

USER-FEE DEBATE



BATTLE BREWING

# AOPA PILOT

FEBRUARY 2007

www.aopa.org

Beechcraft Premier IA

## Sitting in First Class

**Flying Seasons**  
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**Ferry Flights**  
SOMETIMES YOU  
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**AOPA's Catch-A-Cardinal  
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GINGER DAVIDSON  
7296 S RIVER BOTTOM RD  
HANOVER IN 47243-9334

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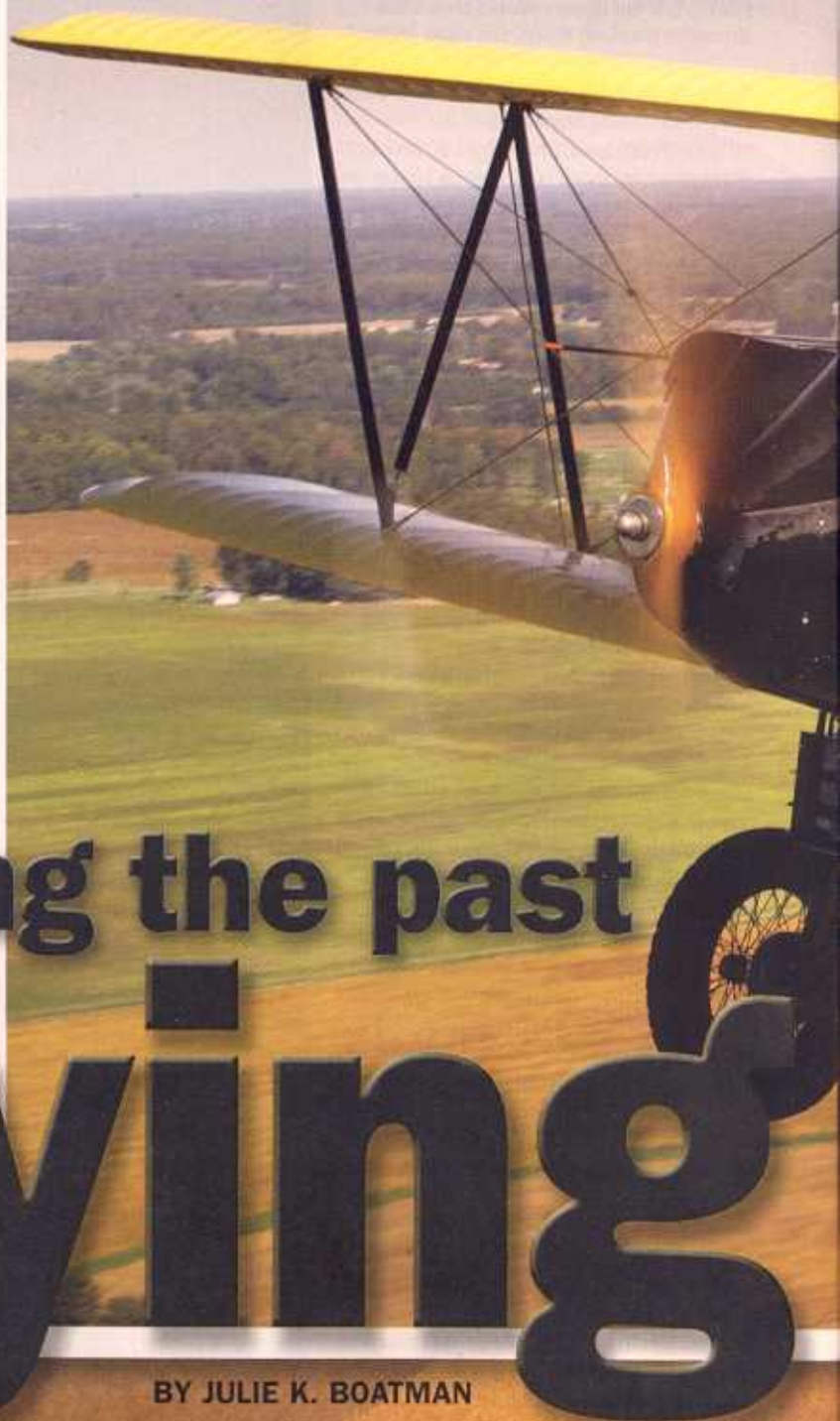
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On the cover: John M. Dibbs photographed the Beechcraft Premier IA in the skies over Wichita to accompany Thomas A. Horne's pilot report "Making the Grade," which begins on page 64.

On these pages: Jim Barrett photographed the action at Lee Bottom Flying Field during the airport's annual fly-in to accompany Julie K. Boatman's story "Keeping the Past Flying," which begins on page 70.

 Look for this information icon throughout the magazine for additional Web resources. Links to all Web sites referenced in this issue of AOPA Pilot are available on AOPA Pilot Online. This service eliminates the need to type long Web addresses and is free to AOPA members. Create a bookmark for your Web browser at [www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml](http://www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml).

**W**e can hear it through the fog burning off on the bottom land, a radial engine of, oh, maybe 200 or 300 horsepower pumping along overhead. Several visitors to the tenth annual Wood, Fabric, & Tailwheels Fly-In at Lee Bottom Flying Field near Hanover, Indiana, landed the previous afternoon, but the first



# Keeping the past flying

BY JULIE K. BOATMAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM BARRETT

official arrivals are about to come slipping down over the withered cornstalks onto the dewy grass.

One Saturday each September is reserved for the fly-in, a day that will see more than 150 mostly day-VFR airplanes (even with grumpy weather promised—and delivered—for the afternoon), and more than 600 visitors from the surrounding states stopping by to celebrate the vitality of classic general aviation flying.

### **Airport history**

Long before it became Lee Bottom Flying Field, this open strip of land on a shelf overlooking the Ohio River was a haven for airplanes. "All we have are firsthand reports from 'old-timers' who told us about landing here," says Rich Davidson, with the first happening sometime in 1938. By the 1950s, the field staged crop-dusting operations, and during the 1960s, it became home to an aircraft salvage operation. The

runway's dimensions during this time? Just 1,800 feet by 26 feet—if that wasn't enough, well, the unfortunate airframe just became more salvage.

"I remember the story of a man getting a [Piper Pacer] project from a small airport on the Ohio River bottom near Hanover, Indiana," says Davidson. "Only recently did my brother and I put it together that that plane came from Lee Bottom." Notable, because that was the second airplane that Davidson ever rode in.

*Continued*



**At Lee Bottom Flying Field,  
'too old' isn't in the vocabulary**



The runway's just wide enough for a Douglas DC-3. Several have landed at Lee Bottom over the years, including one expertly flown at this year's fly-in.

Fritz Hagemann acquired the property in 1986 after retiring from Modern Airlines in Miami. Hagemann expanded the runway to 3,000 feet by 100 feet, and added restrooms, a picnic shelter, and a soda machine.

Davidson first landed at the airport more than 10 years ago while on a quest to find good strips upon which to set down his family's 1946 Aeronca 7-DC Champ, 65 *Echo*. He had launched his professional flying career with a still-wet commercial ticket and an early A-75 Stearman (built by Stearman, before Boeing took over the production; this airplane was based at Tuskegee, Alabama, during World War II) that he used to give rides from Meigs Field in Chicago during the summer and Marathon airport, in the Florida Keys, during the winter. He struck up a friendship with Hagemann, and before the old pilot's death in 2001, they were like family. Davidson had inquired about purchasing the airport, and Hagemann agreed. Today, windows into the friendship can be seen in almost everything accomplished at the field.

Davidson and his wife, Ginger, recently completed a runway extension to stretch the field to 4,100 feet. In 2005, they bought the farm (next door) and prepped the ground for the new grass. No sooner had they planted the mix of fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, and rye than a torrential storm washed nearly all of it into the nearby Ohio River. "The one downpour in a five-state area during nine weeks of drought," says Davidson. In dismay, they put out a cry for help—that much grass seed doesn't come cheap. Sponsors bought bags



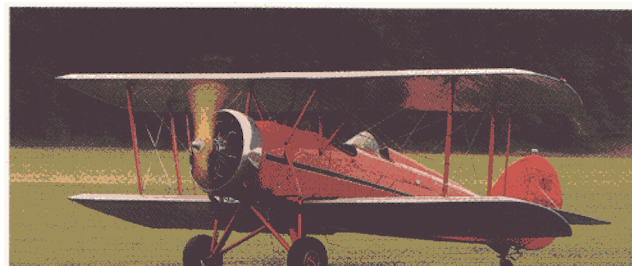
A Stinson L-5 stands sentinel over the festivities (above and below). "The airplane is a dream to fly," says Davidson, "just like every Stinson ever built." This L-5 was used by the British, normally for instrument, navigation, and photo reconnaissance training, and was likely flown around Trinidad.





**They figured that although lots of people were out there trying to save airplanes, no one was saving the antique airport—and that's what they hope to do.**

Ed Maxwell leads this two-ship over Lee Bottom in his Pitts S2B (above), while Nick Coleman tucks in tight in his Swick T. The Bellanca Citabria 7ECA (top right) is owned by John Stuart. Ed Escallon gave rides all day long to excited passengers in his Fairchild PT-26 (middle right). John Patterson's Waco ASO (bottom right) was a cherry sight against the backdrop of the somewhat-cloudy weather.





of seed for \$50 apiece, and names of those contributors are immortalized on a granite plaque near the house.

But the runway extension is only one of many improvements—and just the beginning of the grand plan the Davidsons have for this safe haven. A cabin invites guests, as does a cement pad for an RV—the Davidsons invite *work kampers* each year—transient workers (usually couples and families) who help them with airport maintenance in exchange for the RV hookup. Sinful Sundays (held the second Sunday of June, July, and August each summer, in the afternoon) offer ice-cream treats for those who fly to the field—a sweeter version of the \$100 hamburger, and cheaper too.

### Safe haven

The idea of creating a safe haven for antique aircraft occurred to the Davidsons as they crossed the country—to Rich while ferrying vintage aircraft (his e-mail address includes something along the lines of “if you have an old airplane, I’ll fly it”) and to Ginger while flying to airshows around the region in airplanes such as a PT-26 belonging to the Civil Air Patrol.

Repeatedly they sensed that although folks still come out to look at a unique beauty taxiing up on the ramp, the interest and understanding fade after a couple of photos are taken. Part of their mission is to create a stamp of approval for airports that provide key basics important to pilots of ragwing and tail-wheel aircraft—a well-kept grass runway, line staff educated in handling fabric-covered aircraft, and hangar consideration in inclement weather, to name the most critical needs. But they stress that their airport is open to the public, and they welcome pilots of

The Waco ASO was a draw on the flight line all day (top), as was the DC-3 owned by Dan Gryder (bottom). The short-wing Pipers were also well represented (right), along with many more airplanes built in Lock Haven and other Piper plants.



all classics—past, present, and future. “Yesterday, a pair of [Cessna] 152s landed. That was really cool.... They are the next generation of antique aircraft,” says Ginger.

In the meantime, they are creating what they see as the ideal place for old airplanes at their airport home in Hanover. The ultimate plan? A living-history museum for aviation—a snapshot of the golden age of flying, from the mid-1920s to the years immediately past World War II, from when Lee Bottom himself was born.

At the fly-in, a poster featuring David Lord’s artist’s concept of the open-air museum shows sketched out in ink the period hangars, old-time gas station, and general store, overseen by an airway beacon and rooftop billboard to guide pilots.

An old-time airport beacon’s framework lies ready beside the Davidsons’ personal hangar and shop—the couple are actively searching for more vintage airport structures, including a true air-

**They are creating what they see as the ideal place for old airplanes at their airport home.**

they believe in a working antique airport (see “A True Laird Swallow,” page 73).

Although the airport is public use, it doesn’t receive any funding from local, state, or federal sources. When asked about whether they might in the future apply for funds, Ginger related that to keep things how they like it (no fence, for example), they prefer to keep a low profile and make it on their own—and through the help of like-minded pilots who fly in and donate to the cause. Various fundraising efforts such as tailwheel training, sales of Lee Bottom merchandise, and cabin rental sometimes pro-

duce more goodwill than cash, according to Rich Davidson. In the future, they see the museum as a way to bring more people in and keep the effort self-supporting. They also have plans to build T-hangars, and eventually sell a few airpark lots to like-minded souls: pilots who honor the past by keeping that past flying. The Davidsons set the example themselves, by putting tireless effort into making this strip of living history a reality.

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### INTERACTIVE ▶

#### AOPA PILOT ONLINE



Think you know classic aircraft? Know a Waco from a Stearman, and a Cub from a Vagabond? How about up close and personal? Test your knowledge with our interactive online quiz. [www.aopa.org/pilot/leebottom](http://www.aopa.org/pilot/leebottom)

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