

## A Pilot's Perspective

### Flying Club Days

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In the not-too-distant past, there was a small airstrip carved out of the oaks and digger pines about three miles east of Redding, and just north of Redding Municipal airport. It's official name was Enterprise Skypark, and it was home for the zaniest, most fun-loving bunch of pilots, wannabe-pilots, airport bums and odd characters I've ever run into in one place. This motley crew was known collectively as the Enterprise Flying Club. I didn't own a plane then, but I had a pilot's license and had just transferred from Susanville to a new CDF assignment in Redding. After work one day I drove out there, liked what I saw, and joined the club. From '69 through '72, when a promotion led me away to Santa Rosa, the Skypark was a favorite hangout.

The runway was a bit narrow and not overly long, the taxiway was unpaved and there were trees bordering on all sides, plus powerlines and Highway 299E on the south end. Well, OK – you just needed to pay attention to business, carefully manage airspeed and not hesitate to go-around if you mucked-up a landing approach. Probably the hairiest landing ever made at the Skypark occurred when the pilot of then-Governor Reagan's official airplane, a large turboprop, which had been cleared by the tower to land at Redding Muni, mistook our dinky airstrip for Muni and barely roared to a stop in a cloud of dust at the extreme north end. Needless to say, the governor and his entourage de-planed and traveled by car over to Muni. The frazzled pilot took off by himself later, using every possible foot of runway on his takeoff roll.

One of the unique features at Enterprise was a good-sized club building which boasted not only pool tables, meeting-room and a small dance floor, but a rather-well stocked beer-bar and pilot-lounge. This, plus the fact that a good percentage of members liked their beer, pretzels and a good time, plus the inclination of the club's manager, Bob Lockwood, to hire friendly barmaids, made for a lively atmosphere. The bar business also helped pay the club's operating expenses. Although some of Redding's stuffier aviators looked down their noses at the Enterprise bunch and suspected all sorts of safety violations, that was not the case. I never saw one flying-member consume even one beer before climbing in an airplane. Sure, most of us, after a flight and after securing the aircraft, would walk into the clubhouse and have a brew or two. However, FAA's "8 hours from bottle to throttle" regulation was chiseled in stone and, to my knowledge, was never violated.

During my membership years, the club owned or leased an amazing bunch of airplanes: two Alon A2's (low-wing, 2-place, with sliding canopy), a Cessna 150, a Cessna 172, a Piper Cherokee 180, and, of all things, a 300-horsepower Bellanca Super Viking. I checked out in all of them, but generally scheduled the Cherokee 180 for most of my cross-country flights. Maintenance on these ships was handled by a pair of "Al's"—Alan Ewald, whose day-job was teaching aircraft repair and maintenance at Shasta College, and Al Knapik, an independent A&P (airframe and powerplant mechanic). Great guys and good "wrenches", as the saying goes. Al Knapik owned a 1947 Stinson Voyager 108-1 and I owned a Triumph GT6+ sportscar, and after a reasonable amount of haggling, I ended up with the Stinson and Al owned the Triumph.

Several part-time flight instructors handled checkouts, all phases of student pilot training, biannual flight reviews, endorsements for complex aircraft, tailwheel, night operations and so forth. Vic Clarke was one of them. He eventually ended up at Muni, flying cargo for Redding Aero; then moved up to Chief Pilot, Vice President and is now CEO of Redding Aero Enterprises, Inc.

Another instructor was G. G. Sluder, former Marine pilot, a genial, bald-headed, red-mustachioed bear of a man who looked intimidating but was loved and respected by all who knew him. He could build or repair anything, had an endless supply of funny stories and would offer to help anyone with a problem. Sadly, about the time I was moving to Santa Rosa, "G.G. the Great", as he was known around the club, was killed in a night-training accident not far from the Skypark.

Weather permitting, you could count on something special happening almost every weekend. The club organized one or two luaus each year, complete with roast pig, Hawaiian costume dress and music—the whole nine yards. Other group activities included breakfast fly-outs to various airports, flour-bombing and spot-landing contests, poker-runs, and pool tournaments.

Lots of good memories about a great bunch of folks. I remember Bud Pedigo, a highly skilled pilot who owned several airplanes including a pristine Cessna 195 with a big radial engine. Bud kept his planes hangered elsewhere, but would frequently fly his navy blue Starduster II, an aerobatic biplane, over to Skypark and hang-out with whoever was around. Upon leaving, Bud's standard takeoff in the Starduster was a steep climb followed by an Immelman turn (a half-roll back to level-flight heading 180 degrees opposite the direction of takeoff). And who could forget Lorna and her Luscombe, a pretty blonde and a pretty silver airplane that she flew beautifully ...

For many of us who fly, membership in a flying club is a sensible alternative to owning or renting airplanes. Until I could afford airplane ownership, it worked very well for me. Lately, I've heard a little talk about the possibility of a new flying

club starting up here. All it takes is one airplane and a bunch of people who want the opportunity to fly. I hope it happens.