

*Heath Aviation's panel currently includes: Garmin G600, GTN 750, GTN 650, GMA 35, GTX 330, GDL 88; Aspen EFD1000 PFD; Electronic International MVP-50; Cobham/S-TEC 55X with auto trim; and much more.*



# WHAT'S IN YOUR Hangar?

STORY BY DALE SMITH

**A**mongst the jobs to be found along my oft-altered career path was a very enjoyable stint as the creative director for a leading consumer electronics retailer. One of the best parts of the job was being able to bring home all the latest home audio for personal evaluation. Some of it even stayed on “perma-loan,” if you get my drift.

Regardless, what do home electronics and avionics

have in common? Well, today’s high-end avionics, like the best consumer electronics, must be properly demonstrated before they can be fully appreciated by prospective buyers.

High-end audio stores have listening rooms just for that purpose. Push a button and you can connect any speaker with any audio receiver/CD player combination.

In the same way, a growing number of avionics shops are finding it very advantageous to have a nicely equipped, “demonstrator” aircraft available to give prospective buyers a left-seat look at all the benefits the latest avionics will bring to their flying.

The neat thing about these company airplanes is you don’t have to relegate yourself to typical offerings. Imaginative shops are using everything from 1950-era classics to modern homebuilts as their flying showrooms. After all, half the attraction to a prospect is getting the opportunity to “fly” a rather unique and always interesting airplane.

Here’s a look at just a few of the company airplanes your fellow avionics shop owners and operators are using to introduce the latest and greatest.

## 1953 RYAN NAVION

*Heath Aviation, Winona, Miss.*

As Heath Aviation’s owner, David Heath, explained, he bought a 1953 Ryan Navion soon after starting his



*Sarasota Avionics' demo panel currently includes: Garmin G500 with synthetic vision, GTN 750, GTN 650, GDL 69, GTS 800; L-3 Trilogy, Stormscope; King KFC-200; PS Engineering PAV80/DVD; JPI EDM 930; Aspen EFD 1000 PFD with synthetic vision, Aspen EFD 1000 MFD; and much more.*

company in 2002. "There were two listed in Trade-A-Plane, and this was very much more appealing than the other one," he said.

Soon afterward, he and his team began a multistep, multiyear upgrade program to transform this 1953-era beauty into a totally modern airplane, fully capable of demonstrating both new avionics and Heath Aviation's obvious talents as a custom panel creator.

So what have customers said about his thoroughly modern classic? "Customers love her," Heath said. "I love her. We fly and work out of her. She really helps us sell."

### 1982 PIPER PA-32R-300

*Sarasota Avionics International, Sarasota, Fla.*

"The airplane was owned by one of our customers, and he upgraded to a TBM 800," explained Kirk Fryer, president of Sarasota Avionics. "So he gave us a great deal on it. I had flown it many times in the past, and he knew I loved the airplane and would take care of it."

Besides having a panel big enough for everything, Fryer said the Piper's large back door and comfortable cabin is ideal for showcasing what Sarasota Avionics can do beyond the cabin. "We have a DVD player in the panel and two video screens in the cabin," he said.

As for customer reaction?

"Almost every customer I have flown in the airplane has upgraded to something they've seen in here," Fryer said. "They love it."

### 1970 CESSNA 150 AEROBAT

*Tech Aero Avionics LLC, Denton, Texas*

"It's got the 150 horsepower upgrade, and I bought it back in 2005 to get my license and use for demo flights," explained Tech Aero's owner, Trevor Smith. "I added a Garmin 430 and 300 that someone traded. I flew with it until the GTN units came out. I was going to put in a GTN 650, but with all the panel room, I went with the 750 and a remote-mounted audio panel."

Smith said that while the classic 150 has served his company well as its airborne demonstrator, the need to showcase glass displays motivated him to step up to a 1958 V35 Bonanza as Tech Aero's new flying showroom.

"It currently has the original old-style panel in it, but not for long," Smith said. "I have a Garmin G500 going in, and I'm going to move the GTN 750 to the Bonanza, too."

As for how his customers respond to the aerobatic 150?

"It's unique," Smith said. "When people see it, it's just much more memorable to see a 150 Aerobat with all the new stuff. It sticks in their minds, for sure."



*Tech Aero's demo panel currently includes: Garmin GTN 750, GMA 35, GTX 330, SL 30 and a JPI EDM 700 with fuel flow.*



*When completed, Pacific Coast Avionics' RV-7's panel will include: Advanced Flight Systems' two-screen EFIS with engine monitoring; Advanced/TruTrak autopilot; Garmin GTN 750, GNC 225A, GMA 35, GTX 33, GDL 39; Vertical Power VP-X Pro; and more.*



*When its current upgrade is completed, Nolan Avionics' demo panel will include: Ultra Electronics AuRACLE CRM2100 engine monitor; PS Engineering PMA8000 audio panel; dual Aspen EFD 1000 PFDs, Aspen EFD 500 MFD, dual Garmin GTN 650s, GTX 327; Century Triden autopilot; and more.*

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### VANS AIRCRAFT RV-7 KIT PLANE

*Pacific Coast Avionics, Aurora, Ore.*

According to Dewey Conroy, Pacific Coast Avionics vice president and chief operating officer, four-years ago, he and his son, Trevor, were flying to Oshkosh in a 182 when his son asked if he wanted to do a cool father-son project. "I said yes, and when we returned home there was an RV-7 tail kit waiting for us," Conroy said. "That's how it all happened."

Conroy said his son chose the RV-7 because it was "the best all-around" airplane for what the duo wanted to do. "It's primarily our family airplane, but we use it as an avionics demonstrator and to showcase Pacific Coast's capabilities to craft custom panels for homebuilts," Conroy said. "Our goal is to have it flying by next summer – we were making great progress, but we lost a year because Trevor's freight dog flying job has kept him busy. He's the driving force behind the project. I'm just the helper."

### 1980 PIPER PA-32R-301T

*Nolan Avionics Inc., Durant, Okla.*

When asked about their company airplane, Nolan Avionics' owner, Laura Nolan, said their Saratoga has not only served as the company's demo plane, it also was used to beta test the Sandel SN3500 display unit. "It's had a lot of avionics in its panel," she said. "Now that the new units are out,



*Gulf Coast Avionics' demo panel currently includes: dual Garmin G500s, dual GTN 750s, GDL 69, GTX 328, GTX 32; JPI EDM 960 engine analyzer; Avidyne TAS605 traffic, Cobham/S-TEC 55X autopilot; L-3 WX-500 Stormscope; and more.*

it's getting completely redone with Garmin GTN and triple Aspen displays."

And while triple Aspen's are nothing new, Nolan's layout is a bit unusual.

"We are putting two displays – a PFD and MFD – on the left side and a single PFD on the co-pilot side," Nolan said. "When we do a demo, if they're not familiar with the Saratoga, they can still experience all the benefits of the avionics from the right seat. We can easily configure it any way we want."

She also said the company recently added a second "demonstrator" to the fleet. "We just got a Cherokee 140. It's primarily for my husband to use to get his instrument rating, but with its dual Garmin 430Ws, it will be a great demonstrator until the Saratoga is done."

As for customer reaction to the Saratoga, she said their customers have always loved the airplane. "We've sold plenty of Sandels from it and a ton of 430s – it spoils you," Nolan said. "Everybody who flies wants to buy it from my dad. But it's not for sale."

### 1977 PIPER PA-34-200T

*Gulf Coast Avionics, Lakeland, Fla.*

According to Rick Garcia, Gulf Coast Avionics president and chief executive officer, if you are going to do a panel upgrade for your company airplane/demonstrator, make it the best upgrade it can possibly be.

"This new panel represents the best selection of avionics and systems we can put in the Seneca," Garcia said. "We recently added the Garmin G500 on the right side, and if there were an STC for the G1000, I'd put that in the panel."

"This is really the third total panel upgrade we've done on this airplane, and each time it has been a major step up. It's



*Spirit Avionics' demo panel currently includes: Mid-Continent Instruments and Avionics Lifesaver electronic ADI; Garmin G500 with synthetic vision & JeppView, GTN 650, SL 30, GMA 350, GTX 327, GDL 88, Century 2000 AP with altitude preselector and flight director; EDM 930 engine monitor; and more.*

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always been done with our customers in mind. It's not only a showcase for avionics, but it also gives us a chance to show customers what we can do to fabricate their ultimate panel."

As for customer reaction, Garcia said it's very much the word "wow," followed by one simple question: How much did all this cost?

"There's no doubt the Seneca has definitely helped sell a lot of equipment and installations," he said.

Here's hoping it continues to do so for many more years.

## 1977 CESSNA 182Q

*Spirit Avionics, Ltd., Columbus, Ohio*

Rick Ochs, Spirit Avionics president, said his relationship with this particular 182 goes back well before he started his company.

"I was working as a manager for another shop, and it belonged to one of our clients," Ochs said. "A few years later, after I started Spirit Avionics, he became my partner


in the company. When he decided to upgrade to a P210, Spirit bought his 182, and it became our company aircraft."

And while it was a fantastic airplane, Ochs said its panel and interior left a lot to be desired. In fact, he said it was an embarrassment for a modern avionics service facility like Spirit Avionics to use as a demo aircraft, especially "with those dreadful plastic overlays on the panel."

In 2010, the 182 got a total interior makeover by the business aircraft cabin specialists at TriTex Air.

"We also took out that old panel and custom created a new metal panel and lower valance," Ochs said. "Now it's an airplane that shows Spirit's talents. It is beautiful and state-of-the-art in taking advantage of modern avionics technology, which rivals most new aircraft of any class."

While Ochs said the 182's panel impresses both clients and prospects, including representatives from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the U.S. Coast Guard, the thing he's most proud of is that his 17-year old daughter, Amanda, earned her private pilot's license in the airplane last year. □



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