeroSedan), should a customer want one.

Inasmuch as the company is located in Chugiak, Alaska, 20 miles northeast of Anchorage, it's not hard to understand why it has a going business supporting Sedans, along with FAA approval to manufacture other STC'd parts for other aircraft. It is in the middle of the most active population of Sedans in the country. Also, Mike Hoag estimates more than 200 of the airplanes are still in existence, forming a base for a viable business. Just about any critical part for the Sedan is available from Burl's, along with STCs for approved modifications, the most important of which is installing a 180-hp Lycoming O-360 in place of the original 145-hp O-300. This makes a significant improvement in the airplane's performance and puts what is often regarded as the most bulletproof and easiest to maintain aircraft engine in production today ahead of the firewall. It is assumed that most bush operators have made that change or will in the future.

When Konrad did the interior of what would eventually be Suzy's airplane, he chose a tasteful combination of vinyl and cloth that was as original as possible.

"It says something about changing times that Sedans' interiors usually included ashtrays," Mike said. Suzy/Konrad's airplane doesn't have them. Rather, the lids conceal headset jacks.

In doing the panel, a nod was given to authenticity so the sole piece of modern equipment on the panel is a basic comm unit, which is hidden by the glove box door.

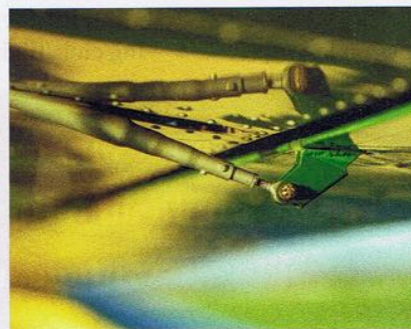
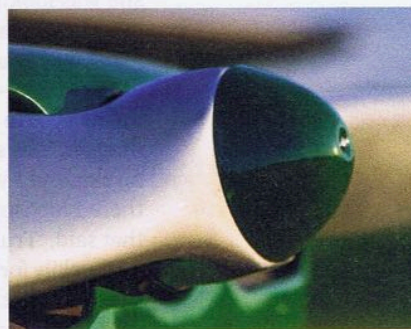
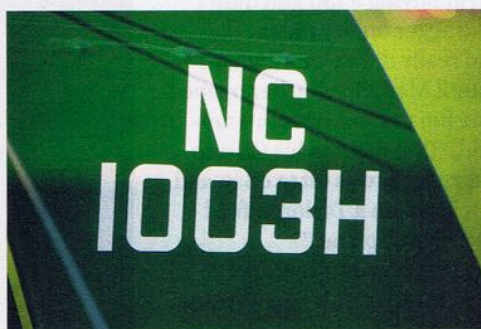
ENTER SUZY KRYZANOWICZ AND PICKLES

"I WAS RAISED on a small farm in mid-Michigan," Suzy said. "When I was 13-16 my dad planted about a quarter acre of pickles for me to tend. I made as much as \$1,000 per summer, which was huge money in those days. Mom asked me how I was going to spend my money, and I didn't know. She told me that I had to put it in the bank and save it to use for something big. Then, when I was 15, I got my first airplane ride! It was in a Cessna 172, and I was mesmerized."

Suzy knew immediately what she wanted to spend her pickle money on.

"When I was 16 and a senior in high school, I was dual enrolled at the local junior college where I took my private pilot ground school," Suzy said. "And there I met Ben Gibson, who was to have a big influence in my life. He was the instructor in the class. He was a true mentor with the biggest passion for aviation I had ever seen! He regaled us with stories of the Handy High School Aero Club that he started in 1960 and how most of those students became aviation professionals. One of those students was Mark Staudacher, who later became my boss."

While Suzy was in junior college in the mid-1990s, she said it felt like she "won the lotto" when she was hired as a co-op sweeping floors and cleaning airplanes in a local fortune 50 company's flight department.



Suzy's Sedan is loaded with well-done vintage details.



"I was enrolled in the aviation flight technology program that had just been approved and spearheaded by the local godfather of aviation, Ben Gibson, my ground school instructor," she said. "Mark Staudacher was my supervisor who had learned to fly from Ben in the '60s! Aviation is such a small world."

Once she graduated, Suzy flight instructed for a few months and then moved on to flying freight, air ambulance, and passenger trips for an outfit out of Willow Run in Michigan in the old turbine Beech 18s, Learjets, and Falcon 20s. When a pilot position opened up at her old co-op flight department, she had a successful interview and was back in the same hangar she swept — only this time as a pilot!

After 15 years there, Suzy made another major step. In 2017, she was hired by a major airline as a first officer.

"From the beginning, I became sort of like the cat lady, only with airplanes instead of cats," she said.

The first airplane she purchased was a 1946 Taylorcraft. During this time, she said she was looking at buying a 150 and didn't even have a taildragger on her radar.

"I was 27 and really didn't know what I didn't know — until Mark Staudacher opened up my eyes to the fun you can have in a taildragger," she said. "One flight in his Champ on skis and I was toast. It was off to eBay, and there I hit 'Buy it Now' on a Taylorcraft ad that said, 'Truly a nice airplane!'"

Luckily for her, the prebuy inspection showed that it was, in fact, a truly nice airplane.

"I also have two Cessnas — a 1967 150 and a 1963 172 — that I started a little flying club/flight school with," Suzy said.

"Our focus is giving people/kids an affordable way to fly. The prices are basically 1990s numbers — \$45/\$35 dry for the 172 and 150 — and the instructors don't charge 2019 going rates either."

She started the Grassroots Aviators (GRA) Flying Club at the end of 2011. Since that time, they've had 21 new solos, and quite a few members left to purchase their own airplanes and base them locally. There are currently six teenagers in the club, including Suzy's mentor's granddaughter.

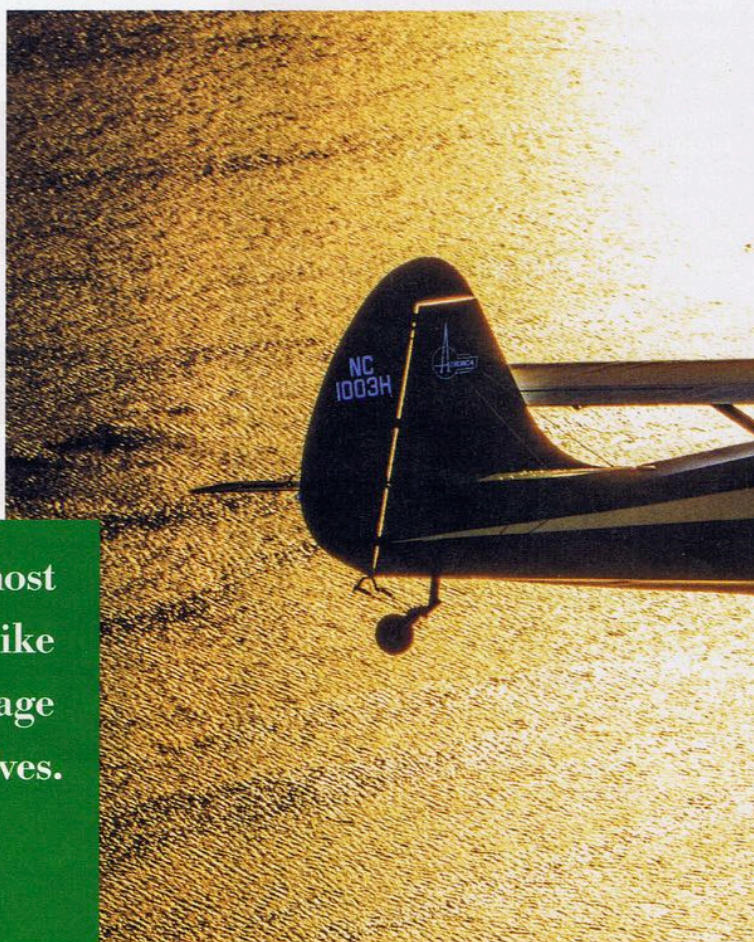
"I know that when I started flying at 17 from a small grass strip in Pinconning, Michigan, the instructor, Jim Klein, didn't charge me the going rate," she said. "I also know that if it weren't for my mentors, Ben Gibson and Mark Staudacher, I wouldn't be where I am today, nor would I be in the position to give back to the community like they have done over the years."

Suzy said she really enjoys doing owner-assisted work on her aircraft and plans to earn her A&P certificate.

"I'm not afraid to get my fingernails dirty, and [I] think that every pilot should know a little more about their airplane than just how to fly it and write up squawks," she said.

The Aeronca Sedan entered her life when she spotted her first one on a layover in Alaska.

"I was intrigued," she said. "It wasn't until I spoke with the bush pilots who were flying them that I realized what a gem the Sedan is! From that point on, I wanted one of my own but didn't get serious about it until a few years ago when Ben Gibson, the mentor of my mentor, mentioned he had found one and was looking for a partner."



It's a toss-up as to which have the most complicated life stories: pilots who like vintage airplanes or the vintage airplanes themselves.

WANT MORE VINTAGE?

THE VINTAGE AIRCRAFT ASSOCIATION is the EAA division that brings together people who share a love for the aircraft of yesterday. Whether you fly, restore, or simply enjoy vintage aircraft and aviation, we invite you to consider adding the Vintage Aircraft Association to your EAA membership. For more information, visit www.EAA.org/vintage.



She'd known Ben since he was her high school ground school instructor, and knowing how influential he has been to the aviation community in the area, Suzy said the decision to partner was a no-brainer.

"At the time, I really didn't know Ben more than the mentor/mentee relationship that we forged over the past 25 years," she said. "Owning this Sedan together has really helped both of us. For him, he feels like a kid again. And for me, I have gotten to know Ben as a friend, and that is wonderful. It's amazing how a love of aviation can bridge the generation gap, and I love how our friendship has grown!"

Suzy said she was impressed at how easy the Sedan was to wheel land right from the get-go.

"The only weird characteristic was I couldn't feel it when the tail touched the ground," she said. "I wasn't expecting it to touch when it did. This is because the tail wheel assembly has bungees instead of a leaf spring like most other tail wheels. The strut is straight down from the vertical stab instead of trailing behind and under the rudder."

When Ben found the Sedan, it was owned by Steve Comer in Glenwood, Indiana, who had bought it from Konrad. Mike, who is the 15AC guru, restored it in 2001 and it has been in the Great Lakes region ever since. It has a left side seaplane door because it was a seaplane in its previous life and was even on the cover of a magazine.

"My goal when I decided to become a partner with Ben on the Sedan was to help him find his way back to the small airport and give back to him like he unselfishly gave to so many of us over the past 50 years," Suzy said. "Crossing the bridge from mentor to friend was just a side benefit I didn't expect, but I will always cherish."

At 105 mph, the Sedan is Suzy's go-to airplane for cross-country flights.

"I have taken it to Oshkosh, [Wisconsin]; three times to Blakesburg for the Antique Airplane Association's fly-in; and Ben has taken it to the Aeronca fly-in in Middletown, Ohio," she said.

It will haul whatever you put in it, she said, and has no issues, even with the original 145-hp O-300 Continental engine.

"It's a good airplane for hauling two people and a week's worth of camping gear," Suzy said. "One thing is for sure: We get a lot of attention no matter where we take it! A lot of times we are mistaken for a Stinson, so it is pretty neat to educate folks on what it is. And most of the time, it is the first time they have ever laid eyes on a Sedan!"

Suzy said one of the questions they get a lot is if the Sedan has the original paint scheme.

"The story I heard is that the Irish air force commissioned Aeronca to build them 10 Sedans, and they were to be this paint scheme," she said. "This is the last one in existence. You can be the judge if that is an old [wives'] tale or not, but sometimes truth is stranger than fiction."

It could be said that N1003H has led a difficult life sprinkled with hardships. But there is no doubt that it is in high clover now. It's nice when airplanes that need love find the people who will love them the most. And N1003H certainly has. *EAA*

Budd Davisson, EAA 22483, is an aeronautical engineer, has flown more than 300 different types, and has published four books and more than 4,000 articles. He is editor-in-chief of *Flight Journal* magazine and a flight instructor primarily in Pitts/tailwheel aircraft. Visit him on www.AirBum.com.



Illustration by CONNOR MADISON