

My Jaguar Mooney

I recall, in 1963 I had to give up flying because I could not afford the cost of renting an aircraft. At that time it cost \$4.00 per hour including fuel. Boy, how things have changed. I had just soloed in an Aronica Champ fulfilling a boyhood dream of learning to fly, a dream acquired from living near the runway of a WWII primary training base in Arkansas. As a child I would see all the military aircraft take off and land every day. I just had to learn to fly. I soon discovered it was an expensive hobby that this farm boy would have to put on hold for a while.

About five years later I was able to afford the hobby again. I started flying Pipers and Cessnas and eventually was able to buy my first aircraft, Cessna 172. In 1971 I purchase a Mooney M20C and I flew that aircraft for about three years. I loved the airplane but sold the Mooney because of time considerations that decreased my flying time considerably. Our Home Improvement business was successful enough that it afforded me the time to start flying again and later on our family business, Security Alert was growing and doing well, from 3 locations to 40 locations in 5 years. As it grew I determined that now I could actually justify owning an aircraft for business so I started flying again in Pipers and Cessnas but I just really wanted to get another Mooney.

Then in 1994, I found it, a 1970 Mooney M20E. The owner was a friend of mine and always kept the airplane hangared. I knew it was a good aircraft, in great condition, with low airframe time of 2300 hours. It was IFR equipped with aileron and flap gap seals, wing root fairings, lower cowl enclosure, and 231 wing tips. I knew what the next step was. I took my wife, Lynn, to see it. She had become my flying companion and I wanted her blessing. She asked, "Why did I want a Mooney". I said "Because it is faster". To which she replied "If you like flying so much why do you want to get there faster. If you get there slower you have more time to enjoy flying". She told me it looked OK to her and that was all I needed to hear. I rode right seat while my friend piloted the aircraft. I checked everything on the aircraft and everything worked. After some friendly haggling, I bought it. My new motto became "Have plane will travel".

At the time I was not aware that this was to become my Jaguar Mooney and BEST OF SHOW winner. I just wanted a good aircraft to help me with our growing family business. Lynn and I were also in the search of the \$100 dollar hamburger. In other words we were always flying somewhere just to get lunch. She developed certain duties as my flying partner. She always watched the fuel gauges, and kept her eye out for other aircraft. However her main duty was to tell me if the gear light was green on the final approach and she never failed to do it. She often said she didn't know how I could remember what all those switches and gauges do, when I can't even remember where I put my keys. I must say I have been fortunate enough to have two loves in life, flying and Lynn, and I have never had to choose between the two. We enjoy flying together. I have recently retired and left Lynn and my children, Frank Jr., Jamie, and Sherry to run the business. They always did anyway. Now I finally have the time and the means to enjoy my love of flying, if I could just find my keys.

After over hauling the engines, I added the 201 windshield, three bladed prop, S-TEC 50 Auto Pilot with altitude hold an Apollo GX-60 GPS and my friends at Don Maxwell Service Center in Gladewater Texas added the 201 cowling. I now have the performance of a 201. I started renting tie-down space at a place called Aircraft Interiors of Memphis on the Olive Branch Airport. I got on the waiting list for hangar space which is very limited on that airport. The convenience of being at the interior shop became too tempting. Besides, when the airplane gods allow you to get great work done and never move your aircraft, you have to give in. I would see all those beautiful interiors coming out of the shop and mine was old and dated looking. I spoke with the manager, Jimmy Jones and told him I wanted to spruce up my interior. He ask me what colors and styles did I like. I said "I really like the way my Jaguar XK8 looks". He said he could make my interior look like the jaguar and thus the concept of the Jaguar Mooney was born. It took some custom fabricating to install the two tone leather side panels with burlwood trim. The backs of the front seat had to be raised by 5 inches and the seat redesigned to look like the Jag seats. We covered all the window moldings with Eurostretch fabric, installed new carpet and detailed the panel. The cosmetic upgrade was

topped off by a great paint job with a unique paint scheme designed by Brian Smith with Wings Aviation Design Group of Dallas. It looks great, it performs great, it's comfortable, and it's worth every dime invested and more. Lynn says it looks OK to her and that's all I need to hear.

Accolades have followed. Many people tell me it is the best looking Mooney they have ever seen so I decided to take it to the Fiesta 2000 in San Antonio where it won BEST OF SHOW in it's class. It has become the flag ship at Aircraft Interiors of Memphis. I now have a hangar space and Jimmy shows it off on a regular basis. He has even added pictures of it to his website, www.aircraftinteriors.org and in case your are wondering? No it is not for sale.

Written by Frank Benson, Sr.

