

Continental Drifter

by Stu Simpson

The windshield fogged slightly, but it would soon clear as the Cavalier's cockpit warmed in the morning sun. I set the mixture, cracked the throttle and turned the key. The Cav's engine caught on the third or fourth blade and chugged into its typical steady hum.

A few minutes later we were up and climbing, reaching greedily for the sky. We were off on another air adventure that would take us places where we'd never been before. I wondered what sights we'd see, what weather we'd encounter and if we'd have any troubles on this trip.

Cross-country flying in the Cavalier is among the most enjoyable and satisfying time I've spent in my life. The Cav has allowed me to range farther across this continent than I could have done with any other plane I've owned. I love its speed, its maneuverability and the load it can carry.

I've learned that it's somehow important to me to explore far away places in my own plane, and the Cavalier allows me to do that. I get a sense of accomplishment, a sense of having journeyed over great distances to places far beyond. It takes skill and daring to leave the comfortable nest of home and the local flying area to chase horizons, to reach for far off destinations.

I've come to terms with the drifter in me, the part of my personality that constantly seeks out new places to see, new experiences to absorb. I suppose, too, that the Cav is partly to blame; it's become my enabler.

Because of the Cavalier I've seen the vast expanse of Wyoming, where on its windswept plateaus little seems to grow and even less seems to live. I've seen the Indianapolis Speedway from 6000 feet up. I've crossed the Ohio River and seen the cooling towers of its nuclear power plants. I've flown out over the Great Salt Lake and hoped the butterflies in my stomach would help keep us aloft if something went wrong.

The Cav has flown me to within a few miles of the Atlantic, the Pacific and the border of Mexico. I've scraped between peaks in the Canadian Rockies and seen the mists of Tennessee's Smoky Mountains. I've traversed the Saskatchewan prairie and thought it'd never end. Riding on the Cavalier's wings I've gone to cities and towns and landscapes I'd have otherwise never reached.

My plane has allowed me to see how the land changes across this continent and how people interact with it. Up there, I've wondered what brought folks to live in places down below. And I've wondered why they stayed. Sometimes it's obvious, sometimes it's not.

The Cav's left seat has given a bird's-eye view of, and a razor sharp contrast to, vehicles on the roads and highways. I've fantasized about where a semi is headed, and wondered where a motor-home is from. I've seen groups of motorcyclists and known they understand what the Cav and I are doing because they're doing it, too.

The southwestern deserts have revealed themselves to me up there on my perch. The stark and sandy desolation, the parched and jagged mountains ablaze with shocking reds and ominous blacks and browns, have all left indelible impressions that made me want more. I've marveled at thunderstorms there and watched fighter jets race through the nearby sky.

And after all of that, after hundreds and thousands of miles in the sky, after all the mountains and deserts and cities have passed beneath us, the Cav always carries me home. It brings me back to that little patch of grass from which we launch each time the far horizon beckons.

I love the cross-country trips I make in my Cavalier. I adore watching the world unfold one mile at a time, the view constantly changing, the wonders never ceasing. The Cav has helped me indulge and accept my wanderlust, to recognize it as an agreeable and pleasant part of my character that I can't suppress, and really don't want to. The Cavalier is the airplane that has finally allowed me to be a continental drifter.