

More Than a Machine

By Stu Simpson

Some say an airplane is nothing more than a machine. It's a collection of things, of pieces and parts and nothing more, they claim.

And they are wrong.

Somebody, maybe you, put all those pieces together, maybe you even made some of them. Even if you didn't build it, I'm willing to bet you feel a personal investment in it, a *connection* to that plane.

You see its sleek lines, its streamlined beauty, the elegant curves of the fuselage and tail, and how even sitting still it all seems to scythe through the wind. You look at the wing and grasp not just the shape of the airfoil, but the beauty in what it creates – lift. You visualize how it springs you from the shackles of the gravity that enslaves most others.

You see your plane's strength. You know it'll pull you through turbulence that hits like a boxer, how it'll get you down safely in a belligerent crosswind. You know you can land it on a pasture or hillside at maybe 35 miles an hour. Or maybe your plane can get you to the coast in time for lunch.

Your airplane takes you to see places others miss; places like the top of a cloud, the other side of a mountain. In your airplane you can see the rain, and even the wind, long before they get to where they're going.

You know what your airplane can do.

And you know not only what it does for you, but what it does TO you. You feel your heart race when you pull back on the stick and see the ground fall further and further away. It's a thrill that makes you smile.

You know the sense of unmatched freedom to climb, to turn, to point in any direction almost completely unhindered. If you want to go see what's over there, you simply turn that way to go look.

And turning is fun, too! You pull the stick this way or that and the plane banks at your command. You pull back on the stick, feel the G-forces on your body, and slip into your fighter pilot fantasy. (It's okay, we all do.)

In your plane you can explore. You can fly to different cities and even different countries. Maybe you simply spot a field or a sand bar that challenges you, that asks if you and your plane have what it takes to land there. Now you're a bush pilot putting your taildragger into the tightest spot, right on speed to land short because you can. You grin at the adventures your plane has tattooed onto you.

Your airplane evokes so many feelings, breathes reality into so many dreams. So, I have to ask; do you really love your plane, or the way you feel - the person you become - when you fly it?

Does it even matter?

Your plane gives you more life, and more meaning in your life. No one's going to tell me it isn't part of you, part of who and what you are, part of your very identity.

You're damn right it's more than a machine.