

Tire Guy Takes to the Sky

By John Harrigan

People who keep a sharp eye and ear out for strange sounds and sights in the sky might have noticed something unusual up there one day this past May, and no doubt will again before summer's end. It'll be Brian LaPerle in his brand-new (to him, at least) airplane, which will bring the Colebrook Airport's aircraft complement to six.

Brian, who's running his Northern Tire emporium when not thinking about mud-runs and airplanes, can remember almost to the exact day when he was first bitten by the "gotta fly" bug, and succumbed to the disease on May 18 when he took delivery—by air-freight, of course—of a 1946 Taylorcraft single-engine plane.

"It was great," said Brian, that slightly embarrassed, new-toy grin lighting up his face as he remembered the day when his plane appeared out of the skies to the west. "They delivered it."

He can remember the exact bug-bite day (it's written on his calendar) because it occurred when, after seeking advice on some electrical work, he went up for a flight with Rob Roy, who happens to own the same kind of vintage plane. Almost the minute they landed, he said, he went searching on the Internet for used airplanes.

He found one in Wisconsin, a Model BC-12D with a four-cylinder 85 horsepower engine. It was one of around 900 aircraft made in March of 1946 by Taylorcraft, the next major competitor of industry leader Cessna.

"The guy in Wisconsin who had it dabbles in buying and selling planes," Brian said. "The original owner was a guy in

Missouri, and according to the paperwork it originally had a 65-horsepower engine. It was switched to the 85 in the early 1980s, and the engine was rebuilt in '84 and only has 600 hours or so on it."

A friend of the dealer flew it East, and Brian and Rob were there waiting at the airport when it appeared out of the west on a sunny day—"Not too much wind, out of the south," he said—on May 18. While Paul Nugent took the Wisconsin pilot to Portland to catch a jet home, Rob and Brian checked the Taylorcraft over and immediately took it up for an inaugural flight over home turf. "We were up for about an hour," Brian said, the grin still there.

When they landed, the Taylorcraft joined hangar space with two similar planes flown by Rob and by Doug Brooks, a Cessna silver 170 also flown by Rob, a Piper flown by Dick Bengston, and a Cessna 140 flown by Chris Fife.

Brian's next step is to get his private pilot's license, a process he's already begun by taking lessons at the nearest source, Lakeview Aviation in Newport, Vt. After 40 hours of flying he hopes to take his tests and have his license by September. Right now, he's flying and practicing touch-and-goes, sort of like skipping a stone. "I still have to learn how to land," he said.

So far, he hasn't set his sights on flying much beyond the air above New Hampshire's North Country and Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, "Except," he added, "for visiting my Mom," who lives a long drive but a short flight away in Shelburne, Vt.



OLDIE BUT GOODIE

Brian LaPerle is pretty tickled with the 1946 Taylorcraft, delivered to him in Colebrook after he found it in Wisconsin on the Internet. Story inside, on page 19. (John Harrigan photo)



BRIAN'S GROUND CREW

Brian and Mindy LaPerle and son Balin, age six, with their 1946 Taylorcraft at the Colebrook Airport. (John Harrigan photo)